

Abrupt end to Forest Rally for Activ RallySport

Activ RallySport have had a disappointing end to round three of the Australian Rally Championship, rolling out of the QUIT Forest Rally yesterday.

However, despite their misfortune, they still lie in fifth place at the half-way point of the championship.

After a brilliant fourth place in Heat 1, Justin Dowel and Matt Lee were determined to keep their Mitsubishi Lancer Evolution IX in the points.

Heat 2 started on Saturday night with two runs around the tarmac Super Special Stage in Busselton, three hours south of Perth, with Dowel and Lee lying sixth after the two tests.

The rally headed into the forests to the south east of Busselton on Sunday morning, with crews upping their pace. Former Toyota factory drivers, Neal Bates and Simon Evans, were determined to make up for their disappointing results on Saturday, meaning the Activ RallySport team were going to have to have a good clean run to repeat Saturday's performance.

After the first two forests stages of the day, Dowel had put the Lancer into a solid seventh place, despite a spin which cost at least 10 seconds. But at the end of the 11 kilometre SS15, the Evo IX hit a bank and rolled heavily, ending their rally then and there.

"It's a disappointing way to end the rally," a dejected Justin Dowel said. "We'd had such a good run on Saturday that we were hoping that Sunday would go just as well, but rallying can be a fickle sport and this certainly isn't the result we were after."

"We crossed the flying finish of stage 15 and the car hit the bank front on. It then pirouetted before landing heavily on its roof."

The accident happened at high speed, with the front, rear and roof of the car badly damaged. The Activ RallySport team will now strip the car back to a bare shell to assess the damage, before deciding on the best course of action heading into the next round.

"We now have a little over a month to get the car repaired before round four of the championship in Queensland, where we are determined to get our season back on track," Dowel added. "This is a blow, for sure, but we'll be in Queensland."

Co-driver Matt Lee praised the safety of the Lancer Evo IX, which ensured that neither crew member sustained any injuries in the accident.

“The car held up incredibly well, and is a real testament to the safety of modern day rally cars,” Lee said. “In particular, the HANS devices that attach to our helmets, worked perfectly.

“In the accident I could feel the HANS device stopping my head from being thrown around. If I wasn’t a fan of it before, I certainly am now.

“We can draw some huge positives from this weekend,” Lee added. “Compared to this event last year, we were two seconds per kilometre faster than in 2008, and were less than one second per kilometre behind the leaders. That bodes really well for the future, and we’re really buoyed by our speed.”

Dowel and Lee are still fifth in the championship, just four points behind fourth placed Eli Evans, but 37 clear of sixth placed Dean Herridge.

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Reigning Australian Rally Champion, Neal Bates, took victory in Heat 2 after a fine drive in his Super 2000 Toyota Corolla. He finished 13.6 seconds in front of his former team-mate Simon Evans, with Heat 1 winner, Glen Raymond, third in another Toyota.

Privateer Darren Windus led the event by 15.7 seconds after the first five stages, but crashed heavily into a tree on the sixth stage, badly damaging his rented Toyota Corolla.

Former Subaru factory driver, Dean Herridge, took fourth in a Subaru Impreza WRX, with the similar car of Eli Evans in fifth place.

QUIT Forest Rally

Heat 2 Results:

1. Neal Bates / Coral Taylor, Toyota Corolla S2000, 58m04.3s
2. Simon Evans / Sue Evans, Mitsubishi Lancer Evo IX, +13.6s
3. Glen Raymond / Matt Raymond, Toyota Corolla Sportivo, +19.1s
4. Dean Herridge / Glen Weston, Subaru Impreza WRX, +24.5s
5. Eli Evans / Chris Murphy, Subaru Impreza WRX, +1m19.1s

Australian Rally Championship pointscore

After Round 3 (of 6)

1. Neal Bates / Coral Taylor	199 points
2. Simon Evans / Sue Evans	186
3. Glen Raymond / Matt Raymond	174
4. Eli Evans / Chris Murphy	116
5. Justin Dowel / Matt Lee	112
6. Dean Herridge / Glen Weston	75

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