



Entries 'Power' Past 100

As entries for Sol Rally Barbados 2013 passed 100 mid-way through February, Dunmore East father and son Eddie and Keith Power confirmed their participation in the Caribbean's biggest annual motor sport International, bringing to four the number of first-time Irish crews on this year's list... and Pacenotes has been told there are more revelations in the pipeline.

Thanks to support from the island's private-sector Tourism Development Corporation (TDC), the Barbados Rally Club (BRC) has seen massive growth in Irish interest in the last few years. BRC PRO Neil Barnard says: "While there is an historic link between the rallying communities in Ireland and Barbados, what we have experienced in recent years goes well beyond that."

"The competitions to recognise volunteer marshals with a free trip to Sol Rally Barbados and the parallel promotion through Pacenotes Rally Magazine has raised the profile of our event

significantly. Over the past two years, we have attracted 50 new International drivers and co-drivers to the event, around half from Ireland, where rallying is a National sport, much the same as in Barbados."

Eddie Power, a class Champion in the Dunlop Irish National Rally Championship in 2005, is entered in the new WRC-2 class in a Toyota Corolla WRC, a sister car to that campaigned in recent years by Barbados Toyota dealer Roger Hill – they have consecutive chassis numbers, and were among the last cars built. Power Senior's co-driver will be Kilmeaden's

Michael Morrissey, whose achievements include two Irish National Championships and the Group N crown in the Middle East Championship.

Son Keith will be driving his factory-built Renault Clio S1600, originally campaigned in the Junior World Rally Championship in 2004 by Olly Marshall, before it was bought by Brian O'Mahoney, who used it with considerable success in National and International events in Ireland and the UK.

Power Junior won the 1600 class in the Southern 4 Championship in 2006, then the S1600 class in the National Championship the

following year in a Ford Puma. More recently, he was the overall two-wheel-drive Champion in the 2010 Southern 4 Championship and won the Carlow Motor Club Rallysprint in 2011, while co-driver Jonathan McGrath from Mitchelstown has twice won the S1600 class in the Irish Championship.

The 'Power Rangers' first-time entries follow those of Enda McCormack and Tommy Doyle, who will drive Ford Escort MkII and Renault Clio R3 respectively, news of which was published in our February issue. Entries remain open on the official web site, www.rallybarbados.net, until mid-May.



Photo by: Seamus Counihan/www.crspics.com

Armstrong, who finished fifth in Sol RB12 in his Toyota Starlet and sixth the previous year, will have regular co-driver Barry Ward alongside him. The Barbados Rally Club's (BRC) Rookie of the Year in 2002, Armstrong has since won five BRC Class Championships, two each in Group N and Group A, then last year in his SuperModified 10 Starlet.

Prior to his first outing in the SX4, in the loose-surface Rally Trinidad (March 23/24), Armstrong had a late February test under the watchful eye of triple British Rally Champion Mark Higgins, including two days on gravel at Walter's Arena in Wales.

Armstrong said: "The test was such an eye-opening experience. Mark took his time with me, he is an awesome guy and showed me a couple of ways where I can improve. In terms of the car, the Suzuki SX4 WRC is absolutely amazing. The car's turn-in is unbelievable, how it stops, how it reacts, how you can just lob it into a corner, get on the brakes and then just power out, with

Armstrong confirmed in Suzuki SX4 WRC seat

Barbadian two-wheel-drive ace Neil Armstrong will drive the Simpson Motors/MML Suzuki SX4 WRC in 2013...



Neil Armstrong, Simpson Motors Suzuki SX4

minimal steering input.

"I have driven a four-wheel-drive car before - an Evo VI - and the only similarities between the SX4 and the Evo is that they are both four-wheel-drive and they both have

a steering wheel. Every aspect of the SX4 is just better and improved to a level that I am now only beginning to comprehend. I am so looking forward to driving it in Trinidad and then in Barbados."

On the SX4, Higgins said: "The first time I drove the car on gravel I felt totally at home with it, the balance was incredible and it really hangs onto the corners well. I have driven a lot of world rally cars over the last 10 years and I am very, very impressed with this car. It was very hard for the guys to get me out of it!"

On Armstrong, he added: "Neil has been doing a great job in testing. He is a bright talent and he is learning really well at the moment. He is a natural driver, that's for sure, he listens well, his speed is good and he's improving all the time. Watch this space, as I believe Neil could be the new star out in the Caribbean."

Armstrong replaces Sean Gill in the SX4, after Gill's decision to step down from the top level of island motor sport. Gill said: "The commitment to a full time programme with the SX4 has taken its toll and, to be honest, I need to concentrate on my family at the moment, so I am taking a break from the sport. I will be back, though, and I am looking forward to competing again in the future."