

The Australian brother-sister rally team of Brendan Reeves and Rhianon Smyth take on the tarmac roads of Germany's wine region this weekend when they tackle Rally Germany. Currently sitting in second place in the World Rally Championship (WRC) Academy series, the Aussie pair are aiming for another strong finish and have been working hard leading into the event to ensure they have ticked all the boxes.

With three rounds of the Championship completed (the previous one being Rally Finland three weeks ago), Brendan and Rhianon head into Rally Germany with confidence after some serious training and testing.

"It's been good to stay over in Europe and get a few rallies done in one hit," Brendan said. "The start of the season was drawn out but now it's really moving along.

"This is our first Tarmac rally in the Academy this year so the car has taken on a few changes to make it suit the surface. We will do a shakedown in the car Thursday and by then it should really start to come together."

All WRC Academy crews recently completed a driver training program in Belgium and Brendan and Rhianon also had their own private test session in Germany in a leased Ford Fiesta R2, similar to the one they will drive in the rally. The private test session was funded by supporters of the duo who paid to have their name included on the bonnet of the rally car for this event.

"The testing in Belgium was driver training in a road car but it was certainly beneficial," Brendan commented. "It probably enhances your mistakes in a slow car like that over the rally car. We worked on taking the smooth lines, throttle control, steering application and the balance of the car, mainly. There was lots to think about and take on board but it certainly gave me more areas to work on.

"The test in Germany was in an R2 on a local vineyard road with many hairpins and narrow changing surfaces. This was to get my driving style changed from the gravel and work on a good tarmac setup so that I can go into the event with confidence and ready to attack the stages. It was also a chance to practice our pace notes before the recce and make changes to them.

Brendan and Rhianon competed in Rally Germany last year in their inaugural year in the WRC Academy and the event proved a challenging one for them. The route takes drivers through tight, twisty vineyard roads and through the Baumholder military base where huge concrete boulders (known as hinklesteins) can create havoc if you overshoot a corner, but their approach to the rally won't really change this year.

"I'm not approaching the rally much different but I'm taking what I learnt from last year and this season into account. This rally is so busy from the co-driver's side and the driver's and one small mistake from either can be 10 seconds gone so we really need to nail every junction and hairpin to be in the top results come Saturday."

Germany (and much of northern Europe) has been experiencing hot late summer conditions so being in peak physical condition will be important. Brendan and Rhianon spent time in between Rally Finland and Rally Germany training hard in the UK and their fitness could be an important factor in the overall results.

Brendan said, "It's been so hot here this week - we have even seen 40 degrees - so if that keeps up, fitness will certainly be important with the longest stage being 46 kilometres long. There is a high chance of thunderstorms also, as we experienced in our event recce, but the temperatures are supposed to drop to mid 20's on the weekend."

With three days of recce behind them, WRC Academy crews will get the chance to hear from 8-time World Rally Champion, Sebastien Loeb, ahead of the rally. Brendan is planning to ask him lots of questions, and also has the added bonus of fellow Australian, Chris Atkinson, competing in the event. Atkinson has competed in Rally Germany on numerous occasions in

the past and has been happy to share his knowledge of the event with Brendan.

Rally Germany starts in Trier on Friday, 24 August at 10.48am (local time). Academy crews will contest 12 stages (six on Friday and six on Saturday) before the winner is decided.

We'll have regular updates of Brendan and Rhianon's results throughout Rally Germany.

About the WRC Academy: The WRC Academy consists of six events in Europe run on both gravel and tarmac surfaces, with all competitors driving Ford Fiesta R2s prepared by M-Sport, the team that prepare the cars for the Ford World Rally Team.