

First ARC podium finish for Justin Dowel

Justin Dowel and Matt Lee have taken their first podium finish in a round of the Australian Rally Championship after a brilliant drive in this weekend's Rally Tasmania.

They guided their Activ RallySport Mitsubishi Lancer Evo IX over the event's 18 tarmac stages, finishing behind only Scott Pedder (Mitsubishi) and Simon Evans (Subaru) on overall time elapsed.

In 2009 the pair were eighth in Rally Tasmania, so their 2010 result highlights a significant increase in their competitiveness on tarmac.

Days one and three of Rally Tasmania were worth 50 per cent points in the Australian Championship, while day two counted for a full 100 per cent haul.

Dowel and Lee took fifth place points on day one, third placed points on day two, and fifth placed points on day three, putting them fourth on the overall points standings.

"We've had a sensational weekend and we're really happy with the overall result," Dowel said after the final two spectator stages that concluded the rally.

"We had some head gasket problems yesterday which meant we had to detune the car for today's stages, but it enabled us to get to the finish and secure third place.

"We had no overheating issues today, and we were able to crank the power up over the last couple of short stages, which saw our pace increase again. It's been a great weekend."

Co-driver Matt Lee was full of praise for Dowel's driving on tarmac, and sees the event as a stepping stone for a successful 2010 ARC campaign.

"Justin drove superbly all weekend and it's set us up really well for the rest of the season," Lee said.

"We started the year with the goal of finishing on the podium in as many events as possible, and we've started on the right foot."

The next round of the Australian Rally Championship is the QUIT Forest Rally in Western Australia on April 17 and 18.

Final results, 2010 Rally Tasmania

1. Scott Pedder / Jon Mortimer, Mitsubishi Lancer Evo IX, 1h43m56.1s
2. Simon Evans / Sue Evans, Subaru Impreza WRX, +49.9s
3. Justin Dowel / Matt Lee, Mitsubishi Lancer Evo IX, +3m03.0s
4. Mark Pedder / Catherine Smallbone, Mitsubishi Lancer Evo IX, +4m23.5s
5. Ryan Smart / Rebecca Smart, Toyota Corolla Sportivo, +5m29.2s

ARC pointscore after Round 1 (provisional)

1. Scott Pedder 81
2. Simon Evans 64
3. Justin Dowel 52
4. Eli Evans 50
5. Mark Pedder 45
6. Ryan Smart 40
- =7. Glen Raymond 34
- =7. Steven Shepheard 34
9. Charlie Drake 33
10. Bruce Fullerton 24