

Hello everybody,

This week the Rally New Zealand Rising Stars team head to Nelson for the penultimate round of the Vantage New Zealand Rally Championship.

The car is all back together and looking sharp once again after the disappointing crash on Day One of Rally Whangarei. I personally spent a few days here and there stripping the car and reassembling it to keep costs down. The guys at Orewa Panelbeaters have done a fantastic job of making it look like it never happened.

After Rally Whangarei, the class points really have closed up and Ben Hunt is now just 23 behind Richard & I. With 32 points for a leg win it is important for us to complete all four legs left in the season. We will be looking for a mature drive to the finish to ensure we keep scoring good points towards our championship, especially with Nelson being Ben's home rally where I'm sure he will be quick. To add to that, Nelson's road surface is known to be abrasive and hard on tyres. Our tyre allowance is only eight new and two used, less than previous rallies this year, so staying out of trouble and driving down the middle of the road will be the strategy for our team.

Richard and I really are starting to work well together in the car. I am trusting his calls 100% and we are making next to no mistakes. I am really trying harder during recce to make improvements that will raise our speed without taking risks. Richard is helping with this also and we have formed a fantastic partnership.

Since Rally Whangarei, I have had some major personal changes which include moving from Hamilton to Kerikeri to work for my major sponsor Rintoul Civil Contractors. I am maintaining all the small plant and work utes, which means I take orders from our service crew member, Alfie, who runs the workshop.

I also attended the 2010 Elite Motorsport Academy in Dunedin after Rally Whangarei. What a week it was, learning more about all aspects of peak performance in motorsport. Things like physical and mental fitness, nutrition, sponsorship, and even driving a simulator for an hour at 45 degrees celcius. I was the leader of Team Dynamic with Suzuki Swift drivers William Bamber and Andrew Vincent as team-mates. We managed to take out the team category and the overall individual places with Andrew 1<sup>st</sup>, William 2<sup>nd</sup> and myself 3<sup>rd</sup>. I believe it was extremely beneficial to my career and will help with my success in future. As I continue working with academy team I hope to make the most of the knowledge and put it to good use.

For now though, follow our results live during the rally on the 21<sup>st</sup> & 22<sup>nd</sup> of August at [www.chrissport.co.nz](http://www.chrissport.co.nz)

Stephen Barker

