

Hello again everybody,

Well Rally New Zealand has been and gone for another year. It was an eye opening experience for us competing on the world stage, thoroughly enjoyable and in the end we came away with a fantastic result.

The long rally started for us on the Monday night with Recce Documentation at Sky City before two days inspecting the stages and our safety notes on Tuesday and Wednesday. For this event we were able to do two passes over every stage, allowing us to check any changes we made to our notes in the first pass and become more familiar with the roads.

On Thursday I used my Evo 8 at Shakedown as the VIP rides car. The decision was made not to use the Fiesta as we didn't have anything to gain from it, so I had a blast drifting the Evo round the stage on the oldest set of rally tires I owned. The VIP's that I took for a skid were rapt and we put on a good show for the spectators. But best of all we finished a close 2nd only 0.2 seconds behind the fastest Production World Rally Car.

Although not an official result, it was a great way to start the weekend's competition!!

Day one at Whangarei started well with a nice clean conservative drive in the first few short stages. However in stages three and four, we lost a minute to our nearest competitor, Ben Hunt, due to being stuck in thick dust from a slower car ahead of us.

We picked up the pace in the afternoon and by the end of day one we had a six and a half minute lead over Dermot Malley who was second in Group N 2wd. The only damage done was nudging a curb and bending the rear suspension at the Auckland Domain super special stage.

We made a fast start to day two in the Franklin area, sitting 6th outright in the national championship competitors after two stages. However the next stage cost us time when we caught a slower car, again getting caught in the dust.

The afternoon's stage times were a bit slower for us as we decided to run old tyres and save our last four new tyres for the final leg of the rally, although we finished the day 24th outright and 8 minutes ahead of Ben Hunt for 1st in class.

The third and final day of the rally was held in Raglan on the famous Te Hutewai and Whaanga Coast stages. The road surface was slippery due to some moisture from over night rain, so we got off to a slow start and got faster throughout the day.

At lunch time service we had moved up one more spot to 23rd, 18 minutes ahead of the nearest Fiesta. A second run through the opening two stages stood between me and the finish line. The stages had dried out giving the Rally New Zealand Rising Stars Fiesta more grip, allowing us to set quicker stage times.

As we neared the end of the last stage we slid wide on a tightening left hander and clipped the bank. This damaged the rear suspension again but luckily not enough to prevent us from crossing the finish line a strong 22nd outright, winning the Group N 2wd class by nearly 18 minutes over Ben Hunt.

So for the second time in two events, Rich and I took away the trophies and champagne for Group N 2wd. We also have a healthy points lead now after winning all 5 points scoring days so far this season. It's been an awesome start to our season and we hope to carry our pace and consistency through to the next round of the New Zealand Rally Championship in Whangarei on the 3rd-4th July. This is my home event and the competition is sure to be hot!!

Thanks Everyone,

Stephen Barker

