

Motorsport Ireland Road Safety Initiative launched

Selected as ambassadors for Motorsport Ireland's new Road Safety Initiative, Craig Breen and Toni Kelly are way too young to remember the efforts of another motorsport luminary as he tried to educate people into improving their on-road driving behaviour.

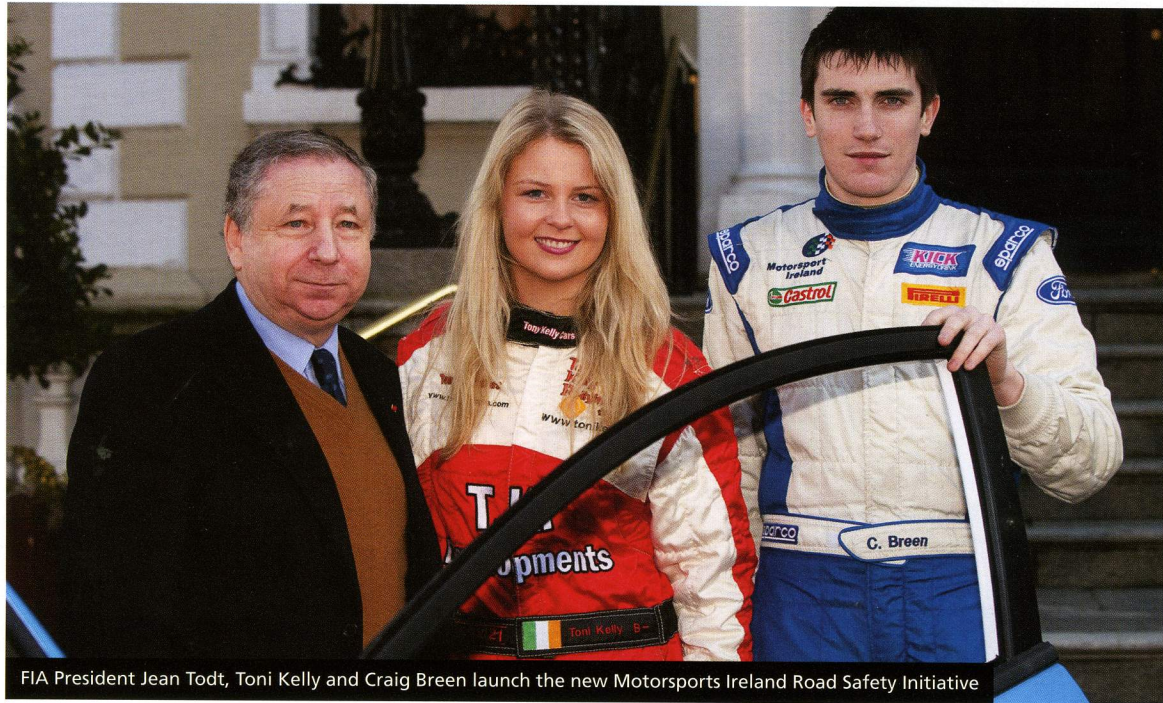
Starting back in the seventies, Sir Jackie Stewart drew heavily from his racing experience and unquestionable pedigree as a former three times F1 World Champion to impress upon those lucky enough to have had the opportunity to learn from him the value of smoothness and proper anticipation as critical skills whilst driving on the public highway.

Back then, the link between Road Safety and Motorsport was a great deal more tenuous than is being suggested today and only somebody with the pedigree of Sir Jackie could have gotten a public hearing on the subject.

Times have changed and the offices of Motorsport Ireland at the RIAC in Dawson Street saw Alex Sinclair joined by Conor Faughnan of AA Roadwatch and Noel Brett of the Road Safety Authority as well as the significant presence of the President of the FIA, Jean Todt as they joined forces to launch the Road Safety Initiative.

Conor Faughnan, Policy Director of AA introduced Jean Todt to the assembled media representatives and described it as an auspicious day. He said the AA has conducted a major opinion poll amongst Irish motorists in which over 22,000 drivers participated. When asked to rank the importance of various motoring issues, road safety was rated as number one – ahead of fuel costs, insurance costs, road conditions, tolls and the environment. "The AA is sending out a strong message to the incoming government", he added, "and that message is – Do not neglect road safety, it is the number one concern of Irish motorists!"

Monsieur Todt said that motorsport wants to do everything that it can to help spread the message about safe driving. Irish efforts to improve road safety have been most impressive, he noted, but said there is still much more to be done and he believes motorsport can help. "The sport has invested millions in safety", said M. Todt. "indeed, many key modern safety features like ABS brakes and crumple zones were



FIA President Jean Todt, Toni Kelly and Craig Breen launch the new Motorsports Ireland Road Safety Initiative

developed in the crucible of motorsport before becoming standard on road cars and saving many, many lives!"

Jean Todt continued by thanking drivers like Sebastian Loeb and Michael Schumacher for their efforts in promoting road safety and better driver behaviour on public roads.

Todt made it clear that not only does the FIA support this kind of activity but is itself driven by a mandate from the UN under the banner of its Decade for Action for Road Safety programme.

Alex Sinclair told assembled journalists that with immediate effect, all participants in Irish four-wheeled motorsport events would wear the UN Decade for Action in road Safety Tag bearing the message WEAR, BELIEVE, ACT!

Speaking to the press, the President of Motorsport Ireland said "We know that in Ireland young people, and especially young males are much more likely to be killed on our roads. We also know that motorsport is hugely popular, with fans turn out in their tens of thousands to support national and international events. Motorsport Ireland is committed to promoting road safety through motorsports and this initiative will contribute to both the national and global campaign to save lives on our roads."

Commenting on the initiative, Noel Brett, Chief Executive of the Road Safety Authority, said, "Tragically, young men are over represented in road deaths in Ireland. In fact, young men between the ages of 17 and 24 years of age are five times more likely to die on the road than the rest of the driver population. This particular group is hard to educate and all too easy to alienate. Megaphoning young people doesn't work. We have to reach them on their level. This isn't really new territory for the RSA, we have been involved twice with Rally Ireland in the past and we look forward to that opportunity again!"

Noel Brett noted that Ireland has gone from more than 400 fatalities on Irish roads in 2000 to a little over 200 during 2010. "We are now ranked 7th among the EU nations and we now have delegations coming to visit and review what it is we are doing here", he said.

"We want to discourage those most at risk of killing or being killed from taking unacceptable risk and inappropriate driving, if safety rules are broken and people get killed, we're all losers," he said.

Answering questions posed by journalists, Noel Brett was adamant that the purpose of enforcement was to achieve a change in attitude

and behaviour and wasn't just about catching as many people as possible. It to be hoped that this particular message filters down to the enforcers

In his turn Conor Faughnan declared "I don't buy into the idea that those who are interested in motorsport are necessarily dangerous drivers. It's like saying those who watch boxing matches at the Olympics are going to be more involved in brawling outside pubs, there's no connection at all!"

There was little talk of motorsport itself other than a prod by one journalist who didn't let the moment pass and asked Jean Todt if there were any issues going forward between the FIA and Motorsport Ireland after it publicly supported Ari Vatanen against him for the presidency.

Todt responded by saying, "I am very respectful of what Ireland is doing for motorsport, it is remarkable what has been achieved here. And you don't judge people's achievements on the basis that they have been working for you or they have not been working for you during election time. Once the election is over, it's all about the FIA committee working together and getting results together!"

By Richard Lyons



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