

Major Motorsport titles within grasp for Harding and Breen

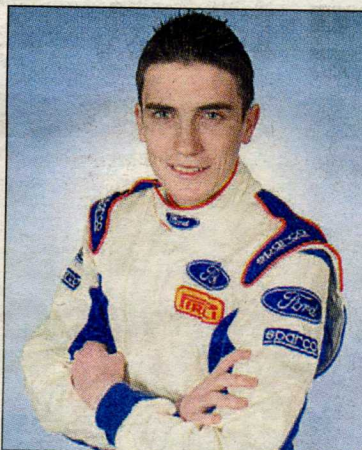
■ Trevor McGrath

Twelve months ago Carrick-on-Suir Motor Club member Ray Breen clinched the National Forestry Championship on the final round at the Birr Forestry Rally and in doing so he equalled Eugene Donnelly's record of becoming the only driver to hold both a National Tarmac Championship and National Forestry Championship. A year on, the Carrick club is again to the fore as two more club members are on the brink of securing major National Championships. Trevor Harding stands at the top of table in the National Forestry Championship, the same competition where Ray Breen was victorious in 2008 and to show that Motorsport is defiantly in the Breen family genes Ray's son Craig is the overall leader in the National Junior Rally Championship. Trevor and Craig can acquire their respective championship crowns with point's finishes next Sunday as both title races culminate again with the Birr Forestry Rally.

After a number of years and many events of playing bridesmaid Trevor Harding has stepped up to the plate this season. Harding kicked off his bid for National Forestry glory by finishing second to Keith Cronin in Mitchelstown at the Tipperary Forestry Rally back in January. He then took victory on his home rally in Carrick on Suir by being fastest on half of the day's six stages in early March. Round three the Moonraker Forestry Rally was a very close battle and Harding was pushed all the way as Peter McCullagh made a return to the championship. The pair traded fastest times all day and as both crews entered the last stage they were level on time. Harding stopped the clocks with a time of 5.52 but this was not to matter as McCullagh rolled his Mitsubishi Evo 9 halfway through the test. After a break from April to August the championship moved on to round four in Co. Cork with the stages based around Mallow. Harding changed from using his Subaru Impreza to renting a Mitsubishi Evo 8 from Derek Jobb. Mallow's Michael O'Brien and Kanturk's James O'Brien in a Ford Focus WRC were seeded at number one and set the pace from the off. Harding used the opening two stages to familiarize himself with his new mount and when the cars entered first service he was lying in third place. On stage three Harding set his first fastest time of the day but as the crew headed for service number two Harding had fallen to fourth, 21.1 seconds down on rally leader O'Brien. Things went from bad to worse over the afternoon stages as Harding first suffered a puncture and then the head gasket failed on the EVO. After this mechanical failure Harding



Trevor Harding.



Craig Breen.

points. On the short final test John Reid in a Toyota Corolla WRC set the second fastest time and beat Harding by 1.1 seconds relegating him to fourth. After an eventful season to date Harding is now at the top of the leader board with 75 points, Pat O'Connell is in second place with 70 points and the top three are completed with John Reid lying on 69 points. For Trevor to claim his first title he needs to finish in the top five with O'Connell needed to take victory to have any chance. Trevor will again use the Evo 8 from Derek Jobb backed by Sentry Security, Long's Garage and TJH Cars.

Rollercoaster ride

For 19-year-old Craig 2009 has been a roller coaster ride from the start. Craig moved to Rallying at the start of the 2009 season after getting a good grounding on the European Karting circuits as a junior. From the start of the year Craig formed a formidable team a round him, his Dad as team manager, Car Preparation by Tom Gahan/ M-Sport and Co-Driver Gareth Roberts and for the 2009 season the team would attack on four fronts, at home in Ireland the National Junior Rally Championship and the Irish Fiesta Sporting Trophy Championship, across the water the UK Fiesta Sporting Trophy Championship and on the world stage the Fiesta Sporting Trophy International. On the 21st of August Crag rapped up both the Irish and UK Fiesta Sporting Trophy Championships at the Ulster Rally and at the time of writing is in second place with two remaining rounds in the Fiesta Sporting Trophy International (World Rally Championship). Next Sunday Craig takes a two point advantage in the National Junior Rally Championship as we enter the last remaining event the Birr Forestry Junior Rally. He got his junior championship bid underway in emphatic style when he claimed victory

Tipperary forestry rally and then back that up by winning round two in Carrick on Suir. This year's championship is based over fourteen events with the five best scores counting. Craig made his third appearance at the ALMC Stages (Tarmac Event) where he debuted the new M-Sport Fiesta R2 and was rewarded with eight points for a second place finish. Craig debuted the Fiesta R2 on gravel at the Cork Forestry Rally and gave a dominant display with a start to finish win which gave him his points total to date of thirty eight from four events. The young Waterford driver now only has to finish in the points to claim the 2009 junior title and the prize of €5,000.

This year's junior championship is also a stepping stone to the coveted Billy Coleman Award. This award was set up in 2000 by Motorsport Ireland in recognition of the achievements of perhaps the country's greatest ever rally driver "Billy Coleman". The award was designed to enhance and develop Ireland's chance of producing top class rally drivers. For the 2009 season the award is linked to the National Junior Rally Championship with the winner of each class, along with two other drivers nominated as wild cards by expert competitors selected by Motorsport Ireland from within this series to go forward for consideration for the Billy Coleman Award. At this point Craig stands a great chance of going forward as a class winner, maybe even Junior Champion and rounding off the year in fine style.

The culmination to the season will unfold next Sunday in Nenagh, Co Tipperary at the 2009 Birr Forestry Rally and could be very fruitful for both drivers from the Carrick-on-Suir Motor Club with championship titles within their grasp.

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