



**MEDIA RELEASE
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SUPERB FIELD SET TO FIGHT OUT CATLINS COAST RALLY

A superb field, possibly the best ever, will fight it out in the 2011 Catlins Coast Rally on Saturday.

When the field departs the start at Owaka Motors at 9am on Saturday morning five previous winners will be among the seventy-four crews taking part.

2005 winner Derek Ayson is the top seed for the event. Ayson has a new car, a Mitsubishi EVO 8, at his disposal this season. Ayson is under no illusion as to how tough this year's event will be. "There are some good drivers coming so it would be good to be able to finish in the top three in what will be my first rally in the car. I'm a little bit nervous. It has been five years since I've been in a 4-wheel-drive. I believe it takes a season to get really familiar with a new car."

Ayson also has a new co-driver this year, Gav McDermott. While he has contested the event in 2-wheel-drive cars in recent years Ayson has still managed some noteworthy results. He finished third in 2007, sixth in 2009 and fifth last year despite not having the advantage of 4-wheel-drive.

John Silcock of Rangiora in his Mitsubishi EVO 6.5 is the second seed. Silcock is focused on securing his third Mainland Rally Series title, only requiring a small points haul at Catlins to achieve his goal. "I have come down for a finish. I'm there to win the Mainland Series," he says.

Kieran Hall of Nelson is the third seed this year in his Subaru Impreza STi. The last time he appeared in the Catlins Coast Rally was 2007 when he was a convincing winner. "The social side of Catlins is great. Where else would drivers get cream pikelets at drivers briefing? I know I did last time I was there. How many events these days get 70 plus entries? The Eastern Southland Car Club have earned a great reputation with the roads, their organisation and the way things are well run." Like his fellow contenders Hall acknowledges the quality of this year's entry. "I will go there to win but I would be happy to be in the top five."

Following Hall away from the start will be Dean Bond of Balclutha in another Mitsubishi EVO 6.5. Bond won the rally in 2009 becoming the Laird Motorsport Southern Rally Series Champion in the process. His attempt to make it two in a row last year ended in the opening stage with a gearbox problem. "I hope to go further this time," he jokes. "There are probably six or seven people who could win this. If his car is okay then Derek (Ayson) might be the hardest to deal with. He has similar local knowledge. Silcock and Hall will be competitive but if it is an even playing field then the locals including Andrew Graves and Paul Cross will be right there. I'm looking forward to it. It was good to win it once. Having done so the pressure is off. I will be happy to finish in the top group. I've been there and done that so the pressure is not so intense."

Last year's winner Andrew Graves of Gore will start at five this year. Graves has one of the older cars of any of the expected frontrunners, a Mitsubishi EVO 3. He says he would love to make it two in a row but he is not holding his breath. "There is stiff competition this year. Nearly anyone in the top ten could win it. It depends what happens on the day. Derek (Ayson) and Bondy will be hard to beat if they stay mechanically sound. We will go as fast as we can and be as safe as we can to be there at end and give our sponsors good coverage."

Another Gore driver, Paul Cross starts at six. Cross has leased Paul Beattie's EVO 8 again this year after doing the same last year. For a driver who does not compete regularly Cross has fashioned an outstanding record over the past few seasons. Second in the Gore Rally in 2008 Cross was third at Catlins in 2009 and second behind Graves last year.

Last year's third placegetter Steve Wellington of Dunedin lines up next in his EVO 6 while the top ten is completed by 2-wheel-drive cars. Marcus Van Klink of Kaiapoi is the eighth seed in his Toyota Corolla AE86. Last year Van Klink was in the top ten until he struck problems near the end of the event. The popularity of the rally has tempted Tony McConachy of Palmerston North south in a rapid Haybusa powered Toyota Starlet at nine while the top ten is completed by Kaitangata driver Duncan McCrostie in his Nissan Bluebird Turbo.

Other prominent competitors in the field include former winner Deane Buist of Christchurch in a Ford Focus, Bert Murray of Waimate in the ex-Neil Allport NZ Rally Championship winning Mazda RX7 and Deborah Kibble also of Waimate in an ex Ross Dunkerton Mitsubishi Lancer Turbo.

Locals include Bond, McCrostie, Barry Mills of Balclutha in his spectacularly fast Hillman Avenger, Rhys Gardner, Steve Morris, Craig Barclay, Michael Gunn, Paul Gouman Warner Reid of Balclutha plus Chris Thompson of Kaitangata and Damian Vincent of Stirling.

Eastern Southland drivers outside of the top ten include Craig Abernethy, David Kirk, Kevin Laird, Craig Cormack and Carl Morris of Gore plus Nigel Marshall of Wyndham ,

Fast Facts:

The winner of the Catlins Coast Rally is presented with the Darryl Robinson Memorial Trophy. The leading South Otago crew receives the Kerry O'Donohue Memorial Trophy and the first Otago Sports Car Club crew the Glen Shirlaw Memorial Trophy.

Former Southlander James Holder sponsors 'The Monit Rally Computer Award' for the first novice driver and first novice co-driver in the rally. Last year Holders brother Dave won the drivers award while Hannah Irvine won the co-driver prize.

Five former winners will line up this year - Andrew Graves of Gore, Deane Buist of Christchurch, Derek Ayson of Gore, Kieran Hall of Nelson and Dean Bond of Balclutha.

The class battles are bound to be hard fought:

Watch out for Tony McConachy in Class A David Holder of Invercargill, Mike Townsend of Australia, Rhys Gardner of Balclutha and Nigel Marshall of Wyndham in Class B, Marcus Van Klink and Deane Buist in Class C, Ayson, Silcock, Hall, Bond, and Cross in Class D, Graves in Class E, Barry Mills in Class F, Duncan McCrostie and Bert Murray in Class G.

Ayson, Graves, Mills and Mills' co-driver Mark Allington of Balclutha have contested everyone of the previous ten Catlins Coast Rallies.

Andrew Graves is the only driver who has won the event as both a driver and a co-driver. He drove to victory in 2010 and co-drove for Ayson in 2005.

Century Batteries have recently confirmed their continued support of the event rejoining other long time sponsors MWH, the Rosebank Lodge, SouthRoads and Owaka Motors again in 2011.

As usual the rally will start from Owaka Motors in Owaka at 9.00am with eight Special Stages providing 157 kilometres of high speed competition.

The final stage will again be the very popular Riverside Reserve stage in Balclutha, a stage that always attracts an excellent crowd.

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