

## [Heat One] Scott Pedder Edges Out Eli Evans

The opening Heat of the National Capital Rally may have been trimmed to just four stages following changeable weather conditions but it proved to be a demanding day for crews as road surfaces dried, tyre selection became an issue and a high rate of attrition caught the unwary off guard.

First on the road, Eli Evans, became the first to sample the changeable road conditions as he ventured onto the first stage with Kumho's harder compound tyre fitted to his Honda Jazz.

"I went for the 900's (Kumho tyre), which has a more closed pattern, and it hurt us on the first stage," Eli said, setting the fifth fastest time. "It was a gamble, we thought there would be more moisture in the road but it was a lot drier and sandier."

Eli's wrong tyre call allowed Brendan Reeves to claim an early advantage on the stage, but despite the Mazda drivers fastest stage time all wasn't well. "Straight away we had brake and clutch problems," he explained. "So to go fastest on the stage even with the problems proved how good the car was."

Victorian Steven Mackenzie had an early scare in his Ford Fiesta, glancing a gatepost and damaging the left side door and rear quarter panel resulting in mostly superficial damage.

Elfyn Evans, on a special appearance outside of Europe, showed the pace of the Ford Fiesta R2 to set second fastest time on the first stage, although it was to be a short lived advantage, the team explaining what happened next.

"He went into a right left kink, and spun, which put him off the road. It's ripped the front bumper off the car, so we think it's just cosmetic damage, but the car is down a bank and we've had to wait all day to get it out. We won't know the real damage until the car gets back to service, hopefully he'll be back tomorrow."

At the conclusion of the second stage Scott Pedder had jumped from fourth into the lead, holding a sizable 16.3-second lead over Will Orders.

Further back Jack Monkhouse was experiencing brake issues, with the rear brakes on his Nissan Silvia only working when the hand brake was used. "I couldn't work out what was wrong, I had the brake balance switch all the way to the rear and still nothing. Then I realized we'd pulled it all out when we rebuilt the car and maybe it was fitted backwards, so I went to full front brake bias and it worked," said Jack.

Another to have brake concerns was Mark Pedder, his Honda reportedly overheating its brake fluid leading to a complete loss of brakes. "We'd get about 8 or 9 kilometers into the stage and we'd lose everything!"

In the second Honda Eli Evans had a slightly different headache to overcome. "About halfway through the last stage the power steering just went dead, nothing at all, and I can't tell you how difficult these cars are to drive without power steering!" The cause was quickly traced to a split power steering hose.

With his steering restored Eli set about chasing down Scott Pedder over the afternoon's two stages, and by the end of the third stage he'd closed the gap to 10.2 seconds, Will Orders relegated to third.

Of more immediate concern was the health of Michael Boaden's Volkswagen Polo. Roughly two kilometers from the start of the third stage the engine began to struggle and Boaden fought furiously with the switches in the car to rectify the problem. "I couldn't work it out, until I cycled to a screen on the dash that showed we had no fuel pressure," Boaden stated.

"We're actually incredibly lucky, all the fuel injectors had blown out and there was fuel everywhere. The car could have gone up in flames!"

On the fourth stage Brendan Reeves day came to an abrupt end when a driveshaft in his Mazda broke on the start line. "It must have been the pressure of the clutch problems, but right on the line it just went, and we rolled down the stage about 100 meters and pulled off to wait for our service crew to come and get us," he said.

In the end Scott Pedder, chased hard by Eli Evans who managed to take a further couple of seconds, held on to claim the Heat One win.

"We've had one of those very rare days in motorsport where everything has gone right!" he beamed at the final service. "I pushed hard on the second stage today, we'd identified that as the one to push on, and it really set us up for the rest of the day."

A late scare when a huge chunk of rubber flailed off the rear of his car wasn't enough to prevent Pedder from losing his lead to Eli. "I've always liked Canberra, I've always had great results here, so today I'm really happy!" Pedder added.

For Eli concerns early in the day with tyre selection and then brake overheating problems, similar but not as bad as those experienced by the sister car of Mark Pedder, didn't stop him from smiling with a second position.

"Considering the dramas we've had today I'm very happy to have closed the gap to Scott. We pushed but it wasn't enough, still I'm happy to get second and the points on offer," Eli said.

Will Orders slipped down the order on the last stage, dropping from third to fourth after Tom Wilde increased his pace. "A really good day," said Tom. "I'm treating this weekend as a test run, so to get a third place is amazing. I eased into it this morning and was surprised how fast our times were."

Orders would put the time loss down to a bad tyre choice for the second loop of stages. "I went for the open pattern, I should have gone for the closed, it cost us. But I'm not too worried, it's been a good day and our gap to the front-wheel drive cars can be bridged, I'll just have to go out tomorrow and try harder."

Monkhouse overcame his earlier brake confusion to finish fifth ahead of Mark Pedder who continued to battle with his overheating brakes, the Honda team drastically cutting extra air intakes into the front bumper at final service in an attempt to alleviate the problem.

Costly technical concerns for Mick Patton and Adrian Coppin dropped the pair to the very bottom of the top ten.

"I think I saw 47 big rocks out there today and managed to hit everyone of them," said Patton. "We've damaged the sub frame in the front of the car and that slowed us, but I've had fun, this car is amazing to drive."

"I hit a rock and damaged the rear beam on the first stage, then I hit another rock and bent the steering arm which pushed the wheel into the front arch on the last stage," said a down beat Coppin.

Seven stages remain tomorrow for crews to complete before the rally concludes with a ceremonial finish and champagne spray.