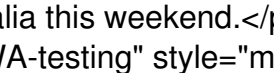


Victorian duo, Brendan Reeves and Rhianon Smyth, have had a successful test session ahead of the second round of the ECB Australian Rally Championship, to be held in Western Australia this weekend.



The brother and sister combination tested their Mazda2 in dry and dusty conditions near Nannup, three hours south of Perth, ahead of the three-day event, which begins with a tarmac stage on Friday afternoon.

They are determined to claw back points in this year's championship, after a disappointing start to the year at the National Capital Rally in Canberra in March.

Despite winning the opening Power Stage and taking the first five championship points of the year, Reeves suffered mechanical problems throughout the rally, and is now well down in the standings.

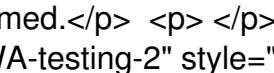
After problems in Canberra, we obviously need to do as well as we can here and score the maximum number of points possible, Reeves said.

We proved in the first round that the car has the speed, but we just suffered from a few new problems that cost us time.

The rallyschool.com.au Mazda2 has been fully rebuilt since the first round, with stronger driveshafts fitted and changes to the brake system. The changes have given Reeves renewed confidence.

All the things that broke or played up in Canberra were things that hadn't been a problem with the car before, so the team have worked hard to ensure that everything is now 100 per cent right, Reeves added.

The test stage showed that we are making good progress, and I was really happy with how the car performed.



It was a stage of about 2.4km in length, which gave us a good indication of what to expect when the rally hits the forest stages on Saturday.

The set-up that we started with felt great straight away, and I'm confident we've got a good package for the rally.

The Western Australian roads are notorious for their fine, ball-bearing stones that cover the roads, making driving extremely tricky, however Reeves believes he can quickly come to grips with the conditions.

Having grown up in Wedderburn in Victoria, the roads are very dry and loose in the summer, so I'm quite used to it, he said.

And on the only other occasion I've competed in WA, in 2007, we were lying in the top five.

Interestingly, although the Quit Forest Rally is a gravel event, the qualifying stage, the Power Stage and three of the rally's special stages are on tarmac around the foreshore in Busselton.

While Reeves is seeded as car number five, his road position for the first Heat will be determined by his time on the two qualifying runs. Like many competitors, he'll be weighing up his options as to whether it's better to be first on the road and deal with the loose gravel on the stages, or drop further back and battle the potential dust hazard.

It's not an easy choice, he admits. We definitely want to go out and win the Power Stage and bank those five championship points on offer, but deciding the best road position for the first Heat will be a little bit of a lottery.

Regardless of that, I'm extremely happy with the car after testing, and the suspension and the chassis felt great.

The car feels quite similar to the Fiesta R2 I drove in the WRC Academy last year, and hopefully that all bodes well for a good result this weekend.

The Quit Forest Rally begins with the Power Stage on Friday afternoon, followed by two runs around the tarmac Super Special Stage in Busselton on Friday night.

On Saturday, Heat 1 continues with eight forest stages around Nannup, covering 106 kilometres of stages.

Heat 2 begins on Saturday night with a further run

around the Busselton foreshore, before continuing on Sunday with another eight gravel stages for a Heat distance of 115 kilometres.

Reeves and Smyth will be hoping that their luck changes, and that their assault on the 2013 ECB Australian Rally Championship is just beginning.