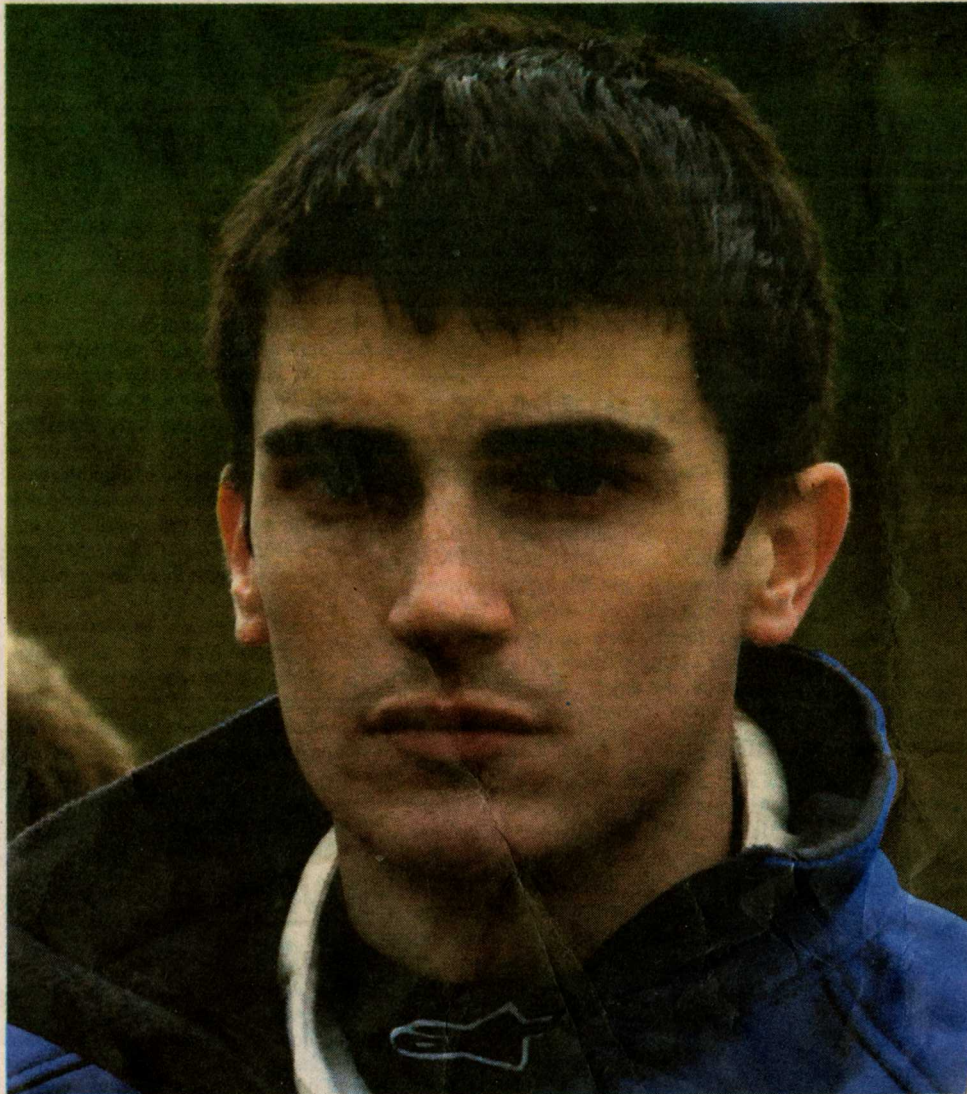


Breen on verge of second World Rally Crown



Craig Breen, ready for Spanish showdown

TREVOR MCGRATH

CRAIG Breen will take on World Rally Spain next week gunning for his second World Rally crown in two years. The Irish driver seized the inaugural FIA WRC World Rally Academy last November in spectacular style on Wales Rally GB and now he is but one step from the 2012 FIA WRC Super 2000 title.

Breen began the SWRC season with a maiden win on the opening round on Rallye Monte Carlo and backed up that performance by securing second in the category on World Rally Sweden. Leaving a snow covered Karlstad in February the Ford Fiesta S2000 driver held a comfortable 18 point advantage over his main rival P-G Andersson.

The championship moved to gravel for the first time in March with a trip to the Algarve for World Rally Portugal. A frequent happy hunting ground for the Irish driver turned to disappointment with his first

non-finish of the year.

At the beginning of the year Craig nominated Rally New Zealand (Rd 4) as his dropped round and following the tragic accident in Sicily he made a poignant return to rallying in Finland (02 – 04 August). The event looked like a fairy-tale comeback until the penultimate hurdle, which saw him crash out on the famous Ouninpohja stage.

Wales Rally GB beckoned in mid-September and saw Breen who was now partnered by fellow Irishman Paul Nagle return to the winner's podium. It was another poignant event for Craig as he competed for the first time in Wales since Gareth's death but the 22-year-old put his emotions to one side and pulled off a great victory rejuvenating his title hopes.

World Rally France brings us up to date and Breen's championship ambitions got the ultimate boost as the season return to tarmac. The event turned in favour of the Ford driver on the final day when he grabbed the lead and held

out to take his third win of the season.

After seven events to date in the Super 2000 World Championship, the eighth and final event looks to be one of the most difficult. Over the opening seven rallies, four have been on a gravel surface, two on tarmac and one on snow but the sting in the tail this year is that the three day, World Rally Spain consists of the opening day takes in six gravel special stages. Then in final service on Friday night the competing cars are converted to tarmac spec and the final two days action reverts to asphalt. Day one Friday is made up of six stages, totally 150kms and includes two runs over the monster Terra Alta (44km) test.

Saturday and Sunday also take in six stages each day, all being completed on a tarmac surface. Saturday covers 160kms and Sunday the final day covers 92kms.

To keep up to date on Craig's progress log on to www.craigbreen.com throughout the next weekend.