

Craig's Column...

Swede Dreams are made of this



Hi to all and welcome to my new *CarSport* column...

This is a new venture for me and I'm delighted to get the opportunity to document my 2011 season. During the off season I was contacted by Pat Burns, the editor of *CarSport* about writing regular articles covering my exploits in the WRC Academy and other events I take on during 2011. To be associated with one of the foremost motorsport magazines in the country is an honour and together we hope to bring you an insight into the cut and thrust of the WRC Academy.

I will also bring you a behind the scenes look at the training and tuition part of the WRC Academy and as this is my first time to write any article of this type I also want to get you the reader involved. As the story unfolds I'm sure you'll have questions that come to mind, I want you to email me with your questions. I will at the end of each column include what I think is the most intriguing question and then attempt to answer it; more on this later.

So let's set the scene for what now has to be my busiest event schedule to date. My priority for 2011 has to be the FIA WRC Academy. The championship is based around six WRC events all of which are located in Europe. The championship starts with Rally Portugal in late March, which I was delighted to see as the event brings back great memories of 2009. It was my first WRC event; I was competing in the FSTi and came home first in class and 25th overall.

Rally d'Italia Sardinia comes up quickly after Portugal and will again be on gravel but this will be my first time taking on the event. There's a break then until July when I head to Finland and I can't wait. I first tackled the famous stages in 2009 driving the ST Fiesta but last year I really enjoyed the faster pace of the Fiesta S2000. So it will be interesting to drive the R2 this season.

The second half of the season kicks off in Germany for the first of two tarmac events. Rally Deutschland will be another learning curve. I'm very used to tarmac rallies here in Ireland and for example the likes of the Jim Clark and Isle of Man in the BRC but

Rally Deutschland is a totally new package.

Rallye France is the second of the two events on the black stuff but it will pose a different challenge than that of Germany. Then the championship draws to a close with Rally GB in November and I'll be doing everything thing I can to be in contention for what I'm sure will be a showdown in Wales.

As there are gaps in the Academy schedule I want to firstly keep my competitive edge between the Academy rallies. Over the Christmas period our initial event schedule included a programme of SWRC events using my Fiesta S2000 but after re-evaluating the FIA WRC Academy Championship I knew it was imperative to get back to front wheel drive and stay with the Fiesta R2 for the full season. Our entry, test session and logistics for Sweden with the S2000 were in place and I wanted to take on the snow stages for the first time but after the snow in Scandinavia I'll be in an R2 for the rest of the season. My first event with my newly acquired R2 is set to be Rallye Sunseeker and all going well Gareth and I will be back for my home event in Carrick-on-Suir just a week later on the 5th March. The Willie Loughman Forestry Rally was my first event with 'Jaffa' two years ago and I've never looked back, so I'm looking forward to that one. I'll be switching between Irish and BRC events during the season and it will be easy to keep up to date with my whereabouts on my new website.

That brings us nicely to that subject, outside the action on the stages I'm really looking forward to the launch of my new site. There'll be a new streamlined look, with loads of new features and when I'm on an event the site will carry up to the minute details.

WEDNESDAY 2ND FEBRUARY My birthday, funny, usually for a person celebrating they're in party mode but I am in rally mode. I'm off to Norway in the morning for snow and ice testing. The calm before the storm!

My Dad has been friends with John Haugland for years and we avail of John's services for two days testing at his School in Geilo (300 km North West of Oslo). Day one concentrated on the

ice of the frozen lake; we took in about 200 kms over five hours, changing setup as the day progressed until we were happy. The speeds you can carry are amazing and it took a few runs to get used to using the snow banks. Day two was set between the trees on snow-covered stages; 80kms were covered but when Gareth and I were leaving we were up beat about our setup for Sweden.

WORLD RALLY SWEDEN

12th overall and 3rd in A2 (S2000), absolutely brilliant. Jaffa and I were ecstatic on the road section from the final stage to the Hagfors service park, when we got back all the lads were waiting, it was brilliant. We'd achieved our goal of a competitive performance, our time on stage four was a high point but what pleased me the most was my controlled pace with no errors over the three days. Now let's rewind back to Thursday evenings Super Special.

Driving from the service park to the SS1, I kept rolling things over in my mind, the pre event test in Norway went very well, I was happy with the car setup, we had put a lot of effort into our pacenotes, I knew there'd be a steep learning curve but this was my third WRC S2000 outing and I wanted to continue the upward trend of improving results. Patrick (Sandell) on home ground was going to be the man to beat. In a funny way I had him to thank for my GB result, when he banged in that quick time on Sunday morning (Resolfen SS17). I responded on that occasion. Now we were playing in his backyard.

There was an electric atmosphere in the Karlstad trotting arena; the Swedes were out in force... heavy snow falling... fireworks going off... absolutely AWESOME!

Our start position was a help but with snow falling conditions were tricky. As we passed the finish boards I knew it was a good one, off the start line every corner was cut perfectly and more importantly I carried the speed on to the each straight section. As we came to a stop, Jaffa's voice crackled on the intercom "Must be in the top ten", I answered... don't know, then it went up on the board 1:45.9 12th, Yes!.. a good start, the real business kicks off in the morning.

VARGASEN, 24.63 KM...

More snow during the night, solid start required but it all goes out the window after 6km, stage blocked, six minutes lost. I was lucky there was a long road section before reaching SS3; time to recompose. The stage was a blur, I still had the six minute loss in my mind but 17th over the 20 Km was ok. SS4 Lovhaugen, I'll remember that name for a while. Everything clicked, 7th best, nice to read the timesheets and see C. Breen ahead of Loeb, Latvala and Ogier. Over the second loop I decided to just keep the head down



and climb the leader board. Going to bed on Friday night I was happy, after the problem on SS2 we had dropped to 36th but coming off the final stage of the day we were back up 22nd.

DAY TWO...

Nine stages but Mike (Broad) just kept telling me "This is a learning experience Craig", and that was the way we approached every stage, sure I wanted to impress but as each stage went by I gained more knowledge and the times were still respectable. Ending day two in 15th was very pleasing, I showed I had the speed and there were no mistakes.

THE FINAL DAY...

Six stages... 15th overall, Ken (Block) was in touching distance and I felt I could haul him in. We could see a problem at the start control as the cars in front filed away in order, Rene Kuipers was in front of us. After he pulled off the start line I tapped the accelerator and pulled forward, with the three minute interval I usually give the belts a pull and give the dashboard a quick check but suddenly the time cards were handed back and with only a minute gone, we were forced to enter the stage by a rather reluctant marshal. I launched the car from the line and we were off, I only got 7 km into the stage when I caught my first glimpse of Kuipers, the snow dust was hanging in the air and as I reeled him in I couldn't see a thing. I knew we were losing time - it was very frustrating but the chance was gone to gain another place. As I left the start on SS18 I noticed the rear diff took a few seconds to engage, the same thing happened on SS19 so I decided then not to take any chances and just bring it home.



The final few stages were approached with just the finish in mind, and with three clean runs over Torntorp, Rammen, and Gustavsfors (also known as the Power Stage) we made it! 15th overall on my first winter rally, what more could I have asked for! By the time you read this I'll be back to front wheel drive in the R2. In the next issue I'll be reporting on my trip to the Sunseeker and my home event in the Carrick-on-Suir Forestry Rally. Both events signify Jaffa's second anniversary of joining the team. Then the big one, WRC Portugal, the first event in the academy and on the back of our great result in the snow I'm full of confidence.

To finish my first column I'll go back to my earlier point. As the season unfolds

I want to get you the reader INVOLVED. I want you to EMAIL me your questions.

Starting from my next column I'll select one question and I'll try to answer to best of my ability. The questions must be rally-based but can be about the WRC Academy, other events I take on or my training, YOU decide. I'll answer one question per column and then at the end of the season I'll pick out one of the questions that has been published during the season that I think is the most interesting and the WINNER will get a spin on a test session with myself and the team.

See you all next time...

Email your questions to: craigbreenrallying@gmail.com

To keep in touch with Craig Breen Rallying log on to www.craigbreen.com
And to find out more on the FIA WRC Academy log on to www.wrc.com/wrc-academy