

Breen starts the party with third Fiesta win

CRAIG BREEN further underlined his credentials as Ireland's brightest rallying hope with his third victory in as many events last weekend

The financial meltdown of the past few months has served to highlight the often previously undetected flaws of the global economy, the international markets and, of course, the people working in them. Even those with not the slightest interest in hedge funds, sub-prime loans or the price of the Euro have now become familiar with phrases like quantitative easing.

Perhaps now, speculators working in the futures markets, should look at an entirely new stock - that of Craig Breen.

The 19 year-old from Kilmurry sealed his latest victory in the dramatic setting of the Kielder Forest in Northumberland, England.

The Pirelli International Rally played host to the third round of the Kick Energy Fiesta Sport Trophy, and after a gearbox failure put him out of the first round and cost him vital points, Craig needed a strong result if he was to get his title bid back on track.

Things didn't quite go to plan when on the opening day, Craig and his co-driver, Gareth Roberts were hampered by the clouds of dust kicked up by fellow title protagonist, Kris Hall. "We were running second on the road, and soon into the first stage we got caught behind Kris limping along with a puncture. That cost us 10 seconds trying to get past him," Craig explained.

He was literally able to make up for the lost time on the second stage and give himself a 6 second lead in the Fiesta class and 13th overall.

Last week, the young pair had a spectacular roll which destroyed their car whilst pushing hard for overall points in the Circuit of Ireland rally. As the rally moved to the daunting Kielder stages, Craig admitted, "The forest there is not great for confidence building, I can tell you! I was still feeling the effects of last weekend's off, and to be honest I was nowhere near committed enough on the fast stuff."



Craig Breen, on his way to victory in England last weekend.

This naturally cost them time and their lead was cut to just two seconds. Digging deep, Craig responded by attacking the following two stages. His advantage was not only restored, but extended - "At this point of the rally, the Fiesta Sport Trophy finished, so we won by fifteen seconds. We were over the moon. To win in Portugal (the Fiesta Sport Trophy International class, on the Rallye de Portugal), win (the Fiesta Sport Ireland round) on the Circuit of Ireland and now come to here to England and win again, what more could I ask for?"

However, with little time to reflect on, or bask in the glory of their victory, Breen and Roberts jumped straight back into their fast Ford in a bid to score more British Rally Championship points.

Craig explains, "We were locked in a battle with fellow Irishman,

Marty McCormack for the top two-wheel drive honours. Unfortunately, we lost 9 seconds to him on Special Stage 7 but it looked like it was 'game on', all the same. Sadly, proceedings were brought to a halt on the following stage when a car caught fire and burnt to the ground, causing the cancellation of stages eight, nine and ten. We headed back to the service area, with two hard stages to go. On stage eleven, we put ourselves one second ahead of Marty and I was really looking forward to going for a good go at it in the remaining stages!"

Two stunning stints behind the wheel in the remaining two stages saw Craig and Gareth classified 10th overall, the first two-wheel drive crew and finish first in the R3 class. Craig said, "It was an incredible day. But as I was being presented with my Fiesta awards, I was sud-

denly called to the interview area and was then presented with the Pirelli Star Driver award for the Rally! This accolade puts me into a shootout with every other winner of the award over the season, and if I win I will receive a fully-funded drive in the British Rally Championship in a top of the range Group N car."

He added, "To say that I'm absolutely shocked is an understatement. I never expected to win the International, Irish and British Fiesta rounds one after another - but to then win the Pirelli Star Driver as well, was the icing on the cake."

Craig next event is the Killarney Rally - the third round of the Irish Fiesta Sporting Trophy Championship, on the 1 - 3 May.

To follow his fortunes and learn more about his career, visit www.craigbreen.com