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## Two national rallying titles for Waterford duo

BY TREVOR MCGRATH

Trevor J Harding and Andrew Purcell were crowned Irish Nation Forestry Rally Champions and Craig Breen claimed his third title in an amazing 2009 season as he won the National Junior Rally Championship in emphatic style on Sunday last at the Birt Forestry Rally. At the finish ramp at the Abby Court Hotel Headquarters, Nenagh, Co. Tipperary there were jubilant scenes as both Harding and Purcell reached the summit of the of the year long challenge and Craig Breen the newest talent in Irish Motorsport again astounded fellow competitors, organisers and spectators as he took yet another championship title.

The final days action got under way with stage one of the eight stage event in the Knockanora forest complex on Sunday morning at 9am. The drama started from the start line as Harding's nearest championship rival Pat O'Connell slid off the stage on location three, the Mitsubishi Evo 9 getting stuck in marshy ground near the edge of the forest road. O'Connell and Co driver Mark Wiley eventually extracting the car with the help of spectators but losing forty nine seconds and coming off the stage in twenty eighth place. There was a far more controlled start for the other Mitsubishi pair in the championship race. Trevor Harding and Andrew Purcell seeded at number one recorded a time of 4.27 just three seconds off stage winners John Reid and Enda Shields. Reid and Shields were also in with a slim chance of taking the title. They were lying in third place in the standings but victory was required with both Harding and O'Connell not being able to finish the event and score points. All looked over for O'Connell at this point but there was a long days rallying ahead. Craig Breen looking to take his third title of the year started with an explosive time on the first stage of four minutes, thirty nine seconds. This time set him a class apart in the Junior Rally and brought him up to equal third overall in the rally. Breen only required a points finish to be crowned Junior Champion but Craig had other ideas and wanted to get as high as possible



Trevor J Harding and Andrew Purcell, Irish National Forestry Rally Champions.

sible in the overall results in his new Fiesta R2.

Reid set the bench mark again on stage two with Harding was third on the time sheets with a time of 10.02 but O'Connell pushed hard over the test and set second best time on the test and climbed back to ninth overall. Breen continued his charge with a time of 10.12 to take third place on his own. The cars returned to tackle these two stages after first service with Reid taking his third fastest time of the day, O'Connell was again next on the time sheets just one second down stopping the clocks at 4.25, the Hardest job for Andrew Purcell was trying to keep Harding under control and they recorded third best time on the stage. Competing in the Junior Rally Craig Breen under pinned his intentions by setting the amazing time of 4.32 in the little Fiesta, just eight seconds off the WRC Corolla of Reid. Stage four was cancelled after the junior field passed through because of safety grounds. The stage was deemed to be dangerous as over night rain and the first pass through had now made the very slippery on the downhill sections.

After second service the car made their way to the first of the afternoon's stages and it was here that the next piece of drama was to unfold. Pat O'Connell was now on a charge and set his first fastest time of the day with 5.26 over the stage and now climbed



Craig Breen (far right) is the National Junior Rally champion.

to take third overall. Reid was still in control and was second on the time sheets and looked to have the rally win in his sights. Breen now dropped to fourth but the spectacle now turned to championship leaders Harding and Purcell as their Evo 9 broke a drive shaft half way through the stage. Over that stage they dropped twenty eight seconds to O'Connell and on the following stage they were another forty three seconds down and by the time they reached service the pair were now down to fifth overall. Time was not the most important factor however as Harding and Purcell knew that all they had to do was finish five places behind O'Connell to capture the title. The most urgent issue now was to get the car repaired and finish the two

remaining stages. The Mitsubishi Evo 9 rented from Derek Jobb pulled into service and the mechanics jumped on the car in a frantic effort to keep the championship campaign alive for Trevor and Andrew. There were a few moments when all looked lost but as the time ticked down for the crew to leave the car was lowered from the lifts with the new drive shaft fitted and Harding was away.

Over the last two remaining stages there was no change in the top three. John Reid went on to take his first forestry rally win of the season, second went to Pat O'Connell and a fantastic third overall went to Craig Breen. Trevor and Andrew rounded off the coming in fifth and taking the championship crown.