

## **RALLY NZ RISING STARS**

The third round of the Vantage New Zealand Rally Championship, the International Rally of Whangarei, proved to be a very interesting rally for us. I was one of four lucky drivers chosen as an FIA Asia Pacific wildcard entry for this round and was running as number ten on the road for the first day.

Being my home event, number ten on the road was an awesome place to be for the first day as I was running much further up the field than we would normally on only our third rally in the Seed Force Subaru.

The first stage was going very well, although we had a bit of an understeer problem. I adapted my driving style and it was going really good for the first 20km, until I braked a bit late for a left hander and went wide on the exit. Unfortunately we jumped through a couple of cutty grass bushes and landed on top of another one. The car was fully bellied out and even after nearly an hour of trying to get it off, even cutting a famer's fence to create an exit, Ben and I could not move it.

That was a very disappointing end to the first day of what I hoped would be an exciting rally for us. The sweeper crew came through after the stage had finished and pulled us out through the paddock, with the only real damage was a broken front bumper and a dent in the driver's side doors. I started it up and drove it all the way back to service, where the team got to work on another exceptional repair job and had us ready to tackle day 2 in no time.

Day 2 was a real struggle with the weather being so terrible and in some places doing 200 km/h the windscreen wipers were having trouble keeping up. Easing into it in the morning and getting my confidence back in the car, we were off the pace that I would have liked to have been at, but by the afternoon I was happier, even though the weather got worse throughout the day.

So then what happened? Where did he finish?

Day one's mishap cost us the lead in the NZ Junior championship and even though we got maximum junior points on day 2, we are still on the chase to get it back going into Nelson. It's going to be a tough battle with Sloan Cox to get it back, as he is driving very well, but as I have found out in this sport - and I'm sure a lot of people have - anything can happen and the tables can turn at any moment, so I haven't lost hope yet.

Nelson is a rally I am rather looking forward to as it gives Ben Hawkins and I a chance to test our pace note writing skills on a one pass reconnaissance. I also think the Subaru will handle the sometimes rougher conditions a bit better than the little Fiesta we used in this event last year.

Until then, take care!

Ben Jagger