

Hi

It is finally that time of year that Rally Japan is upon us and our chance to show the world what our small New Zealand team can do. When we were lucky enough to win the Rally New Zealand rising stars scholarship late last year it was decided that the funds would be used to run Team Green in Rally Japan, giving us a full six round PWRC campaign which is crucial for my future career. This is our 4th round of the championship, winning New Zealand with our own team and then 3rd and 2nd in Finland and Germany respectively with the Pirelli Star Driver team. With these results we find ourselves in a very strong championship position and thanks to the Rally New Zealand Rising Stars Scholarship we have a chance to close in on the leading two drivers of the championship in this event.

Being that the car had to take the long journey on the boat we had to work about 5-6 weeks ahead of ourselves. After we won the International Rally of Whangarei it was straight home to our South Canterbury base where we had just 9 days to strip and prepare the car before everything was loaded into the container. The whole team did a fantastic job and thanks to Cameron Sea and Air Freight the container has now safely arrived in Japan. As this event is very important to us we put a lot of emphasis on the car preparation before it left the country. For Rally Whangarei we ran a lot of our second-hand spare parts on the car so that we could save our better parts that had only done Rally New Zealand for Japan. This part rotation process means that we know exactly the mileage that everything has done on the car and we can save unnecessary wear and tear on non-championship events.

I am really looking forward to driving the Team Green Evo 9 again. It is such a nice car to drive that over the last 2 years we have developed and fine tuned to my driving style. The Evo 10 that we drive in the Pirelli Star Driver program is also a good car but they are identically set-up for all 5 drivers, so there is a compromise. But with our car I am much more comfortable as it does everything I want it to do.

We have never competed in Japan before so it will be another new event for us. From video footage that I have studied of the event the roads are narrow and fast in places and can be very slippery if wet. Also once wet, the very soft road base chews up very quickly, becoming rutted and rough which is a lot different to what we are used to. Although it has been warm and dry in Sapporo of recent, it is now coming into Hurricane season (which is why we had to send the container up 10 days earlier) so the chance of rain is very probable.

The goals for the event are high especially considering our championship position. We are aiming for the top step of the podium but it will be very difficult as our two main opposition, Patrick Flodin and local Toshi Arai will be very quick. Especially Toshi, on home turf he will be as difficult to beat as beating the Finns in Finland. But we are in the right car and I am feeling confident that we can challenge him. A key part to being able to do that however will be making sure we have good pace notes so we will concentrate on that during recce on Tuesday and Wednesday.

I leave the UK, where I have based myself following Rally Germany 2 weeks ago, on Friday while I meet the rest of the team in Japan. It will be great to see all the guys again and work in a team where we are all good mates. Following the weekend of unloading the container and preparing the car we have an all-important test on Monday that will give us a chance to adapt the set-up of the car to Japan conditions. I can not wait. A huge thanks again to the team at Rally New Zealand for giving us this opportunity and it is my full intention to repay that faith with the result that I am aiming for. You can keep up to date with the progress of our week at www.haydenpaddon.com

Thanks
Hayden