

CRUCIAL PART OF THE SEASON FOR NJRC

WORDS BY Trevor McGrath



The culmination of the 2009 National Junior Rally Championship finally draws to a close over two weekends in October. First up is the Cork 20 Junior Rally on the fourth of the month, with the culmination of the season on a hectic weekend's actions on the tenth and eleventh as the Donegal Harvest Junior Rally and Birr Forestry Junior Rally bring the curtain down.

The last event (Round 8) the Cork Forestry Junior Rally saw a change of leadership as Craig Breen regained a two-point advantage over Jonathan Cunningham with a dominant start-to-finish win. Third on the table John Byrnes also had a good result as he finished second overall and picked up eight points. These three have opened a gap to the rest of the field and it now looks that the Junior Champion for 2009 will come from Waterford, Galway or Limerick. Craig tops the table on thirty-eight points, Cunningham in second place on thirty-six and John Byrnes in third with thirty-four. The remainder of the championship and the destination of

performance on the stages. At the finish ramp in Cork all the competitors voiced the same opinion that, given the nature of the championship regulations and points scoring system, it is important to have as many drivers entered on each event to score maximum points.

OPENING HALF OF THE 2009 SEASON

The 2009 season started with a blanket of snow for the opening round in Mitchelstown and it was Kilkenny driver Craig Breen who grabbed an early lead in the championship. Breen didn't have things all his own way as he was pushed firstly by Limerick man John Byrnes and also by Co. Monaghan driver Vincent McAree. Breen then backed up his success by taking top honors on round two on his home event in Carrick on Suir.

For round three the championship moved to Lismore, Co Waterford for the Moonraker Forestry rally organised by the Munster Motor Club. This time out it was the turn of Vincent McAree to take victory and move into second place in

with some controversy at the finish as he was first accredited in fifth position because of his time on stage 5 when he stopped at fellow Junior competitor Kevin Gallagher's crash but when the times were adjusted it was the man from Clontee that claimed top points.

Round four, the Cavan Stages, signified a change in surface from the gravel of the forestry events to tarmac for the next five rallies and also signified restructuring and revisions to the championship regulations. NJRC coordinator Motorsport Ireland noticed a major fall off in competitor registrations from 2008. The downturn in the economic climate was the biggest deterrent; budgets for prospective competitors entering the series were not as readily available as in other years. The major changes in the regulations at this time were, the season now consists of fourteen events and the best performance from any five events will count towards the Championship. A minimum of four events must be completed in order to qualify for an award.

twofold. Firstly, the NJRC was formed to hone and encourage the skills of young talent and secondly, the NJRC is the only route to the qualification process for the Billy Coleman Award and every effort needed to be made to attract as many suitable competitors as possible.

Back on the stages the former two events started in Cavan Town with the Headquarters in Kilmore Hotel. Clerk of the Course Marty Sherlock had organised a very testing event with a nine-stage layout. A knock-on effect of adding the extra events to the calendar was that it gave drivers more options as to the events they would choose to take part in and this became very apparent as only two of the registered drivers made the trip to Cavan. In class six from Monaghan was Vincent McAree and from Galway entering class eleven in his Honda Civic we had Jonathan Cunningham. Over the opening loop stages McAree, reported that his car felt very soft and he couldn't commit 100% to cornering or on the bumpy sections. In service-Vincent had his mechanics stiffen the suspension which allowed