

Australian rally driver Brendan Reeves and his co-driving sister, Rhianon Smyth, will tackle the fifth round of the 2012 World Rally Championship (WRC) Academy series this weekend in France. Currently sitting second in the Championship after four of six rounds, Brendan is keen to put in a good performance and reduce the margin to current series leader, Elfyn Evans.

Rally France is a tarmac event based out of Strasbourg near the German border, and a short 100 kilometre test this week on a similar road to those used in the event, has given the young Aussie a confidence boost. Brendan and Rhianon competed at Rally France last year in their inaugural season in the WRC Academy but they were forced to retire from the rally with a mechanical failure.

This year's event sees six stages from 2011 repeated, and competitors will complete 16 stages in total. Rally France will kick off on Thursday afternoon with crews completing a reconnaissance run of the Super Special stage around the streets of Strasbourg in an electric car before switching to their competition cars (Ford Fiesta R2s in the case of Academy crews) for the rally's first stage.

Brendan is keen to get back behind the wheel of his Fiesta R2 on the French roads and knows that smooth, consistent driving is a top priority for a good finish. With crews only allowed a remote service on Friday (they can only change tyres and make repairs using tools carried in the car), a clean run is super important to ensure they finish in one piece on Friday and give them a good start for Saturday's final eight stages.

Whilst the weather has been fine and sunny leading up to the event, rain is forecast for the weekend which could make the roads slippery.

"The roads here are very different to rally Germany in most areas, then sometimes you are back amongst the tricky vineyards as we were in Germany," Brendan said.

"One of the new stages we recced yesterday, SS4, reminds me of our Targa Tasmania rally back in Australia - in some parts it really flowed nicely and was very smooth. Other stages are going to be dirty under the trees with lots of corner cutting and mud being dragged onto the roads.

"The biggest change this year is that the metal poles put on the apex of the corners by the organisers are gone and have been replaced by plastic bollards with a solid rubber base. We will just have to see if they are still there when we arrive at high speeds! It was very difficult last year as some of the poles were getting hit and others weren't. One thing is for sure - we certainly won't have any side mirrors left at the end of the rally!"