

Hello

The 2009 NAC Insurance International Rally of Whangarei was held over the weekend of 6 and 7 June. It was part of the FIA Asia Pacific Rally Championship (APRC) and was the third round of the Vantage Aluminium Joinery New Zealand Rally Championship.

One thing I can say after our journey north is that they have some of New Zealand's most fabulous gravel roads. They have a bit of everything from fast flowing corners, extreme camber and tight, twisty, smooth public roads. The Rally of Whangarei is an event not to be missed.

Jeff Cress and I arrived in Whangarei on Wednesday afternoon for documentation and then we went on the Mayor's mystery tour which finished with a delicious meal with fellow rally competitors - a nice relaxing evening before the seriousness began.

Thursday was big day of reconnaissance and a chance for those of us that hadn't driven the Whangarei roads before to check them out and see what we were in for on Saturday and Sunday. We put a lot of effort into recce so that we had full confidence in our notes.

On Friday morning we did reconnaissance on the super special stage at Pohe Island, with our shakedown nearby to follow. I took two lovely ladies for a ride around the shakedown stage at Pohe Island. It was a huge buzz to see how much they enjoyed the ride and I was glad to see they trusted me! Neither of them wanted to get out, saying they thought they'd better have Jeff's seat for the weekend.

On Saturday morning, in the opening few stages, I was lacking confidence...not in the car but in myself. I wasn't happy with how I was driving so with a bit of a kick up the backside from Jeff we started to find more speed throughout the day, setting a few good stage times.

We ended Day 1 as the third Fiesta and 16<sup>th</sup> overall.

On Sunday morning we got off to a good start, just seconds off Ben Jagger's times every stage. We managed the odd stage win which gave me a lot of confidence and I noticed that I was driving the car a lot faster on Sunday compared to Saturday.

Ben Jagger and Ben Hawkins were the team to beat for us, after a few unlucky events throughout the weekend. But by the end of the rally we were unable to match the speed they were showing, so well done to the Two Bens, who had an excellent rally.



We ended Day 2 as second Fiesta and 13<sup>th</sup> overall – a result we were very happy with. The most important thing is that I have learnt a huge amount about the car and have gained a huge amount of confidence that I can take to the remaining rounds of the New Zealand Rally Championship.

I would just like to say a special thanks to organisers of the NAC Insurance International Rally of Whangarei for running such an awesome event and also Rally New Zealand for the wonderful opportunity and ongoing encouragement. It was also great to see familiar faces throughout the weekend and the support you all gave me.

Jeff, thanks a lot for sitting next to me. I am now starting to fully understand the notes and am becoming fluent now (Mum says I sleep-talk notes ☺) All the mentoring throughout the rally by Neil Allport and Kayne Barrie has been amazing. Kayne, thanks for all your help and knowledge and a wonderfully-prepared car; I couldn't have asked for more. And a huge thanks to Gavin Peterson, Paul Curnow, and my father for taking the time to service for me. It is hugely appreciated and without you guys I wouldn't be doing this.

To my personal sponsors: Nelson Fork Trucks Ltd, Allan Kirby at MS Nelson Ford, Body Talk Nelson, Colin at Alpine Stars and Highfield Romney, thanks again for coming along for the ride.

Also a huge thanks to my sponsors that are part of the Rising Stars Scholarship: NAC Insurance, Apparel by Design, Castrol, Network Visuals, Genuine Vehicle Imports, Dunlop and KBM (Kayne Barrie Motorsport). Cheers for all your support.

TV coverage for the NAC Insurance International Rally of Whangarei screens on TV1's Powerbuilt Tools Motorsport from 5-6pm with Day 1 shown on 21 June and Day 2 shown on 28 June

Well, until next time, take it easy and you will be hearing from me before the Racetech Rally Wairarapa.

Thanks

Ben Hunt  
Hunt Motorsport Team

