

Brendo's regular co-driver, Rhianon Smyth, will sit alongside New Zealander, Emma Gilmour, in this year's Asia Pacific Rally Championship. The pair will be part of the successful Motor Image team, headed up by Cody Crocker and Ben Atkinson, the reigning APRC champions.

Rhianon tells us about her exciting new role and her busy year ahead, co-driving for both Emma and Brendo.

Congratulations on your new role. You must be very excited with the opportunities that lie ahead this year. How did the role as Emma's co-driver in the Motor Image team come about?

I met Emma briefly last year while rallying in New Zealand at the WRC round. Then a couple of months later in December she spoke to me about the idea, as MotorImage was looking at an all girl team. Unfortunately at the time, due to commitments with Brendan (Reeves, Rhianon's brother and regular driver) for 2009, I could not commit to the full program.

I then got a call again a couple of weeks ago from Emma, and the six event APRC program worked well for me with my school (teaching) commitments and the rallying commitments I already had planned with Brendan, so I accepted the job with great pleasure and anticipation.

Have you had a chance to do any testing with Emma as yet?

No, due to this all happening so quickly, I have not been able to test with Emma yet. Rally Queensland testing will be our first time in the car together. Emma has sent me some pace notes and footage from the last round of the NZ Championship where she came third outright with Glenn (Macneall) co-driving, so I will study that before the event and get to know how she likes things done in the car.

Your first event together will be Rally Queensland in May, round 2 of the Asia Pacific Rally Championship, but prior to that you are already committed to a pretty busy schedule (Rally of Lithgow last weekend and Targa Tasmania next week with Brendo), do you think it will be difficult to step in beside Emma and adapt to her pace note system straight away?

Yes, I am very busy in the next month with many rallies, but I don't see there being any problems. I sat next to Rick Bates last year at Targa Tasmania, who uses 1-6 notes and L4 etc, compared to Brendan who uses 1-10 and 4L. I have also done pace noted events with Nathan Reeves, Molly Taylor and Gavin Edwards, who all also use different systems. If I just read the notes written down and get my timing right, we should have no issues.

The APRC consists of seven events this year, with the Motor Image team deciding not to enter Rally New Calendonia. How exciting is it to know that you will be competing in countries like Malaysia, China, Japan and Indonesia?

I am so excited that Emma and MotorImage have given me this fantastic opportunity. Last year was my first ever time overseas, when Brendan and I went to NZ to compete in the Fiesta the first time in the APRC round (Rally Whangarei). Then we went to the WRC New Zealand round and the Fiesta International shootout in the UK - All very exciting!

And now to think I am going to China, Malaysia, Japan and Indonesia to rally is something I have only ever dreamed about.

You really only started co-driving seriously in 2006 when your younger brother, Brendan, needed someone to sit beside him. When you did your first rally together did you, even in your wildest dreams, think that you would one day be part of a fully-supported team in an international championship?

No, like you say, my first rally was in October 2005 with my brother Nathan in his Datsun 1600. Then in the next few months I rallied with Nathan, Gavin Edwards and Emma Cugley to get up my experience until Brendan turned 18. This was due to the fact that while Brendan was on his L plates he needed a co-driver with at least five years experience and that was Robin Smalley.

So in September 2006 I sat with Brendan for the first time and we have worked together as a team since. Brendan and I have always been working together to achieve something like this with MotorImage, but I never imagined going out on my own with another team, where I got paid and supported.

There are a number of Aussies competing in the APRC but it also attracts a number of crews from Europe. What do you hope to get out of the opportunity of competing alongside these guys?

Emma and I are very lucky to have the winners from the past few years in Cody and Ben as our teammates, and I have already been in contact with Ben many times in preparation for the season. I think I can learn a lot from these people and look forward to working with the entire MotorImage Team.

This is also Emma's first year in the APRC so it will be quite a new experience for you both. Do you think having Cody and Ben as your teammates will make the transition a little smoother for you?

For sure, like I said before Ben and I have already been in contact and he will be an enormous help to me. I also have Glen Weston, who did the APRC last year and Dale Moscott, who is doing the WRC, who are friends of mine, to help me along the way with any ideas I want to bounce off them.

Brendo and yourself had already decided to contest the South Australian Rally Championship this year, a number of other selected events, as well as earning a factory-supported drive with Mazda Motorsport in Targa Tasmania. How will your involvement with Emma affect these plans?

At this stage the only clash we have between Emma's APRC program and Brendan's program is Rally Queensland. Brendan will have a different co-driver sitting alongside him for this event and it will be a great experience for Brendan to have a different person calling the notes beside him for the first time in over 2 ½ years. So hopefully, I will be able to work around both and have a very successful year.

Stay tuned for the announcement of Brendo's co-driver for Rally Queensland!