

Breen excels in tartan thriller to claim fourth

Irish Rally driver Craig Breen clenched fourth overall on IRC Rally of Scotland last weekend. Breen only on his second IRC event was on the pace for the start on Friday night and over the three day's showed he can mix it with the big boys on the IRC scene. Being consistent was the name of the game as the weather and surface conditions dictated a cautious approach and Breen delivered in fine style to bring home his Kel-Tech Engineering Ford Fiesta 2000 inside the top five.

The rally got underway in darkness with a double run over the Carron Valley (8.36km) and Breen made an impressive start by slotting in at 7th overall over the first stage just four seconds away from Guy Wilks, who set the pace.

As day two dawned the weather had deteriorated making conditions treacherous. Six stages were planned and Craig seeded 17th on the road started the day in fourth place after his fine effort on Friday evening but confessed to a slow start on the stage three morning opener, he also stated an overshoot on stage four plus the conditions and his road position didn't help as entered midday service.

The rerun over the stages in the afternoon told a different story. Solid times over stage six and seven saw the Irish driver climb to fifth overall and with the final test of the day being cancelled the WRC Academy contender has some defending to do on day three to better his result from Rally Zlin.

Day three on Sunday turned out to be the sting in the tail on what was already a very tough event. Breen was second fastest on stage nine the first of the morning and also managed to go 1.3 sec quicker than Thierry Neuville (FRA) and the gap between Craig in fourth to Neuville in third was just 1.4s.

Then the drama started on stage 10 with Sandell going fastest on the stage taking 5.3sec out of Craig but as Patrik pulled up to the reporters at the end of the stage he stated that he had damaged the side of his car near the finish and would not be able to continue. This took the pressure off Craig and there was more good news as the next competitor through was Neuville in the Peugeot and he reported a spin costing him over a minute. Going into stage eleven Craig had a cushion of 19.7 seconds over Jan Kopecky (CZE) but there was even more drama and this time it was the Kel-Tech Fiesta driver who was to suffer. As he pulled up to the finish of the test it was clear to see he was after taking a visit into the Scottish scenery.

It was then diagnosed in remote service to be a cracked manifold and Craig set out to nurse the car home over the four remaining stages. The 9.9km's of Loch Chon 2 (SS12) came next and the Irish man managed to pull another 1.9 sec out on Kopecky to extend his advantage to 16.8s. All the fingers were crossed in the Breen camp as Craig entered SS13 and the 25km's of High Corrie 2 but there was no problems on the rerun of the stage, the Czech driver did cut the gap by 3.8s and going into the penultimate test the difference was 13s.

Over SS14, Breen matched Kopecky, dropping only a second to hold an 11.7sec advantage going into the last 3km stage. Then over the final stage Craig was in total control, coming home 5sec down on the Czech Skoda driver but finishing 6.6 ahead to take fourth.

Craig's next event will be on WRC Spain in two weeks' time. The Irish driver will contest the event as an SWRC entrant and will again be hoping to continue his good form in the Fiesta S2000.