

Victorian brother and sister rally team, Brendan Reeves and Rhianon Smyth, will again represent Australia when they tackle the prestigious World Rally Championship (WRC) Academy in 2012. The Academy, a one-make series promoted by M-Sport, who run the Ford World Rally Team, will again consist of six rounds in Europe. Reeves and Smyth competed in the inaugural WRC Academy in 2011 after winning the Pirelli Star Driver Shootout in Spain in late 2010. The win gave them a fully-funded drive in the 2011 Series, where, despite numerous mechanical problems in the second half of the season, they finished a creditable fifth outright. For 2012 no scholarships were on offer, and the pair are busy trying to secure in excess of \$300,000 to compete. Their budget needs to cover the lease of a Ford Fiesta R2 from M-Sport for the six rounds, flights to and from Europe for each event, accommodation, a reconnaissance vehicle, pre-event testing and more. The duo have pulled out all stops in order to raise the required funds and have come up with some novel ways to get sponsors on board. The Brendan Reeves Supporters Club has again proved very popular, and as well as inviting small business and corporate sponsors to join them, the pair have introduced roof signage on their Fiesta this year. For just \$500, businesses or individuals can buy space on the roof of their rally car and feature a name or logo. This year's WRC Academy will feature a couple of events the Australian pair haven't competed on before. The calendar consists of Rally Portugal (March 29-31), Acropolis Rally, Greece (May 25-27), Rally Finland (August 2-4), Rally Deutschland (August 24-26), Rally de France (October 4-6) and Rally Spain (November 8-10). The first three rallies are gravel events, followed by the tricky tarmac of Germany and France. The final round in Spain is a mixed-surface event. With the experience gained last year, Reeves believes he and Smyth have a good chance of winning the Academy in 2012. "We've worked so hard for this and put everything on the line," Reeves said. "Last year was just a taste of what we have to show and this year we are very excited about competing again and will be back bigger and better than ever." "Being a part of the FIA Young Driver Excellence Academy has really helped me focus on where I need to improve," Reeves added. "It's just over a week before I'll be in England to start preparations for the first event, which is really exciting!" The WRC Academy is open to drivers under 25 years of age. All competitors lease identical Ford Fiesta R2s from M-Sport. The winner of the 2012 WRC Academy will be given the opportunity to contest all rounds of the 2013 FIA World Rally Championship in a Ford Fiesta R2, with a recce car provided on long haul events, or, alternatively, the driver can decide to contest five rounds of the 2013 series, stepping up in to a Fiesta S2000 car. Reeves and Smyth are planning to give it their best shot and take the title in 2012.