

Mazda Australia got its Tasmanian Tarmac Challenge (TTC) campaign off to a flying start today, tearing up the tarmac at the event's official shakedown.

The TTC, which officially kicks off tomorrow around Tasmania's North West, is the penultimate round of the 2008 Australian Rally Championship (ARC) and the first full tarmac round in the history of the series.

{mosimage}The event sees standard production vehicles go head-to-head with full-blown, four-wheel-drive ARC cars.

While a Mitsubishi Evo Lancer fell to the mercy of today's wet and slippery roads, the sure-footed Mazda3 MPS of 20-year-old Brendan Reeves revelled under the miserable weather conditions.

Reeves and his 190kW turbocharged rally car breezed through several runs of the tight and twisting 3km event opener in the town of Ridgley, just outside of Burnie.

"The Mazda3 MPS felt great out there today – it just loves the wet roads," said Reeves. "If the wet conditions hold over the weekend, we're likely to clock some pretty impressive times."

Co-driving for Reeves is his sister Rhianon Smyth. The 2008 TTC marks the pair's 24th event together and first factory drive. Together they are a force to be reckoned with. At last year's Rallye Burnie (now known as the TTC) the pair finished second outright behind Jim Richards.

Mazda Motorsport Manager Allan Horsley says he is confident both car and crew will be on-song right from the start line tomorrow morning.

"Brendan is a very confident driver for his age," says Horsley. "He seems quite at home behind the wheel of the Mazda3 MPS. All going well Brendan and Rhianon will drive away from this event with the showroom trophy.

"I'm equally as confident that the Mazda3 MPS will give the highly modified 4WD rally cars in this event a run for their money and be very competitive outright."

The Mazda Motorsport team will now make final tweaks to the Mazda3 MPS' set-up before the event kicks-off tomorrow with the first of two 87km competitive heats.

The event's ceremonial start was held earlier this evening at the Burnie Showgrounds. Official start celebrations gave crews a chance to relax before the competition ramps up in the morning.

Official Mazda Motorsport release