

RALLY NZ RISING STARS

Ben Jagger's pre-Otago blog

Greetings all,
Welcome to my first blog for the 2010 Vantage Aluminium New Zealand Rally Championship.

For those that don't know me, I'm Ben Jagger, a 20-year-old rally driver from Whangarei in the winterless north and winner of this year's Rally New Zealand Rising Stars Development Award.

With my co-driver Ben Hawkins, I won the 2009 New Zealand Rally Championship Group N N3 title for two-wheel-drive production cars, also known as the Ford Fiesta class. After securing enough points for the Rally New Zealand Rising Stars Development Award shootout in November 2009, I completed the intense two days of fitness, media, and mental testing and was delighted to be announced as the recipient of the Development Award worth \$50,000.

So now here we are just a few days out from the first round of the championship, the Rally of Otago, ready to tackle the event with a new car - the ex-Emma Gilmour Subaru Impreza which Emma drove to 3rd overall in the 2009 NZRC. It's been a big learning curve for the team this season getting familiar with a completely new car but everyone is looking forward to the challenge and can't wait to arrive in Dunedin.

I had my first proper drive of the Impreza in late March on the road we live on, when it was closed for the Ruarangi Road RallySprint held by the Northland Car Club.

I didn't really know what to expect, having not previously driven a Group N 4WD car before – I hadn't even been for a proper ride in one! But I was very happy with how it felt and how I adapted to it. Ben and I also had a heck of a lot of fun and are really hanging out to see how we stack up in Otago.

This will be the third year I will compete in Rally Otago – it's one of my favourite events. People often say it's the closest thing we have to rallying in Finland, and every driver I know wants to rally in Finland! In the past two years the event has been very good to me, as we won our class in the Fiesta both times ... although we were rather close to being a DNF in 2009 when we left the road after the finish line and hit a tree. Luckily we made it back to service and, after the crew did an awesome job, we were able to continue on.

Winning our class this year is a bit of 'an ask' with the limited experience I have had in the Impreza so far. With the quality and numbers of drivers in Group N 4WD this season, it's going to be a tough competition, but also very interesting. Nonetheless I'll certainly be trying for the best result possible for the team, so bring it on!

I would like to thank Rally New Zealand for giving me the opportunity to make the step up this season via the Rising Stars Development Award. Also, my thanks to Bruce and the guys from SeedForce, Imperial Panelbeaters and Speedy Signs Whangarei for making the car look so good! Speedy Signs Whangarei has also made the new service truck look the part as well, so thanks guys. To Dad, Paul and Kevin, thanks again for all the help and organisation over the past weeks and the ongoing support, and thanks to Kayne at Kayne Barrie Motorsport, also Valtra Tractors, Dunlop Tires and Bream Head Coast Walks.

That's about it from me for now, hope to see you all in Otago and don't forget to become a fan of "The Two Bens" on Facebook for updates during the event and the build-up to it.

Cheers,
Ben Jagger