

## Breen battles into SWRC title contention with an emotional victory

Craig Breen took an emotional victory to get his Super 2000 World Rally Championship bid back on track – with a small assist from the *Heddlu*.

The Ford Fiesta S2000 driver and navigator Paul Nagle took control of the SWRC field after early leader Hayden Paddon (Skoda Fabia S2000) suffered an engine glitch on stage two. Breen built his lead over Yazeed Al-Rajhi and British co-driver Michael Orr (Fiesta S2000) to 1m 24s by the end of Friday's loop, but he hit a string of problems on Saturday.

Breen led by more than a minute heading into Saturday's lunchtime service, where an oil leak prompted his team to change his Fiesta's gearbox. As they completed that long job they noticed a broken powersteering pipe. The extra time taken to fix that caused Breen to pick up 1m 20s of penalties for being late out of service, dropping him behind Al-Rajhi. Breen quickly moved back into the lead on SS10, but an

overshoot on the next test dropped him back behind the Saudi driver. He recovered from that to regain the lead on stage 12, but a sloppy run on the short Celtic Manor test meant he reached service in Cardiff 0.1s behind Al-Rajhi.

There was a late twist: Al-Rajhi wasn't just fast on the stages: he had twice been caught speeding on road sections by the Welsh police. Following FIA rules, the first offence netted him a fine, and the second resulted in a five minute time penalty, dropping him down to third and completely out of contention for SWRC glory.

Breen likely had the pace in hand to overhaul Al-Rajhi, but instead he had the more tedious task of simply cruising around. "We did the job on this event [to win WRC Academy] last year and we've done it again this year," said Breen through the tears. "I just wish Gareth [Roberts, his co-driver who died on the Targa Florio Rally earlier in the year] was here with me – but I know he's there."

Roberts's family were there too, and joined an emotional Breen on the finish ramp in Cardiff.

Al-Rajhi's penalty was good news for the only Welsh driver in the rally: it moved Tom Cave and Craig Parry into second in their works Proton Satria S2000. Cave was left to carry the Proton team's hopes after PG Andersson's hopes ended when he ripped a wheel off his Satria on stage two.

After a steady run to move into third in the SWRC on Friday, Cave gambled on running the hard tyres on Saturday morning. That left him without as much grip, but he held on and upped his pace on softer tyres on the afternoon loop. Second was a fine reward for a solid performance.

Al-Rajhi took third, ahead of Maciej Oleksowicz. Northern Irish driver Alastair Fisher pushed Breen for pace before dropping out with broken front suspension on stage three. He rejoined under SupeRally to finish fifth.

James Attwood



The family of the late Gareth Roberts joined Breen on the finish ramp