

Brendo has been forced to withdraw from the title fight for the Pirelli Star Driver award to be held at Repco Rally Australia next month.

The young Victorian was the first driver to qualify for the Asia-Pacific shootout after winning the Australian component at Rally Queensland in May, but an accident just three weeks ago at Rally South Australia has dented the young speedster's chances of competing.

"It's a real shame and it was a really difficult decision to withdraw," Brendo said, "but I am still undergoing medical treatment after the accident in SA and if I can't give 100% in the rally, there's no point in me competing.

"I'm still young (he turns 21 just six days before Rally Australia) and hopefully there will be lots more opportunities to earn a drive overseas in the future," he added. "I want to ensure I am 100% fit before returning to competition."

Brendo would have been the youngest of the Pirelli Star Driver competitors. Three other Australians, one New Zealander and one Chinese driver are the remaining hopefuls who will compete for a fully paid drive in six rounds of the Production World Rally Championship next year.

The 20-year old had been the pre-event favourite to take out the title after a string of impressive results over the past 12 months. In Rally South Australia he had set fastest stage times in the Australian Rally Championship event, only to crash less than five kilometres from the finish of the final stage.

Brendo has been forced to wear a neck brace since the accident, and has been unable to drive a car, which severely restricted his pre-event preparation. His co-driver and sister, Rhianon Smyth, broke both legs in the accident and has begun a long rehabilitation program.

"Both Rhianon and I are both very keen to get back into the car and compete again," he said. "We've proved over the past 12 or 18 months that we have the speed to match it with the best drivers, and we're confident that we can achieve our goals over the next few years."

