

# Craig's Column...

# Delight in Deutschland...

PHOTOS: GRAHAM CHAMBERS / TREVOR McGRATH

After finishing second in Finland Craig gained victory in Germany



Craig won his class in the Tipperary Stonethrowers Rally as well as getting some miles under his belt on tarmac



Craig had a real battle on Rally Finland with Championship rival Egon Kaur but ultimately finished second

Kilkenny City was again the base for the second year in succession and I decided to enter the event in the S2000. I was very honoured when the official seeding was released and saw the Keltech Fiesta number one on the road, it was humbling coming off the ramp at the ceremonial start in Kilkenny City and see Club President, George Clancy wave the Irish tricolour as we pulled away. After carrying out our recce on the Saturday we knew the pace was going to be fierce as the stages were incredibly fast.

I set out to bed myself in over the opening loop as it was my time first on tarmac with the S2000 since the Cork 20 last year and was happy to take a 19 second lead in to first service and setting three fastest stage times was a bonus. As I extended my advantage over the second loop it allowed me to ease off the pace. Then on the final three stages, all I wanted to do was get home cleanly and secure the victory.

After coming off the final stage it was like a dream come true and to come back to the finish ramp in Kilkenny was something I'll never forget. Taking the win in front of my parents, all my team and on the 40th anniversary of the rally was very special.

## RALLY ESTONIA

After my success in the "Rock", I stepped up prep work for WRC Finland with a test succession on Rally Estonia. My goal was to nail down a competitive setup for Finland. We came away in the end with 2nd in class and 28th overall but as I stayed with the Pirelli control tyre that we use in the Academy I lost some time as the compound was harder than some of our rivals.

## WRC FINLAND

So on to Finland and by far biggest battle of the year to date. I knew well before getting to Jyväskylä that it was going to be a tough event. I was hoping to put my experience of the 2009 and 2010 to good use but I also knew the pressure was on to achieve a win. The event turned into an intense battle with my archrival in the championship Egon Kaur. As the stage times show, we were on the edge all the way through and this was really evident over the last day's seven stages. Alastair Fisher was quickest out of the blocks and held the overnight lead on Thursday. Over the Thursday action I suffered from some handling issues, which resulted in a spin 1km into the opening stage.

On Friday morning Alastair picked up where he left off but his run came to an abrupt end on stage seven. I was

by then up to second but Egon stepped in and took the lead. This was the start of our battle and what a battle it turned out to be. Coming out of SS7 I was 12.1 seconds down which is a massive amount of time in Finland. Kaur then extended it to 15.8 on the next and the pressure was on. I fought back over the second run over Hyvanrula (29km) as I got a good rhythm and took my first fastest time of the weekend. I finished off the day with my second fastest stage time but more importantly I grabbed the lead by 2.4 seconds, which I thought was an important psychological blow.

Day three was made up of seven stages totalling 70km but I was buoyed by the fact that I had covered these tests before, so I was confident we could keep up the pace. Egon started the day well to go back in front by .8 of a second but I countered that on SS13 with my third fastest time of the rally and pull out an 8 second lead. The tit for tat times continued on stage 14 when Kaur took back the lead. I was fastest again SS15 but the result turned on stage 16 when I got caught behind two cars. The final stage was neck and neck until the last split when Egon gained two seconds and the victory.

## STONETHROWERS RALLY

With our result in Finland and looking ahead to the next two WRC rounds on asphalt, I felt it important to get out on tarmac as soon as possible and on our return from Scandinavia we decided to take in the Tipperary Stonethrowers Rally and with the event being based in Clonmel it fitted perfectly. Martin Brady was drafted in as Gareth was celebrating his birthday. We came away with a class win, 6th overall and got some competitive mileage.

## GUEST LECTURE

During WRC Finland, the Academy class were treated to a guest lecture from Mikko Hirvonen. It was really interesting to listen to Mikko's thoughts on the stages in Finland. Also, we took note of his approach to the new stages in the Lahti area where new notes would have to be made. He made us feel very comfortable and relaxed and we had some good fun!

Then on Rallye Deutschland we had Media Lectures with World Rally Radio host Becs Williams and McKlein Photographer Colin McMaster. This one was a little different. It was quite convenient for me however as I was taking part in the WRC Press conference the following day, so good timing! Becs ran us through the do's and don'ts of public speaking, and Colin ran thru some of the basics behind being photographed, and never ever give the thumbs up apparently! Thanks Colin!

## LOOKING AHEAD

Next weekend I'll be back in the S2000 and I can't wait. The Czech Republic



Craig and co-driver Gareth Roberts with Ford's Gerard Quinn

is our destination for the Barum Czech Rally Zlin. The rally forms part of the IRC and it will give me an opportunity to pit myself against some of the best S2000 drivers in the world. The event is on tarmac and bears a similar make up to that of the roads in Ireland. After completing the test here today, it's going to be a tough event, the roads are very bumpy and the weather will also play a factor but the confidence is high and I'm sure to learn a lot.

With my result in Germany I could make some changes to my schedule, we are due to do some testing between now and France in the R2 car, so we are able to head to France, all guns blazing and win again! There is also the possibility of another international outing in my S2000 car soon, watch this space!

## THIS MONTH'S QUESTION:

*I'm delighted to see the questions are still coming in and this month's comes from Matthew Sparrow, Co. Cork and Matthew's question is: I am a big follower and think your driving style is great to watch. My question is, if you had a flashback like in the Dirt games, what moment would you correct and why?*

Great question, I think the obvious one would be WRC Rally Portugal this year. Leading by a minute heading into final stages we just drove off the road at low speed and it was all over. If I could "flashback" and get around this corner, our WRC Academy Championship campaign would be looking a lot brighter. But I still believe we can do it, we just need lady luck back!

## SAVING THE BEST TILL LAST! WRC RALLYE DEUTSCHLAND

After coming within a whisker of victory on WRC Finland I was determined Germany was going to be the one. I

started my preparation on the trip home from Scandinavia by putting in an entry for our local event, the Stonethrowers, which was scheduled for the following Sunday (one week after Finland), I wanted to get out on tarmac ASAP and this fitted in perfectly. We kept it low key but it served a purpose by giving me my tarmac legs. In the build up I also concentrated on my training and I worked hard on the information packages that came from the WRC Academy on the German event. When the time came to leave, I knew I'd not left a stone unturned, I was ready. Upon getting to Trier (Rally HQ), Gareth and I put our heads down and knuckled down to do a detailed recce. We really put massive emphasis on preparation for this event, and I think this was key. Our recce was perfect, and I was 100% confident in committing to them on the first pass, a perfect feeling. With the recce completed we were ready to do a final test session on Thursday morning. As we had to use our allocated tyres for the Shakedown, we only did two runs. Pleased with our set-up, I felt this was a perfect start to the rally.

## NOW TO THE ACTION

The opening day took in a double loop of three stages. Yeray (Lemes ESP) set the pace but I was still happy with my day's work. I wanted to be in touch going into day two and a 32 second deficit was manageable. I set my first fastest stage time on stage four and only for a minor mistake on the last stage of the day, the gap could have been closer.

As day two dawned I knew making up time early was going to be important. Yeray and I had pulled away from the rest of the (Academy) field and déjà vu, here we go again like in Finland another two-way fight to the end. The next twist came when Lemes had a

minor off on stage eight. No apparent damage but the loss of 55 seconds. I was handed a 16 second lead and by God there was no way I was giving it back! Stage nine I clocked up my second FST and extended the lead to over 17 seconds. As we entered midday service it was cut back to 12 but I was delighted with the morning's work. I knew Yeray's mistake was a major factor but it also proved he was pushing hard.

Into the last loop and on the way out to stage 11, I noticed the brakes sticking, I was concerned at that point but couldn't do anything about it. During the stage the problem persisted and I lost five seconds but by stage 12 it had improved and I topped the times. Yeray pipped me by 1.3 seconds on the penultimate stage to bring down it to the wire on the final Panzerplatte stage. Panzerplatte, based in the German Army range in Baumholder, is a classic tarmac rally stage. This year it was 35km in length and was so demanding. With over 120 junctions and varying surfaces, I knew with only 8 seconds in hand, it was going to have to be maximum attack!

We pushed incredibly hard, on the limit everywhere, and crossing the finish, I had a feeling that we had done enough. Approaching the stop car we saw World Rally Radio's Colin Clark jumping and pointing at us, and we knew we had done it! We took five seconds back, and our first WRC Academy win! It was overwhelming, so much effort, being close at every round so far, and eventually it had all paid off. But now, knowing what this feeling is like, I'm going to push harder, and prepare better, and be stronger, this feeling is amazing and I want it again, it's an addiction!

Email your questions to: [craigbreenrallying@gmail.com](mailto:craigbreenrallying@gmail.com)

To keep in touch with Craig Breen Rallying log on to [www.craigbreen.com](http://www.craigbreen.com)  
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