

Learning curve for Breen in Catalunya

Irish rally driver Craig Breen claimed an accreditable 15th overall and fourth in the Super 2000 category today on World Rally Spain after three intense days of action in Salou, Catalunya.

It was a bitter sweet end to the event for the twenty one year old who impressed over the three days but after sustaining a broken rear right driveshaft during Saturday, the WRC Academy contender was left to be content with holding station and finishing out the Spanish round consolidating his position.

At the finish Breen commented, "I'm delighted with this morning's performance. We had a clean run and set some fastest class times on proper tarmac stages. The problems yesterday morning put paid to any hope of a podium finish which was disappointing. Over the year I've shown my pace on the snow in Sweden and both the gravel and tarmac here this weekend. Our concentration switches back now to the WRC Academy for the final showdown on Rally GB."

The only mixed surface event in the World Rally Championship started on Friday with a double loop of three gravel stages totalling 160km's.

Breen competing in the SWRC (Super 2000 category) for the first time made an encouraging start claiming 11th fastest stage time and slotted in third in class on SS1.

On stage two, the 35km's of 'Terra Alta' the Irish driver set the benchmark in SWRC, recording the 10th best overall. His time moved him to second in the class and he remained 11th overall.

As the crews entered midday service Breen had shown the talent which turned heads on IRC Rally Scotland just two weeks previous.

The rerun of Pesells kicked off the evening stages and Craig dropped one position to fourth in the Super 2000 class as Czech driver Martin Prokop leapfrogged the Irish driver, but Craig hit back on SS5 retaking the podium place over the long 35km's of Terra Alta 2.

The opening day was completed in darkness and dust of stage six, with the Kel-Tech Engineering Fiesta S2000 driver consolidating his days' work, holding third in SWRC, 24 sec off the lead Nasser Al-Attiyah (Qatar) and 14th overall going into the first overnight halt.

Day two Saturday saw the rally revert to full tarmac and the action began with the mammoth 45.97km's of El Priorat. There was agony however for the Irish driver only nine km's in when he broke the right rear driveshaft on his Fiesta S2000. He dropped over a minute in the stage and fell to fourth in SWRC; he then continued to lose time over the following two remaining stages in the loop and as he entered midday service he found himself 2:45.9 off the class leader Nasser



Craig Breen rounds another corner while competing in Salou, Spain last weekend.

Al-Attiyah.

With the setback behind him after service, Breen consolidated his position over the afternoon rerun of stages but after losing so much time the chance of a podium place was gone.

Craig remarked after the final Saturday stage, "I was gutted when I suffered the driveshaft problem this morning. We were hampered over the two remaining stages in the loop and I just had to nurse the car back to service. Then over the afternoon stages I found it hard to find a rhythm. On the rerun of El Priorat (45.97), the surface is very smooth compared to at home Ireland and the time was slow. It was better over stage's 11 and

12, this is my first S-WRC start and I'm here to learn."

Sunday saw an early start and Breen was regenerated for the final days fight, a double loop of three stages completed the penultimate WRC event of the season. Breen with no real pressure on him set the SWRC pace on the morning opener and was second quickest on SS14. In midday service he reported, "I'm glad to be able to show some speed this morning." Over the rerun he again set the quickest time on the first out of service but then consolidated over the last two closing stages to record his fourth in class and 15th overall result.