

Team Press Release – VRC Round 1 2009

The 2009 Victorian Rally Championship is finally underway after the running of the East Gippsland Stages rally in Bairnsdale in mid May. Leigh Garrioch and his trusty Mitsubishi Mirage were joined for the first time by a new co-driver, Jenna Kelley, for the 2009 season. The pairing worked well in the screaming little car to finish the event 6th outright, and 1st in class P2.

The Garrioch Rallysport team had worked hard in the days leading up to the event with the rebuilt engine arriving in the workshop the Thursday night before the event. Team mechanic and service crew, Simon Richards, and driver Leigh, spent most of Thursday night installing it, determined to “turn key” before Friday morning. After gaining oil pressure and starting her up, a not so respectable bedtime of 4am was achieved. A short engine running in schedule was completed on Friday, morning and the ute loaded for the trip to Gippsland.

The event was flagged away from the main street of Bairnsdale for a midday start on Saturday the 16th of May, with a good crowd in attendance to check out the array of different rally cars assembled. All the preparation to get to the first event for the year felt worthwhile once the crew left on the first transport stage.

Starting as car 12 in the event was the perfect position to watch the stage times of the leading teams whilst still having reasonable condition roads to attack. The first half of the event (5 stages) were to run in daylight and the second half of the event (4 stages) were after dark. A successful start was made in the first stage, used as a warm up, being one of the quickest 2-wheel-drive cars through the stage. The roads used for following stages became a mixture of fast flowing sections and sudden changes to rough and very tight tracks through thick scrubby bush.

After five testing stages through bulldust, over rocky sections and even mid-stage rain Leigh and Jenna came back to the midway service point inside the top ten. The event was proving a test for some teams with the retirements starting to flow. Being the first event after the summer break for many, car upgrades and modifications were being tested and in some cases, failing.

During the one and a half hour service the vehicle was thoroughly checked over, cleaned and driving lights fitted and aligned. Feeling like the hard work had been done in the first half of the rally, the crew decided to aim for a finish from this point and try to consolidate the position they had already gained.

As expected, the roads had become cut up and very soft and powdery for the night time run. The wind that had been present during the day had also disappeared and made for very difficult conditions. Trying to find a safe pace within dust clouds and with the roads becoming more difficult to read as the night went on, was a real feat. Crews were succumbing to the difficult conditions as the stages continued, with Leigh and Jenna seeing leading crews such as Jesse Robinson and Nathan Reeves stranded between or within stages. The performance of car 11, the 2-wheel-drive Nissan Silvia of Brian Semmens was outstanding as the night continued.

After a dusty night out in the forest, Leigh and Jenna were happy to be transporting back to rally headquarters with a straight car that had performed meticulously throughout the rally. Once the car was into parc ferme at the finish, a well earned dinner and drinks were enjoyed, although one eye was closely watching the score board. Before leaving headquarters for another night of camping in the surprisingly mild Gippsland night, the teams were listed as provisionally finishing 6th outright and 1st in the P2 class (1401-1600cc engines).

Leigh and Jenna would like to thank the rally's organising team from Melbourne University Car Club and all the officials out in the forest. Also, the car wouldn't have made the start without assistance from team sponsors Moko Creative, Auto Palace Auto-refinishers, Suburban IT, Bar 53 Epping, Campbellfield Bin Hire, Meridian Land Surveyors, AAAA signs, Race Recall, Crankshaft Rebuilders, Les Collins and Kwik Kopy Campbellfield. The next event for the Mirage Cyborg is the George Derrick Memorial rally on the 18th of July. Please check out www.garriochrallysport.com.au for updates and further information about the team.