



Craig Breen and Paul Nagle are joined on the podium by members of Gareth Roberts family, Breen's former co-driver who tragically lost his life competing in Sicily three months ago. Right: Craig Breen and Paul Nagle take to the air during Wales Rally GB last weekend

Poignant win for Breen on Wales Rally GB

■ Trevor McGrath

CRAIG Breen has moved back into FIA Super 2000 World Rally Championship title contention by becoming the third driver to win two rounds of this year's series following his dominant category victory on Wales Rally GB last weekend.

Breen's victory prompted an outpouring of emotion at the finish of the final stage as he remembered Welshman Roberts, who lost his life competing on a rally in Sicily three months ago having partnered Breen to the inaugural FIA WRC Academy title in Wales last season. "We did the job here last year and we've done it again this year," said Breen. "Everything was perfect and I couldn't ask for more. But I miss Gareth so much and I wish he could have been here."

The Irish driver began the gravel rally in based in Wales placed fourth in the SWRC (FIA Super 2000 World Rally Championship) standings, twenty five points off championship leader P-G Andersson.

But Wales Rally GB has always been kind to the Waterford man having clinched the Fiesta Sport Trophy

when title rival Hayden Paddon hit trouble with an ignition problem dropping twelve minutes. This was quickly followed by more good fortune for the Irish crew when championship leader P-G Andersson retired for the day after ripping a wheel off his Proton. Breen driving the Kel-Tech Engineering Ford Fiesta S2000 went on to record five fastest stage times within the class to lead Yazeed Al Rajhi (Saudi Arabia) by one minute 14 seconds at the end of day one.

Day two Saturday consisted of seven stages and by the end of the day Breen remained in total control with a lead of two minutes 15 seconds over Briton, Tom Cave. This however does not reveal the cut and thrust of the day's action. Breen retained his comfortable advantage over the morning loop of stages but an oil leak forced a gearbox change at midday service and resulted in the Irishman incurring a one minute 20 sec of time penalties after a powersteering pipe leak was also discovered causing the Fiesta crew to leave service late.

Incurring the time penalty dropped Breen back to the second position in the class, twelve seconds behind Al

turned the tables to go six seconds faster and 2.9 sec in front yet again. On a better tyre option Al Rajhi looked to have had the final Saturday say when he went in front by 0.1 on the 'Celtic Manor' superspecial but there was one extra twist. On the liaison section back to final service Al-Rajhi committed a speeding offence resulting in event officials imposing a five-minute time penalty for the offence dropping him down to third overall.

Instead of waking to begin a final day battle for victory Breen awoke now with a two minute 15 second advantage over Proton driver Tom Cave. Taking no risks over the morning stages Craig extended the lead to 2 min 23 sec by midday service. There were no heroics over the closing stages for Craig and when he reached the end of the final stage the emotions got the better of the 22 year old, "I couldn't have asked for anything better. This is where I met my best friend, where we always did best and I'm so glad we've done it this weekend."

The win puts Breen's championship aspirations back on track as he moves to joint second (68 points), level with New Zealander Haydon Paddon. PG