



## Experts Cup Rally 2011

Round 2 of the State Championship and Clubman Series saw a combined field of 35 rally teams head to Collie in the state's southwest for the Experts Cup Rally in early June.

Using the forest roads around Wellington Dam, the event's eight competitive special stages started in the daylight and ran well into the dark.

With pace noting in the morning and racing starting in the afternoon, the memory of the stages should have been fresh in the minds of competitors. Not far into the first group of stages, safety triangles along the sides of the roads showed that a few were having early troubles.

Garry Whittle/Ryan Doe were the first retirement when they put their Red WRX off the road in SS1. Graham Harper/Kori Mez had an electrical gremlin that cut spark to the WRX engine in the first stage and their rally was over too. Travis White/Greg Flood (Lancer Evo 9) retired early when an off road excursion and broken drive shaft put them out in SS2, and Nic Box/Ash Ridden (Lancer Evo 7) faired no better in the same stage, retiring with mechanical problems. Gavin Morgan/Chris Parish also withdrew on the second stage when an electrical problem in their Spec C WRX put them out of the rally.

As the rally progressed, some competitors were flying through the Collie forests. Amongst the outright contenders, Alex Stone/Hanna Drury, Leigh Hynes/Stuart Percival and Doug Tostevin/Sharon Black were within seconds of each other in their respective WRX's. John Macara, navigated by Dianna Madlener was also pushing hard in his Lancer Evo 2. By SS4, Stone/Drury were out of the rally with a mechanical issue and the top of the leader board ran free on the rest of the field.

The weather was playing its part in the rally too, a dry run up to the rally had made the roads quite dusty. Dust was an intermittent problem during day light hours and when the breeze dropped at night, visibility was greatly reduced for some of the cars.

In the 2 wheel drive standings, a huge battle was raging between Ford and Holden. The two Escorts of Blair Pugh/Paul Helm and Geoff Leatt-Hayter/Tammy Adams were fighting it out with the 5L V8 Commodore of Kiel Douglas/Ashley Burton. No quarter was given on either side and at most a hand full of seconds separated all three teams for most of the rally. After SS5, a broken steering rack for Pugh/Helm caused retirement and left the other two teams to decide 2WD. Further back in the 2WD class, Stephen Mackinlay/Tony Floyd (Mitsubishi Mirage) retired with engine troubles in SS7 and Tim Ralli/Ray Russell escaped retirement when they bumped a tree with the left rear of their Hyundai Lantra in SS6.



The Experts Cup had been a rally of attrition with just 18 state cars finishing the event.

Continuing to improve their speed and confidence in the car, Peter Spight/Jon White (WRX) finished the rally in 10th place. Graeme Miles/Luke Goodman (WRX) set times around the top ten during the day and finished the rally in 9th behind brothers Craig & Scott Puzey (Mitsubishi Mirage) in 8th. Father and son Mike and Jack Civil took their Lancer Evo 6 to 7th place with Jack also winning the rookie navigator's trophy too. Geoff Leatt-Hayter/Tammy Adams (Escort) finished the rally in 6th, separated by just 11 seconds from Kiel Douglas/Ashley Burton (Holden Commodore). With the Commodore's new power plant producing bulk kilowatts, and a slight mistake on a night stage by Leatt-Hayter/Adams, Douglas/Burton took the 2WD win for the rally. Sharing equal 4th fastest time with Douglas/Burton, John O'Dowd and Greg Allen had another tidy and consistent run in their Spec C WRX. John Macara/Dianna Madlener brought their well used Evo 2 to 3rd place, narrowing the gap to 2nd place down to just 16 seconds.

In 2nd place, Doug Tostevin/Sharon Black had a brilliant drive in their green WRX and also won themselves an Experts Cup by maintaining times within the top six on all special stages. Leigh Hynes/Stuart Percival broke a run of bad luck with this year's Experts Cup Rally, winning the event outright. It was not totally plain sailing for the pair in their orange WRX though, a 50 second penalty for leaving service late and a broken drive shaft during the day kept the competition close.

With most of the top points scorers from the Forest Rally either not starting or failing to finish the Experts Cup, the championship is wide open. The next event on the State and Clubman rally calendar is the Lewana Stages rally in Balingup. Held for the last few years in May, a switch to July may present competitors with some very different challenges. Wet weather could mean plenty of mud on the clay based surfaces around the tree plantations of Balingup as opposed to the normally dry and dusty roads.

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