

# Breen ready for French SWRC fight

BY TREVOR McGRATH

A rejuvenated Craig Breen takes on SWRC France next weekend with new confidence. The current FIA WRC Academy Champion is back in the Super 2000 World Rally Championship title fight after his victory on Wales Rally GB three weeks ago. "Rally GB has given me a huge amount of confidence and our win has put us right back in the championship battle," said the Irishman as he looks ahead to the penultimate round of the season. Breen's win lifted him to joint second in the overall standings, level with Hayden Paddon and just eight points off class leader, P-G Andersson.

As we now reach the penultimate event of the season, P-G Andersson (Sweden) tops the table with 76 points. In joint second place Craig and Hayden Paddon (New Zealand) are both on 69. In fourth Maciej Oleksowicz (Poland) has 65 points and after a great result in Wales, Yazeed Al Rajhi (Saudi Arabia) is in fifth position on 55 points. But as we reach the final two events of the year the title fight looks to be between the top three.

All three drivers have shared two SWRC victories; Breen took his initial win on the Monte and backed it up with his success in Wales. Andersson was imperious on home ground in Sweden and again in Finland. Paddon took the spoils at home in New Zealand and in Portugal.

Preparing for next week's Strasbourg based event, Craig said "Our win in Wales was the only result that would have given

us any hope going into the final two rounds and with P-G and Hayden failing to score significant points, it's all to play for in France."

Based on the outskirts of Strasbourg, Rallye de France sees the championship return to tarmac for round seven of the SWRC season.

In total the rally will consist of 22 stages over a competitive distance of 404.14 kilometres, an

increase of 20 per cent compared to 2011. The rally kicks off with a 3.6 Km stage near Strasbourg's European Parliament building on Thursday afternoon, October 4th.

Friday's route features three stages each run twice, including the new Soultzeren-Pays Welch test, plus the day-closing standalone Mulhouse town centre stage.

Saturday's action is made up

of four repeated stages with the Pays d'Ormont stage measuring 43.45-kilometres in length.

The final day is a slightly shorter in comparison to the opening two days with crews covering 61.54 competitive kilometres. These include two passes of the Vignoble de Cleebourg and Bischwiller-Gries tests, the latter now running entirely on asphalt having featured a gravel section in the past. Haguenau will again host the event-closing Power Stage.

Talking about his chances, Craig said, "We're back on tarmac but it's a tough rally. The nature of the stages allow for a lot of dirt to be dragged out making conditions difficult and of course the weather will play a factor. I competed on the event last year in the (WRC) Academy and having that experience will be an advantage. We also have last year's (pace) notes but they will need to be adjusted to the speed of the S2000 car. I did win on the Monte but P-G was very unlucky. It's Hayden's first tarmac event of the season but he's a great driver and I expect him to be quick. I can only drive my own rally and for sure will be giving my all for the win."



Waterford's Craig Breen heads for the SWRC France this weekend.