

Just a month after his last event, Brendan Reeves returned to competition at the Ballarat Supatilt Valley Stages rally on September 23. Based out of Yarra Glen, north of Melbourne, the event was round 4 of the Victorian Rally Championship (VRC) and featured 176 kilometres of competitive driving over ten stages.

Reeves went into the event with a 13 point lead in the VRC and was hoping to become the first driver to win the championship in a 2WD vehicle since 1990. Having won the previous two rounds in his highly modified Datsun 1600, Reeves was aiming to make it three wins from three starts.

Sitting in the co-driver's seat for this event was West Australian Ben Searcy who had competed at this event with Reeves in the past, but had never been in the Datsun before. With Searcy based in Perth, the pair didn't do their event reconnaissance together. Nevertheless, Reeves was impressed with the pace notes that Searcy wrote.



The rally was held in perfect weather conditions with five stages making up Heat 1 and those same five stages repeated after a mid-day service break to make up Heat 2. The event was held in a heavily forested area and the roads, which were quite rocky. About half the roads were dry and dusty and the other half were damp.

Starting as car six on the road, Reeves knew the key to the event was managing his tyre wear and he opted to start on soft compounds and change to medium compounds later in each Heat.

He and Searcy had a great morning as they learnt the roads, and set a steady pace without pushing too hard. They finished Heat 1 fourth overall and third in the Victorian Rally Championship standings.

After the service break, Reeves and Searcy headed out to repeat the morning's five stages. On the opening stage, Mt. Slide, Reeves noticed a drop in power and this gradually got worse as the afternoon wore on, particularly on uphill sections.

Despite the car not running to its full potential, Reeves and Searcy completed the rally, finishing eighth in the Heat and sixth overall for the rally, as well as being the top-finishing 2WD car.

The day's result meant that Reeves finished second outright in the Victorian Rally Championship (Justin Dowel took the title by just seven points), and first in the VRC 2WD championship.

The Valley Stages was won by Troy Dowel and Bernie Webb, with Dowel's father Justin and co-driver Tracey Dewhurst in second place. Darren Windus and Joe Brkic third.



"Whilst we didn't quite manage to take out the overall VRC title, sealing the 2WD title finished the season off well," Reeves said.

“I really enjoy the Valley Stages so it was a great event to end the season with.

“Ben did an amazing job this weekend. He hadn’t even been in the car until the morning of the rally and he wrote the pace notes without any input from me, which is an incredible effort.

“Our small team has worked really hard this year and we’ve had some great results, so a huge thank you to them all.”

Final Standings 2023 Victorian Rally Championship

1. Justin Dowel / Tracey Dewhurst, Mitsubishi Mirage
2. Brendan Reeves / Ben Searcy*, Datsun 1600
3. Tim Clark / Leonie Clark, Subaru WRX

*Not registered for the VRC

Photos: Wishart Media