



Racetech RALLY WAIRARAPA



28-29 May 2011

Rally Wairarapa Preview.

With the excitement and drama of Rally New Zealand now over, the attention and focus of the Brian Green Property Group New Zealand Rally Championship turns to the next event in the fun and friendly Wairarapa.

Centred around the Copthorne Resort and Hotel - Solway Park in Masterton, the Trusthouse Racetech Rally Wairarapa is again shaping up to be a fantastic event. While many of the favourite old roads have been retained, a number of stages are effectively new. "It is quite amazing how the nature of a road changes when you drive it in the opposite direction to usual", says Clerk of the Course, Dave Davies.

So with a return to the roads around Pongaroa, the course may be similar, but the challenges will be new, as a number of stages used in past years have been reversed. The advantage of previous knowledge is reduced and the competition opened up.

Even so, the odds on favourite to retain the Rally Wairarapa trophy will be local driver Richard Mason, especially as Hayden Paddon will be in Argentina contesting the next round of his Production Car WRC championship. Despite struggling for speed at Rally Otago, Mason bounced back to the podium at Rally NZ and finished a fine second to Paddon. With improvements to his car starting to pay dividends, and his passion for his home event, Mason will be hard to beat on home turf.

Pushing him hard will be the Dunedin driver Emma Gilmour. The first two rounds of the championship saw her on the pace in most stages. However she will be looking to eliminate the few niggling problems that have hampered her this season. At Otago she attacked a fence and ended up trailing meters of it behind her into service, while at Rally NZ it was a fuel surge problem on the Hampton Downes circuit that saw her bumped back to third behind Mason (on the first day). A clean run on the Wairarapa gravel will see her pushing hard for the top step of the podium.

Both Dean Sumner and Chris West had good results at Rally Otago, earning themselves valuable points. However both failed to finish at Rally NZ, meaning that they are now playing catch up in the championship points race. For Sumner, a slower than expected pace at Rally NZ was capped off with an off road excursion in the famous Whaanga Coast stage, on a corner that has claimed many an international driver, including Colin McRae.

Meanwhile West had battled hard all of Rally NZ to take up position behind Paddon, Mason and Gilmour and was looking for a good result. That is until the oil light came on only a few kilometres from the last stage and the finish ramp. Switching the engine off straight away meant that he could go no further.



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In the Open Class, for older model and Group A cars, Geoff Argyle and Neil Marshall are the main contenders. Both have previously achieved very good results on the Wairarapa roads and will be looking to do the same again this year.

However they have both suffered from problems in the earlier rounds this year and will be looking to get trouble free runs in order to shake up the leader board. Last year both were running even older Mitsubishi Evos to their current Evo 8 models, but Argyle was 3rd overall on day 1 of Rally Wairarapa, while Marshall powered on to finish 4th overall for the whole event. Similar runs again this year have the potential to upset the main contenders.

With only three weeks between Rally NZ and Rally Wairarapa the teams will be burning the midnight oil to turn their cars around and be ready for the ceremonial start on the evening of Friday 27th May.

Held at the Copthorne Solway Park, the ceremonial start is a fantastic place for rally fans and families to get close to the cars and the competitors. The first car heads over the start ramp at 6pm, with a driver autograph session inside the Copthorne hotel immediately after.

With an 8am start on Saturday morning, from the Copthorne Solway Park, the competitors race their way to the friendly town of Pongaroa, and back again, over 8 closed road stages, to finish the day at 5pm in Masterton. With day two again centred in Eketahuna, it is a challenging 9 special stages that will determine who walks away with the silverware when the crews return to finish ramp outside the Copthorne Solway Park at 4:15pm on Sunday. In all, 284km of hot competition and entertainment makes up the challenge for the 60 odd competitors and hundreds of spectators.



Richard and Sarah Mason on their way to winning Rally Wairarapa 2010
Photo Credit, Jody Seabright





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Fast Facts

- Round 3 of NZ Rally Championship
- Round 1 of Geartech Central Region Rally Series, (points scoring based on Saturdays results only)
- Round 2 of the Classic Challenge Trophy
- 17 Special Stages, 8 on Saturday 28 May, and 9 on Sunday 29 May
- 284km of competitive Special Stages, 158km on Saturday, 126km on Sunday
- www.rallywairarapa.co.nz

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