

Day 1 of Rally Spain has proven to be a difficult one for Brendan and Rhianon, with terrible weather conditions, a puncture and an engine problem all adding to their woes.

"It has been a big challenge," Brendan said. "It wasn't so fun this morning because I didn't have the set-up right for the first two stages [SS1 and SS2]. It was so slippery and the car was just stepping out at the rear all the time – it was like a powerful rear-wheel drive car!

"We changed the set-up and the car felt really good for the long stage [SS3] but about 12 km from the end there is a small water splash and we hit some concrete just after that and got a puncture. Then we waited for Jose [Suárez] to go past, caught him and got stuck behind him for about 10 km, so we lost a lot of time there, too.

"This afternoon we went with a similar set-up. The first stage [SS4] was good, until we went off the road on a muddy section towards the end. So, on the long stage [SS5], we just decided to play it smart and make sure we had a clean run through.

During the day's final stage, the engine of Brendan's Ford Fiesta R2 broke some valve springs and the pair were unable to reach the end of the stage. They will re-start on Saturday under 'Superrally' regulations, which means a 10 minute penalty will be added to their overall time.

"We're not where we want to be at the end of the day, but at least we are still here," a disappointed Brendan said.

Brendan went into Rally Spain in second place in the overall standings for the World Rally Championship (WRC) Academy, just two points ahead of Jose Suarez. The Spaniard currently

leads his home event and will be difficult to beat on day two on his favoured tarmac surface. Brendan and Rhianon are in fourth place overnight.

With Rally Spain a mixed-surface event, all cars will receive a makeover overnight, with mechanics changing them from gravel to tarmac spec.