

A Q&A with Craig ahead of his World Rally debut

■ Trevor McGrath

In an already crammed rally season, Craig Breen will make his debut at world championship level next weekend in Rally De Portugal in Vilamoura – round four of the 2009 World Rally Championship.

The 19-year-old from Kilmurry, Slieverue, has made an impressive start to the first three months of the season, contesting championships here in Ireland and in England on both tarmac and gravel surfaces.

Catching up with the young South Kilkenny driver before he headed off to the sun, I put a few questions to him.

Why pick Rally Portugal for your WRC debut?

"At the start of the year when I was drawing up a plan for the season I decided to base my rallying here in Ireland and Great Britain for 2009, competing in the Irish Junior Rally Championship and both the Irish and UK Fiesta Sport Trophy Series, but I also intended when possible to fit in a world championship event."

How does Portugal fit in to the schedule?

"A very busy four-week period starts the weekend before as I compete in the Bulldog International Rally which is the second round of the UK Fiesta Sport Trophy. Rally Portugal finishes on Sunday the 5th of April and on Monday I travel to a Ford World Rally team test, where I've been offered a spin with Jari Matti Latvala in this year's Ford Focus World Rally Car, something that I just couldn't turn down! After travelling home for a Day I then make my way to Dundalk for the Circuit of Ireland rally on the 11th and 12th of April, the four-event stint finishes with the Pirelli International Rally on the 17th and 18th of April."

What do you hope to take from Rally Portugal?

"Firstly it will be an amazing experience and I hope to sap up all the information I can. It will also be my first time competing over four days of top level rallying so my fitness will be a big factor on the result." How important is the team you've built around you? "Well with every facet of sport today it's vital to have a team around you that you fully trust and that have the same goals as yourself."

Can you expand on that please?

"I'll start inside the rallycar with my co driver Gareth Roberts. Gareth is twenty-one, comes from Carmarthen in Wales and is the reigning Irish and UK Fiesta Sport Trophy champion co driver. Rally Portugal will only be our fifth event together but already we have formed a good bond. Even at this early phase of our partnership I can see the benefits of having Gareth's experience in the car with me, but the most significant aspect to Gareth is that like myself he wants to reach the very top of our sport." Can you give me some details on your rallycar? "Ford Fiesta ST Group N, 2.0 litre Duratec 16V Engine with a max speed of 110 (mph)."

Who prepares and manages the car for you?

"Short answer Tom Gahan Motorsport, but there's a lot more to it than that. After deciding to move into rallying full time and choosing the Ford Fiesta platform as my base for 2009 Tom Gahan was an easy choice to make. Tom has been responsible for the preparation on my Dads rallycar for many years. He has vast experience in the mechanical and technical side of rallycar preparation, plus his links to M-Sport who run the Ford Works team stretches back a long way."

To finish can you give us a short run down on Rally Portugal and how can we keep up to date with the action and your progress?

"A two-day recce begins on Tuesday with the rally kicking off on Thursday afternoon the 2nd of April with a super special stage in the Algarve Stadium, over Friday, Saturday and Sunday there's sixteen stages on a gravel surface held to the north of the host town of Vilamoura with the final stage back in the Algarve Stadium on Sunday afternoon, I'll be up dating my blog daily so logon to www.craigbreen.com and for all the results and action from the rally logon to www.wrc.com."

