

Targa first-timer Rhianon Smyth will partner Mazda Targa stalwart Rick Bates in the upcoming Targa Tasmania. Smyth's rally credentials are impressive but most recently she co-drove her brother Brendan to a stunning second outright in the 2007 Rallye Burnie, their first ever tarmac event.

This year Rhianon will call notes for Mazda regular and five-time Targa competitor Rick Bates.

Smyth, who has navigated in more than 25 rallies in the last three years, says her strategy for her first Targa is to help build on the success already paved by her driver in last year's event. In 2007 Bates finished a stunning 10th outright with a near-standard Mazda3 MPS.

"I think Rick is one of the best drivers in Australia and I am extremely lucky to have been given the opportunity of calling notes to him," says Smyth, who was ranked the fifth best co-driver in last year's hotly contested Australian Rally Championship (ARC).

"The most exciting thing about Targa is that it's a new event for me and a new challenge. Most of my experience has been in gravel rallying and after coming second outright in Rallye Burnie last year, I am looking forward to getting back on tarmac again."

Mazda's two-car team will be competing in Targa's new Showroom competition, which is designed to put near-standard vehicles on an equal billing with highly-modified racing and rally cars.

Mazda Motorsport boss Allan Horsley says he is confident of a Showroom podium finish this year.

"Our 2008 Targa team shares more than 70 years of motorsport experience between them. With this knowledge and rally expertise on our side, Mazda has a very good chance of bringing home a showroom trophy and achieving a very competitive outright result."

The 17th annual Targa Tasmania will be held from Tuesday April 15 until Sunday April 20. The event starts in Tasmania's Northern city of Launceston and finishes five days later in Hobart.