

MEDIA RELEASE

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TOP SEEDS SET FOR BATTLE ROYAL

Defending champion Dean Bond will lead the field away when the Catlins Coast Rally begins in Owaka at 9am this Saturday.

Bond, of Balclutha, crossed the line 2.2 seconds ahead of Andrew Hawkeswood last year to win the event after he had surged into the lead with a strong charge over the final stages. He and co-driver Craig Barclay are the top seeds this year in their Mitsubishi EVO 6.5 and will be keen to make it two in a row. While there are changes to the route this year Bond says he is reasonably familiar with the new roads. "Most of the new bits of road have been used previously at some time. I have either driven them or been a block marshall on them. There is really only a bit of Special Stage 2 at Lochindorb that is completely new." Bond also won the Laird Motorsport Southern Rally Series title last year and after a difficult outing in the opening round of that series in Otago earlier this year he will be looking for a good result at Catlins to boost his chances of retaining that title, fought over three separate events in the south.

Last years third placegetter, Regan Ross of Kaikoura looms as the biggest threat to the hopes of the local pair of repeating last years result. Ross divides his time between his Mitsubishi EVO 9 and a Ford Escort, achieving a great deal of success in both. Ross and co-driver Tania Lloyd will bring the EVO south this weekend and are seeded at two and must be rated a top chance.

Third seed is the very experienced Jeff Judd. Judd of Christchurch and co-driver Grant Marra will compete in Judd's familiar Subaru Impreza WRX. Judd is a two-time Mainland Rally Series champion and a versatile motorsport personality. As well as his rally successes he also has a successful pedigree in circuit racing as well as being one of the country's top rally co-drivers.

Two local drivers, and good mates, Andrew Graves of Gore and Derek Ayson of Clinton line up as fourth and fifth seeds, quite appropriate considering they finished fifth and sixth respectively last year just two seconds apart.

Graves and co-driver Jared Leebody will pilot Graves Mitsubishi EVO 3. Graves was Ayson's co-driver for many years before taking the wheel himself. Since his transition he has become one of the souths top drivers, winning the Laird Motorsport Southern Rally Series in 2007. Meanwhile Ayson, who won the Classic Rally Of Otago against top class international opposition earlier this year, will again delight the crowds with his spectacular press-on style in his Nissan FJ120 Ford Escort RS. Aysons primary aim this weekend is to be the first 2-wheel-drive car home but he and co-driver Greg Scott are sure to make life difficult for many of the 4-wheel-drives.

The top ten is completed by several well performed competitors. Steve Wellington of Dunedin and Hudson Biggs are seeded at six in their Mitsubishi EVO 6. Wellington was a top ten finisher at Catlins last year. Scott Simpson of Oamaru will line up as seventh seed. Simpson, currently fourth in the Laird Motorsport Southern Rally Series, drove a great rally in the National Championship rally in Otago earlier in the year finishing 13th overall in a strong field. Hamish Notman will co-drive alongside Simpson in the EVO 4.

Blenheim driver Richard Bateman along with co-driver Sharisse Guckert are seeded at eight in an EVO 8 while Mike and Rick Wellington start at nine in an EVO 6. The top ten is rounded out by John Giltrap and Paul Millar of Lincoln in a Subaru WRX. Giltrap is a former Mainland Rally Series Champion and finished seventh at Catlins last year.

To add more spice to the event Paul Cross of Gore has made a late entry into the rally in Paul Beattie's Mitsubishi EVO 8. Cross, the 2008 Laird Motorsport Southern Rally Series Champion and fourth in this event last year, will carry number 61 on the car but will run within the top half dozen cars on the road on the day.

Just outside the top ten is the impressive Marcus Van Klink of Christchurch in his Toyota Corolla AE86 and Paul Dickson of Timaru in an EVO 3. Dickson has pulled off some top results over the years and was tenth here last season. Duncan McCrostie is a local driver who will go well in a 2-wheel-drive car - a Nissan Bluebird Turbo while Deane Buist, a two-time former Mainland Series Champion, has the ability to push his 2-wheel-drive Ford Focus inside the top ten. Balclutha driver Barry Mills has taken his Hillman Avenger to some amazing results in past Catlins rallies while Brent Rawstron of Christchurch will be a joy to watch in his immaculate Ford Escort BDA.

The rally winner will take home the Darryl Robinson Memorial Trophy while the first South Otago driver will win the coveted Kerry O'Donohue Memorial Trophy and the top Otago crew the Glen Shirlaw Memorial Trophy.

This years Catlins Coast Rally also celebrates the tenth anniversary of this popular event.

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RSport Photography

Defending champions Dean Bond and Craig Barclay in their Mitsubishi EVO 6.5