

Craig's Column...

Portuguese Man Of War...

Action from Rally Portugal



in 2009, I wasn't taking anything for granted. I travelled out a full week in advance and we carried out a full day's testing on the Saturday before the event. With a detailed recce, paying particular attention to our notes, I felt we were fully armed for an assault on the WRC Academy opener.

THURSDAY SUPER SPECIAL

The rally began with the usual Thursday evening Super Special but this year it took place in the capital city of Lisbon. The stage went well and I slotted in at second place even though a brush with a barrier resulted in a damaged rear beam. It made for some interesting driving I can tell you!

FRIDAY

Day one proper, six stages over a double loop. My intention was to get a lead over the first day in case we hit problems. Fastest times on all three of the morning's stages were achieved but gearbox trouble definitely wasn't in the plan. I got my first warning at the end of the first stage. We pulled up to the stop car and immediately heard a grinding noise coming from the gearbox. It sounded fairly terminal, but we decided to drive on. We managed to get through stage three and four, surprisingly fastest and back into service, where a new one was fitted. We did sustain a ten second penalty but it was a mammoth effort by the M-Sport Academy mechanics, thanks guys!

Back out on the afternoon loop and stage five, I racked up my fourth fastest time in a row on stage five. We were six seconds faster than our nearest rival but with the ten second penalty incurred my lead now stood at 25.8. Stage six the penultimate of the day. As I drew to a stop at the finish time control our lead had extended to 1.06:8 as a result of Yeray Lemes retirement with steering arm failure. We had our own worries however as an engine mount had snapped. We made a temporary repair (a ratchet strap around the engine, professional or what?) to get us to the final service of the day. I knew we'd lose more time on SS 7 but how much?

Felizes 2 (21.31km) completed day one and I was glad to be on the road back to Faro. We just drove through the stage very steadily and on the road section to the Algarve stadium, and a 45 minute service. We dropped thirty two seconds to Estonian driver Egon Kaur who set fastest time, leaving me with a 48.4 sec overnight lead. Day one of the new championship was over and I was out in front, great start.



Through a Portuguese watersplash

SATURDAY DAY TWO

Another six stages and with the car fully repaired I was content that I could bring home the victory. SS8 Almodovar 1, got the day underway and I slotted in fifth on the time sheets over the 26 Kms. Alistair Fisher moved into second overall but my lead still remained healthy at 45 sec. Stage nine and I took my fifth fastest time of the event and my lead was up to 56 seconds. So on to that ill-fated stage ten, the last in the morning loop, I only got a short distance in when I came to a very slow right hander over a sharp crest, a R>4-C (right tightens into four minus over crest) was the call. I got to the top of the crest, and saw what I thought was the road going over another crest, when actually this was a drop down a large ravine. In a split second decision I took the wrong road and went head first down the ravine. It wasn't a massively steep incline so we sustained no damage to the car, not even a scratch! In the panic I tried to keep the momentum I carried in to try and get a run at getting back out, but in doing so, we just got bogged down and stuck. Gareth immediately ran back down the road and gathered some spectators, some more interested in taking pictures unfortunately!

We tried frantically for 20 minutes to try and get out but it was just no use. The ground was too soft and I couldn't find the grip to pull us out. It was all over, my dream of a first WRC Academy win had gone out the window. To make matters worse, we had to wait eight hours for recovery, as we had to

wait for the second pass of the stage to go through. Let's just say it was character building!

We played hangman, X's and O's, eye spy, you name it! I found an old road sign that we made into a hurley stick, so I spent a few hours teaching Gareth how to play our native sport with some stones! We hadn't even a stick of chewing gum between us so I enjoyed dinner that evening I can tell you!

Anyway, after the disappointment in Portugal I was glad to be back behind the wheel within less than a week as round two of the BRC moved to Wales for the Bulldog. Our luck failed us there last year in the S2000 but a class win put us back on track and banished any negative feelings hanging on after the Algarve. My schedule then was to be open then until the Pirelli International on the 29/30 of April but the opportunity had come up to enter the Moonraker Forestry Rally, which forms round three of the National Forestry Championship. Then comes the Pirelli and after that I'll be on a plane to Italy for WRC Sardinia and round two of the WRC Academy. I've also just returned from two days training at Pro Performance in Surrey UK, preparing for Sardinia. We concentrated on heat training to prepare myself for the expected heat of Rally Sardinia, something which is relatively new to me. I'll be there again before the rally just for the final push!

On last month's column I reported that my new website was to be launched before WRC Portugal but alas it ran into a few design issues. The extra time has been well spent however



In action again on the Moonraker Rally



and I can now report that by the time this column is published the new site will be up and running. Logon to see the new face of craigbreen.com

NOW TO THIS MONTH'S QUESTION

Firstly I want to thank everyone who has emailed in a question to me. It's great to see the inbox filling up. This month's question comes from Michael Kiernan, in Co. Offaly and his question is:

What are the advantages of the WRC Academy over a campaign in the S-WRC driving your own Ford Fiesta S 2000?

The simple answer Michael is, a season in the S-WRC would only serve as another single season programme. I needed to look long term and the

introduction of the WRC Academy is the perfect fit. It provides a young driver like me, the first step on the WRC ladder. The one make format using the Fiesta R2, with a control Pirelli tyre putting the emphasis on the driver and allowing best talent to shine through. The academy doesn't just stop with the events as there's education in professionalism, goal setting, media, nutrition and fitness. I also think being part of the Academy puts all of the drivers in front of the major players within the sport and that has to be good.

Well that's it for this month, keep the questions coming and I'll see you all in the next issue, Sardinia here we come!

Email your questions to: craigbreenrallying@gmail.com

To keep in touch with Craig Breen Rallying log on to www.craigbreen.com
And to find out more on the FIA WRC Academy log on to www.wrc.com/wrc-academy



The Super Special in Portugal



On the podium again in Wales