



Rally Finland is one of those events that most rally fans watch on TV and dream about attending one day. Having watched countless rally videos and DVDs in my time, Rally Finland was the event that really stood out as the one to experience at least once. With its fast, flowing roads and infamous jumps, Finland's round of the WRC is the mecca of rallying, but, like most fans, actually going to watch it first hand seemed a bit of a pipe dream.

Then something happened to change all that. Back in December, having qualified for the brand new 2011 WRC Academy Championship, Brendan Reeves asked me if I'd put together a tour to the rally so that his supporters could go and watch he and Rhianon in action at the rally. It didn't take me long to say yes!

After months of planning, eight Aussies and two Kiwis arrived in Helsinki to start the Brendan Reeves Supporters Club Rally Finland Tour. Most people arrived on the Tuesday to allow time to recover from the long flight and to get used to the unseasonably warm Finnish weather. We enjoyed a 'getting to know you' dinner at the hotel on Tuesday night and then saw the sights of Helsinki on Wednesday morning on a three hour city tour.

Late afternoon we joined our fellow tour participants at Helsinki airport for the three and a half hour trip north to Jyväskylä. Having never been to Finland before, we put ourselves in the very capable hands of Rally Travel, a UK company that specialise in WRC tours to most of the European rounds of the Championship. In total, there were 50 people on board the coach, but

the Brendan Reeves fans stood out with our distinctive Supporters Club t-shirts and caps.



On Thursday morning we were up bright and early (which wasn't difficult given that the sun rose at 4am and didn't set until 11pm!!) and on the bus at 6.30am on our way to Shakedown. Shakedown was held on the Ruuhimaki stage, home to some of Rally Finland's best jumps, so we were able to see all the top WRC crews put their cars through their paces in preparation for the rally. It was also our first chance to see the MINI WRCs in action.

A few hours of rally action had really whet our appetites and we were all eagerly awaiting the start of the rally proper. But first we had some other important business to attend. We headed

straight from Shakedown to the Service Park in Jyväskylä and had an opportunity to wander around and see the cars up close. This was also our first chance to say hi to Brendan and Rhianon and ask them about their preparations for the event. From there, we headed to a very informative Rally Forum hosted by Julian Porter of World Rally Radio, with Malcolm Wilson, the boss of Ford BP Abu Dhabi World Rally Team making an appearance and entertaining us with his thoughts on the WRC and how the new teams entering the Championship will affect Ford.

We then headed back to the Service Park to wish Brendan and Rhianon all the best for the rally, before hitting the stages! Three stages were held on the opening evening of Rally Finland and our destination was SS2. We spent a good couple of hours at the spectator point and it's fair to say that there was no 'easing into it' from the crews – it was flat out from the word go and we could see we were going to be in for a top weekend's rally action. After a late night visit to the Service Park and a catch up with the crew of Car 106, it was back to our motel at midnight.

Our departure on Friday wasn't until 7.30 but we had some extra companions today. The producer of Mobil 1 The Grid, a motorsport magazine show, had contacted me asking if they could follow our group for the day as part of their feature on Rally Finland. They wanted to emphasise how popular the rally is and as we had travelled so far to attend the event, thought it would be great to include us in the program. Of course, it was a great chance to give Brendan plenty of exposure, too, so how could we say no?!! (The show airs on Fox Sports and ESPN and is scheduled for August 20 – we'll have full details of the screening times on the website as soon as they are available.)



