

BREEN SHOULD BE UP TO SPEED

WITH Keith Cronin unlikely to be involved again this season, Waterford's Craig Breen and Dublin's Robert Barrable are left to fly the flag for Ireland at the start of the British Rally in two days' time.

With Cork ace Cronin now based in Australia having turned down the chance to compete with Proton in the Intercontinental Rally Challenge, the focus switches to Breen and Barrable.

Win

Cronin was a fine ambassador for Ireland, becoming only the second Irishman to win the British series following Billy Coleman's breakthrough success

back in 1974.

It is a much-changed seven-round British series which starts with the Sunseeker Rally in the South of England on Saturday.



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The series is effectively in a transition year, with four-wheeled drive cars banned from the start of the 2012 campaign.

Consequently, in preparation for the change, many drivers have opted to switch to two-wheeled drives now.

Breen is the top seed in his Ford Fiesta R2 and he will be using the British Championship to get used to the car ahead of the World Rally Championship Academy, in which he will feature in six rounds this year.

Stiff

However, Breen (21) may have stiff competition from two other Irish competitors — Daniel Barry in his Mitsubishi EVO and Barrable, who features in a Skoda Fabia S2000 having won the British and Irish Citroen C2R2 championships last year.

Both have the advantage of four-wheeled drive and should be more than a match for the two-wheeled driven by the likes of Breen.

This weekend's Sunseeker Rally will be followed by the Bulldog in Wales (Saturday, April 2), the Pirelli International (Saturday, April 30), the Jim Clark in Scotland (May 27-28), Ulster Rally (August 19-20), Rally Yorkshire (September 23-24) and the Isle of Man (October 28-29).

While the Jim Clark in Scotland will remain part of the British

series, sense it seems has prevailed in Irish rallying circles with the news that the event will not be part of the 2011 Irish Tarmac Championship.

Organisers of the series, the TROA, decided last year to include the Jim Clark in a seven-round Irish series, knowing full well that very few, if any, Irish would make the trip to Scotland.

In a statement yesterday, the TROA revealed that the series would now revert to a six-round event, with the five best rounds to count.

The next round is the Circuit of Ireland on Saturday, April 23 and Sunday, April 24.

Meanwhile, the first round of the Dunlop National Rally Championship, the Abbeyleix Manor Hotel Rally this coming Sunday, has attracted a capacity entry of 151 cars and crews headed by the reigning champion, Welshman Mel Evans in his Subaru Impreza.

Evans became the first overseas driver to win the championship in 2010, when he secured the title on the penultimate round in Clare after a season-long battle involving the Subaru's of Niall Maguire, Derek McGarrity and Kevin Barrett.

Evans is the number one seed in a decent entry, with current Irish Tarmac Championship leader, Tim McNulty seeded number two behind the Welsh driver.



GEARING UP: Karen Feeney (right) and Katrina Walsh were at the launch of the Festival of Speed, to be staged in August

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