

Brendan and Rhianon have suffered a heartbreaking retirement from Rallye de France after the clutch on their Ford Fiesta R2 broke at the start of the penultimate stage of the rally.

After a consistent drive over Day 1's eight tarmac stages on Friday, Brendan was sitting comfortably in fourth place, abiding by his pre-race plan to drive smoothly and consistently. With a further nine stages to contest on Saturday, Brendan set good stage times and was maintaining his position, knowing that he could benefit from a mistake by one of the three crews ahead of him.

With two stages to run, Brendan was in the perfect position to gain valuable championship points. He went into Rallye de France third in the overall standings but the two drivers ahead of him in the championship, Egon Kaur and Craig Breen, both crashed out of the rally, giving Brendan the opportunity to claw back the leaders' margin.

It wasn't to be, however. As the pair prepared to start SS16, the second-last of the rally, the cable of their Fiesta's clutch broke. Brendan and Rhianon were able to make temporary repairs to the car and with the brakes working but not the clutch, they proceeded to the start line of the stage. Unfortunately the stage started on an uphill section of road and as the car didn't get off the start line within 20 seconds, the pair were out of the rally.

To add to their pain, the rally winner, Yeray Lemes, was issued with a five minute penalty for speeding on the final road section of the rally. He was demoted to third outright, but had Brendan made it to the finish of the rally, he would have moved up from fourth to third.

Naturally the pair were devastated with their retirement from the rally but they remain positive with one round of the WRC Academy Championship to run. After five rounds, the Aussie duo have finished every event except Rallye de France. Whilst most of their competitors have crashed out of at least one event, and some on multiple occasions, Brendan and Rhianon's only non-finish (this weekend) was due to mechanical failure.

"We had a really good run today," Brendan said. "We were setting some decent stage times on the tricky tarmac roads and were in a good position overall. To have a mechanical failure so close to the finish line was devastating. Now we'll go back home and focus on the final round of the Championship."

Brendan and Rhianon will return to Australia early this week to start their preparations for the final round of the WRC Academy, Wales Rally GB, which will be held in November. The pair will also be working on securing sponsors for their 2012 rally campaign.

Visit Brendan's Photo Gallery for [photos from Rallye de France](#)