


Mazda will use this weekend's tarmac round of the Australian Rally Championship (ARC) in Tasmania to help the company decide whether or not to enter the full 2009 ARC season.

Mazda, the country's top-selling vehicle importer, will rally a turbocharged Mazda3 MPS in the Tasmanian Tarmac Challenge held from October 3-5. The event, held in the Tasmania's North West, is the penultimate round of the 2008 ARC.

Victorian brother and sister rally combo Brendan Reeves and Rhianon Smyth will pilot the 190kW turbocharged Mazda3 MPS in the event's Showroom category.

 Mazda's entry in the Tasmanian Tarmac Challenge follows its successful outing at this year's Targa Tasmania in April which saw British Rally Champion Alister McRae win the 2WD Showroom competition in a similar car.

Mazda eyes 2009 ARC campaign

Mazda's last ARC outing was in 1989. Mazda won the Championship that year with a Mazda 323 4WD Turbo driven by Murray Coote, under the watchful eye of Mazda Motorsport Manager Allan Horsley.

Horsley said this weekend's ARC event will give Mazda the opportunity to test the waters before potentially embarking on a full-blown rally campaign in 2009.

"Over the past 12 months we've been in heavy discussion with CAMS over the introduction of the new ARC regulations, and the introduction of a separate championship for production based two-wheel-drive cars," said Horsley.

"I believe there is still considerable debate to be had regarding the allocation of points under these regulations and manufacturers are still anxiously waiting to be told how it will all work. In the meantime we see this as a valuable opportunity for our team to participate in an ARC event, which may be in preparation for 2009."

"In short, Mazda needs to be convinced that the regulations CAMS is proposing will consider two-wheel-drive production cars on an equal footing with highly-modified, four-wheel-drive cars."

Reeves: Mazda's youngest-ever driver

At the tender age of just 20, Brendan Reeves is the youngest driver to fly the flag for Mazda Motorsport. What this young gun lacks in years he makes up for in achievement.

Brendan won the Victorian Autocross Championship at the age of 16 - before he even had a road licence - and later that year was invited by the Australian Institute of Sport to participate in an exclusive three-year Rally Development Program.

In 2007, Brendan and Rhianon finished sixth outright in the ARC and second outright at the Tasmanian Tarmac Challenge (previously Rallye Burnie). More recently they were the fastest two-wheel-drive car at Rally NZ, a round of the World Rally Championship, seeing off a swathe

of international talent to win their class outright.

The 2008 Tasmanian Tarmac Challenge marks the pair's 24th rally together and their first full-factory drive.

"Driving for a factory team is exactly what you set out to achieve in a motorsport career, so I feel very privileged to be given this opportunity," said Brendan. "My goal is to do Mazda proud with a Showroom win."

"As a road car the Mazda3 MPS is a fantastic car to drive. It's sporty, nimble and fun to drive. I can't wait to get into its rally sibling on Wednesday for some pre-event testing."

Rhianon is more than familiar with the Tasmanian-bound Mazda3 MPS. It is the same car in which she partnered rally veteran Rick Bates at Targa Tasmania earlier this year.

Bates was clocking outstanding times in the 190kW hot-hatch until a fan belt broke, ending his 2008 campaign while leading the showroom competition on the final day of competition.

Team manager Horsley is optimistic about his young gun's chances.

"Considering Brendan's outstanding driving capabilities and the rally-pedigree the Mazda3 MPS has already earned for itself, I am confident that come Sunday Mazda will be standing on top of the Showroom podium."

The Tasmanian Tarmac Challenge kicks off with a ceremonial start at the Burnie showgrounds on Friday night 3rd October before the action heats up over two 87km competitive heats on Saturday and Sunday.

FAST FACTS:

Driver: Brendan Reeves

Lives: Wedderburn, Victoria

Occupation: Truck driver/Professional Driver

Co-Driver: Rhianon Smyth

Lives: Ballarat, Victoria

Occupation: Professional Co-driver/Physical Education Teacher

Official press release from Mazda Motorport