

Hello again everybody,

Well, we are nearing the halfway point of the Vantage Aluminium Joinery New Zealand Rally Championship and next we head to the International Rally of Whangarei from 2 to 4 July.

This event should be a great one for the team as once again we will compete against drivers from around the world, with this rally doubling as a round of the FIA Asia Pacific Rally Championship. On top of that, I grew up in Whangarei and class the rally as my home event. It's great for my sponsors that we will be competing on their home turf in Northland once again - I would love to put on a show for them and score a good result.

My co-driver Richard Ellis and I have built a healthy lead in the Group N two-wheel-drive championship to date and it is important for us to be sensible in Whangarei and bring the Rising Stars Ford Fiesta home for a strong finish. It is going to take a lot of patience and concentration to stay with our main rival in the Fiestas, Ben Hunt. He showed very good pace at Rally New Zealand and I wasn't quite fast enough to match him. As we did at Rally New Zealand, we will take no risks to ensure we get to the finish and score a good haul of points. This should put us closer to the goal of my first national championship title.

Richard and I are also keen to make the most of the opportunities afforded by the two-pass reconnaissance system at this event. We can be confident with any changes we make to our pace notes as we have the opportunity to re-drive the stage and check the notes.

We have an ideal road position, being seeded 26th, so we should benefit from a clean, swept line on our first pass through each stage. However as all the stages of this rally are repeated I predict the roads may cut up a bit by the time we get through for our second pass.

All in all, I'm looking forward to my favourite rally of the year; it's shaping up to be a nail biter.

After the rally, any celebrations we get to enjoy needs to be short-lived, because we've got to get straight back to Hamilton so that I can fly out at 6am to Dunedin for the 2010 Elite Motorsport Academy. This is a very exciting opportunity for me and I've doubled my event preparation efforts. It certainly will be a fairly full on two weeks of motorsport for me! At the Academy, I have been grouped with William Bamber and Andrew Vincent. These two young circuit drivers are class acts and I believe we have a really good shot at winning the Academy's group prize.

Thanks again everybody for keeping a close eye on my progress this year. It really is a pleasure to be a part of the Rally New Zealand Rising Stars programme.

Stephen

