



## ***2011 Donnelly Rally wrap***

Showing the popularity of the Donnelly Rally, 40 teams lined up in mid September to contest round 4 of both the WARC and WA Clubman Series for 2011. New competitors and those that hadn't been seen for a while appeared in the entry list.

The rally again staged around the old Donnelly Mill site southwest of Bridgetown, used the fast tall timber forest roads in a combination of 4 special stages run twice. This year Donnelly was moved back to its more traditional September date from the dry & dusty March event of 2010. Torrential rains had fallen in the lead up to Donnelly 2011 and many expected a wet and slippery event. Instead, the roads had dried quite well and only a few places showed signs of the wet conditions. One particular muddy corner however would prove difficult for some teams.

The pace noted rally got underway by mid afternoon with two short stages. Average competitive times around 6 minutes for SS1 and 7 minutes for SS2 were recorded. Travis White/Bill Hayes retired their Evo 9 early with mechanical troubles in SS1 and Wayne Richardson/Bart Grzegorzczuk didn't have the best start to their Donnelly Rally either. In the first stage they rolled their Suzuki Swift heavily and were forced into retirement.

Before the mid way service, teams tackled a 13km then a 30km stage. The roads were very open on the longer stage (SS4) and fast in places with most drivers able to stretch the legs of their cars in top gear. SS4 also had a muddy right hand corner that would catch out father and son Mike & Jack Civil. Despite the 4WD in their Lancer Evo 6, the pair ended up bogged and lost a lot of time recovering the car. Adding to the retirement list was the pairing of Matt Snadden & Blake Thompson. Sheared studs caused their Corolla to lose a wheel a few kilometres into SS4 and all the guys could do was watch the rest of the field pass by. Josh & Ben Gardiner (WRX) had engine issues and were forced out of the rally after SS4.

With the remaining four stages being a repeat of the first 4, teams had some familiarity with the roads. Perhaps due to a few showers of rain during the late afternoon, most teams were slower on their second passes. Dylan King/Andrew Hannigan suffered an electrical problem and retired their Ford Escort after SS5 when they had been setting times around 8<sup>th</sup> place. Tim Ralli/Ray Russell were another crew who were to see Donnelly upside down. Whilst their Hyundai Lantra did land on its wheels after rolling and was able to complete the stage, the car was deemed too heavily damaged to continue the rally.

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The remaining two stages of the rally were contested in the dark, the longest 30km marathon forming the last stage of the rally. It was a case of “who dares wins” with the high speeds on spotlights in the dark. Geoff Leatt-Hayter/Tammy Adams found the same muddy corner that the Civils had trouble with earlier in the day. Despite a slow approach, their Ford Escort got stuck and the crew ran out of late time trying to recover the car. After more than 2 years away from the sport, Jeff Thomas brought out his freshly rebuilt Celica GT4 with new navigator Simone Cain alongside. The pair had a steady rally, however at the start of SS8, the Toyota’s charging system failed and a flat battery meant retirement.

As the last cars finished the rally and the rain started to set in, the results were being tabled. The top ten read like this:

After a 2 year break from competing, Karl Drummond/Karen Russell brought their WRX to a tidy 10<sup>th</sup> place. 14 seconds ahead, John Clinton/Richard Humphries in another WRX made 9<sup>th</sup> place and a further 30 seconds in front was John O’Dowd/Ben Searcy in their Spec C WRX in 8<sup>th</sup>. Showing how competitive Donnelly 2011 had been, 8<sup>th</sup> -11<sup>th</sup> places were separated by just 51 seconds. Kiel Douglas/Ashley Burton brought their big “V8 Super Taxi” Holden Commodore to 7<sup>th</sup> behind Blair Pugh/Paul Helm (Ford Escort) in 6<sup>th</sup>. This time it was not Ford or Holden that took 2WD honours. Instead, Julian Wright/Ian deBoer in their pocket rocket Datsun 1200 took the 2WD trophy and 5<sup>th</sup> outright in the process. This year the 2WD championship has proved to be hotly contested amongst a decent sized field and very exciting to watch. Garry Whittle/Ryan Doe had a great run in their WRX, finishing 4<sup>th</sup> behind 3<sup>rd</sup> placed Alex Stone/Hanna Drury (WRX). On this event, the top two places were in a league of their own, leading the field by a good margin. Leigh Hynes/Stuart Percival (WRX) finished 2<sup>nd</sup> on a rally the pair had won multiple times previously and Nic Box/Ash Ridden took their Lancer Evo 8 to a hard fought win by 6 seconds.

In the State Championship Hynes/Percival lead by 5 points to Box/Ridden with Stone/Drury in 3<sup>rd</sup>. In less than 4 weeks, the last round of the WARC, the Carringtons Safari rally will run. The forests around Mundaring will come alive to the sounds of rally cars in what is set to be a nail biting decider to the 2011 WA rally season.