

Rally Otago done for another year

Our most southern round of the Vantage New Zealand Rally Championship, Rally Otago took place on 10 and 11 of April.

Finishing fifth in Group N, sixth overall and the first junior driver in our first rally in our new car was a great start. I am very happy with how we ended up and how quickly we were on the pace, setting a third fastest stage time on stage 3.

The Wednesday before the rally we had a sponsor's day not far from Outram in Otago, organised by Liam from SeedForce, who did a great job. We had a 7km piece of closed public road on which I was able to get some very valuable seat time before the first stage of the rally. The road was very fast and we recorded a top speed of 198km/h, and judging by the reactions of the guys from CRT who we were taking for rides, they loved it!

Thursday and Friday were official reconnaissance and it was looking like dust was going to be an issue all weekend if we didn't get any rain. Other than that the roads were all looking in very good condition and I was really starting to look forward to starting the event. In particular the Danseys Pass and Kuri Bush stages were looking to be my favourites.

The rallying over the Saturday and Sunday went very well for the team. I was really able to start coming to grips with the new car and began pushing myself a bit harder. Dust was a big issue and it was very difficult to have the confidence and keep the concentration going to be able to make the most of the stages. In parts I couldn't even see the side of the road, let alone what was in front, so I really had to back off. Although it was the same for most of the competitors, it was still rather frustrating.

Stage three was Danseys Pass; at 29km it's one of the longest of the rally and the one I really liked the look of on recce. It had a bit of everything - fast sections, tight sections and big drops on the driver's side! We set off and I felt really good and so did the car so I gave it a bit of a push. We set the third fastest stage time and were only 7 seconds off the quickest time so I was very happy with that.

The only problems we had all weekend were all on Sunday. To begin with, I was going a bit too fast out of a ford over the finish of the first stage of the morning, Whare Flat, and hit the finish board, nudging a spectator. Luckily they were okay, and there was only minor damage to the car so we were able to keep on going. Later in the morning we came into the first service and the car cut out and would not start due to a bad connection in the plug to the fuel pump. We were very lucky to have it happen right outside service where we could push it in, instead of in the middle of a stage or it would have been a completely different story!

So once again, Rally Otago has gone really well for me and I can't wait to come back in 2011. That's about it from me for now, take care and bring on Rally New Zealand!

Ben Jagger