

Australian brother-sister rally team, Brendan Reeves and Rhianon Smyth, have added valuable Championship points to their World Rally Championship (WRC) Academy title chase after finishing fifth at the challenging Rally Deutschland (Germany) at the weekend. With two rounds still to run, the pair are sitting second overall in the Championship pointscore.

After a solid preparation heading into the event, Brendan and Rhianon were confident of a good showing, having taken advantage of a couple of tarmac testing opportunities prior to the rally. The stages used on the event are nothing like the pair normally experience - extremely different from the rally stages of Australia - with tight, twisty roads through vineyards and a huge 46 kilometre stage ("Arena Planzerplatte") through the Baumholder military training area. The military base is renowned for the huge concrete boulders (known as hinklesteins) that line the course, and these can create havoc if they come into contact with a rally car travelling at speed.

Not only are the roads tight and twisty, the Panzerplatte stage has 118 junctions in its 46 kilometres, meaning that the driver and co-driver must write a particularly descriptive set of pacenotes to guide them through the stage unscathed.

Brendan and Rhianon's event didn't get off to the start they were hoping for when an overshoot on the first stage of the rally cost them around 25 seconds. They then landed hard, bending the rear suspension beam, but made it to the end of the stage in fifth place. As day one continued, the pair increased their speed and started to gain more confidence on the tricky roads and as other crews struck trouble, Brendan pounced and finished the opening day in third place.

Day two consisted of six stages - three stages each run twice - including the Panzerplatte stage. The day started well with Brendan reducing the gap to second place and with a comfortable lead over fourth, and a stage win. Going into the final stage of the day (Panzerplatte), he was heading for his fourth podium finish from four events but it wasn't to be. Approaching a sharp left hand corner a little too fast, he went off the road in his efforts to avoid a 'hinklestein' and into some shrubs. His Ford Fiesta R2 was stuck firm and it took some spectators to help get the car back on the road, albeit after 15 minutes.

Back on the pace, the Fiesta then suffered a puncture just 4.5 kilometres from the stage finish. Brendan continued on, but the puncture had caused damage to the front guard and he was forced to limp his way to the finish. To still finish the rally in fifth place was a remarkable effort.

With 10 points earned for his fifth place finish and one bonus point for the stage win, Brendan maintains his second place in the WRC Academy with two events to go.

Brendan was happy with his weekend after a steep learning curve. Getting used to the faster WRC tyres used on gravel, and reading the corners better, were just two of the positives he took out of the rally. The WRC competitors who drive the stage ahead of the Academy cars tend to cut the corners, dragging a lot of loose gravel onto the roads, and driving to suit the slippery surface whilst negotiating the many corners and junctions takes some getting used to.

After recording numerous second-fastest stage times, the young Australian was delighted to take a stage win and earn an important bonus point to add to his Championship tally.

The next event on the WRC Academy calendar is Rally France, another tarmac event, which will be held from October 4 to 6. Brendan will remain in Europe this week for the FIA Young Driver Excellence Academy workshop, a program for which he was selected at the end of 2011.

WRC RALLYE DEUTSCHLAND RESULTS

1. Elfyn Evans

2. Jose Suarez

3. John Macrone

4. Timo Van Der Marel

5. Brendan Reeves

FIA WRC ACADEMY CHAMPIONSHIP STANDINGS AFTER ROUND 4, RALLYE DEUTSCHLAND

1. Elfyn Evans, GBR, 98 points

2. Brendan Reeves, AUS, 63 points

3. Alistair Fisher, GBR, 53 points

4. Jose Suarez, ESP, 52 points

5. Pontus Tidemand, SWE, 49 points

About the WRC Academy: The WRC Academy consists of six events in Europe run on both gravel and tarmac surfaces, with all competitors driving Ford Fiesta R2s prepared by M-Sport, the team that prepare the cars for the Ford World Rally Team.