LEADING from start to finish, Waterford’s, Craig Breen (Ford Fiesta S2000) and his Welsh co-driver, Gareth Roberts, took a convincing victory in the Suirway Farm Machinery Raven’s Rock Rally, the fifth round of the Dunlop National Rally Championship.

At the end of the Kilkenny based event, Breen/Roberts were a minute and 45 seconds ahead of Colm Murphy/Don Montgomery (Subaru), who took the maximum twenty points in the Dunlop series. Third place went to Monaghan’s, Sam Moffett/James O’Reilly (Mitsubishi) were 17 seconds further behind, they move into second in the Dunlop series – 26 points behind series leader, Tim McNulty, who was amongst the non-starters. Despite several problems, Washington James/Llinos Jones Davies won the Modified category. Stephen Carey/Breda O’Driscoll (Honda Civic) won the Group N award.

On the opening stage, Kells, Breen set the pace and opened up a 19 second advantage over both Colm Murphy (Subaru) and Seb Ling (Mitsubishi). Murphy lost time when he clipped a stone and the wheel deflated, luckily, he was near the stage finish. Meanwhile, Ed O’Callaghan (Ford Escort) was a further three seconds in arrears in fourth place. Late entry, Sam Moffett (Mitsubishi), Frank Kelly (Escort) and Shane Maguire (Subaru) were next in classification.

Breen was also quickest through the remaining two stages of the loop to lead the Mitsubishi of Seb Ling by 47 seconds at the Chancellor’s Mills service halt. Breen remarked, “The stages are very fast, stage three in particular, I was probably a little too conservative with my tyre choice, the compound I selected was too soft.”
Ed O’Callaghan crashed his Escort near the finish of the third stage, earlier, on S.S. 2, Paul Mulcahy (Toyota Starlet), who was ninth overall after the first stage, also crashed out.

Ling had a good run through the second stage while Murphy clipped a bank. Eoin Doyle (Subaru), who was fourth overall, had an overshoot on the second stage while he was concerned by a transmission glitch on the third test. Moffett was fifth. Washington James (Darrian) traversed most of the loop with a warped brake disc. John McQuaid (Escort) held seventh. Roy White, on his first rally in some three years, occupied eighth in his MG S2000, he opined that his pace increased as the rally progressed, he did experience some brake fade on the third stage. Paddy O’Dwyer (Vauxhall Nova) and Lloyd Hutchinson (Mini), who completed the top ten, were both untroubled. However, Shane Maguire (Subaru) lost some six minutes on S.S. 3 with transmission woes and he retired at the service halt.

On the repeat loop, Breen continued to dominate and with three more fastest times, he arrived at the final service halt with a lead of a minute and 28 seconds over second placed, Colm Murphy (Subaru). The rally leader, who spun on S.S. 4, admitted that he had slackened his pace. Murphy was 15 seconds ahead of third placed Moffett, both enjoyed untroubled runs through the second loop. Doyle was similarly trouble free – albeit some four second behind Moffett.

Seb Ling’s rally ended when he crashed on S.S. 4 and David Condell put his Escort off the road on S.S. 5. Meanwhile, Frank Kelly (Escort) occupied fifth from Roy White, who reckoned his MG S2000 was down on power, particularly on S.S. 6 as it continued to misfire.

Washington James (Darrian) had to contend with an oil leak through the entire loop. The top ten also featured the Escort trio of John McQuaid, Sam Smyth and Hereford's, Jay Stanley. Smyth reckoned that his Escort was handling a little errantly while he also endured a few minor overshoots. Shay Power retired his Escort on S.S. 4 when the throttle cable snapped, ironically, a short distance from his home.

Elsewhere, Neil Williams (Escort) lost time when one of the spark plugs failed near the finish of S.S. 6 while Joe Connolly, also in an Escort, experienced a soft brake pedal on the same stage.
Breen went on to take victory and complete a notable family double as winner of the event. His father, Ray, a former Dunlop National Rally champion, won the rally in 2005 and 2008. As Breen did not register, Murphy took maximum points in the Dunlop series while third placed Moffett took second placed points to move into second in the Dunlop series – 26 points behind the series leader, Tim McNulty.

James was the highest placed in the Modified category while fifth placed Eoin Doyle (Subaru) overshot and stalled on the final stage. Sixth placed Frank Kelly (Escort) reckoned he couldn’t have driven any harder. Roy White in seventh, finished with a damaged air filter.

The Dunlop “Drive of the Day” award was annexed by Monaghan’s, John McQuaid (Ford Escort), who was co-driven by Kerry’s, Seamus O’Connor. The final places in the top ten were claimed by Sam Smyth (Escort) and Lloyd Hutchinson.

For various reasons, Dunlop series leader, Tim McNulty (Subaru WRC), Niall Maguire, Kevin Barrett and Darren Gass, all in Subaru WRC’s, Liam McCarthy (Toyota Corolla WRC) and Wesley Patterson (Ford Escort) withdrew their entries.