

The FIA WRC Academy, rallying's premier training programme for young drivers, completed a three-day Induction Programme for its competitors at M-Sport in Cumbria. Thirty-four drivers and co-drivers from 14 countries participated in the event, ahead of round one, Vodafone Rally de Portugal which takes place from 24-28 March 2011.

The sessions offered the drivers a chance to familiarise themselves with the Ford Fiesta R2 rally car and Pirelli tyres with which they'll contest six rounds of the 2011 FIA World Rally Championship, as well as offering classroom tutorials on topics including professionalism, goal setting, media, nutrition and fitness.

Explaining the importance of both on and off-stage preparation to a rally driver's career, WRC Academy Principal Marc de Jong said, "The WRC Academy is a world class competition, mixed with education and training for drivers up to 24 years of age. In rallying, experience is very important and these guys are at a really early stage of their career. Many are graduating from national championships and these are their first steps at WRC level. We want to help them prepare for the WRC Academy season and give them a good foundation to build their talent. That's why this Induction Programme isn't just about driving, but included many other aspects as well."

Robert Reid, 2001 World Rally Champion co-driver and director of ESP, delivered a talk on the importance of planning and goal setting: "Some of the WRC Academy drivers might have felt a bit like they were back at school for the day, but the smartest drivers who take all the advice on board and work with it will soon see the benefits."

By the end of the day session, the atmosphere was buzzing with anticipation among the excited WRC Academy Class of 2011. At only 17 years old, Miko-Ove Niinemaee can't believe he's already found himself on the first rung of the WRC ladder, even proclaiming the Fiesta, "The best R2 car I've driven. I think my favourite thing is the handling. It's steady on the road, not nervous." Other drivers focused on the benefit of the theory sessions with Dutchman Timo van der Marel chipping in: "I learned how important it was to identify weaknesses and make a plan to turn them into strengths."

But perhaps the clearest message came through when fellow Aussies and Pirelli Star Drivers Brendan Reeves and Molly Taylor were asked to say the first thing that came into their heads when they heard the phrase "WRC Academy" and chimed in uncanny unison "great opportunity".

The first round of the WRC Academy gets underway at Vodafone Rally de Portugal on Thursday 24 March 2011.

Find out more about the WRC Academy at: [www.wrc.com/wrcacademy](http://www.wrc.com/wrcacademy)