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# RALLY NZ RISING STARS

Hi everyone,

Rally New Zealand, taking place over three days on 7, 8 and 9 May, is an event I've been looking forward to since 2008 when it was last held in New Zealand. Although we had a very tough event that year - after breaking a drive shaft on day one, going off the road on day two and getting a puncture on day three - it was a rally that I really enjoyed. I can't wait to get underway this year! The atmosphere, the loads of spectators lining the stages and the World Rally teams and cars make this event very exciting to be competing in.

The break between Otago and Rally New Zealand has not been very long at all and the team has been flat out getting all the preparation on the car done and organising everything needed to enable us to have a trouble free run this time at Rally New Zealand.

In 2008 we competed in our old Ford Fiesta and now we have moved up to the Subaru Impreza we will be up against the best in the world of the Group N production class. This rally is going to be the first time myself and Ben Hawkins will be writing pace notes from scratch and will be a very steep learning curve but is something that has to be done to be able to make the necessary steps forward and hopefully be on the pace with the PWRC cars. At this stage we won't be going out there to blow the world away but really just using the opportunity of a two pass reconnaissance to be able to start making this step forward as I feel it is the cheapest way of getting more speed.

Day one is taking place at home here in Whangarei with the cars doing series of four stages in the Kaipara District, just south of Whangarei, then heading into the city for a remote service at the Laurie Hall car park. Competing at home on the local roads in front of the crowds including friends and family is something that I am really excited about too as it was a few years ago now that the WRC was up in this area. The last time it was up here I was a spectator watching my uncle Brian Stokes and even got a day off school!

The week leading up to the three day rally is pretty full on with documentation on Monday afternoon, reconnaissance taking place on Tuesday and Wednesday, shakedown and promotional activities on the Thursday and then Friday through till Sunday it's all on! I hope to see everyone out there in amongst the action over the weekend; there is a bit of everything for everyone so get into it!

That's about it from me for now. Regular updates will be on "The Two Bens" Facebook page. Until then, take care.

Cheers, Ben