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BUIST WINS GORE RALLY AHEAD OF LOCAL DRIVER

Deane Buist and co-driver James Bracefield of Christchurch won the 2008 Gore Rally on Saturday. The duo took their Mitsubishi Lancer EVO 6 to victory by a margin of 1 minute and 3 seconds from Gore driver Paul Cross, who delivered a stand out performance in his first full rally in his Mitsubishi Lancer EVO 4. In taking a superb second place in his home event he also clinched the 2008 Laird Motorsport Southern Rally Series.

Nelson driver Greg Teece was third in yet another EVO, his result elevating him to win the South Island 4-wheel-drive NZ Truth Rally Xtreme Qualifying Series. Kaikoura driver Regan Ross finished fourth in an EVO 9, his first event in the new car.

Buist took the lead on the second stage after Teece held a brief early lead after winning the opening stage in the Pukerau Forest. The Christchurch driver said he had no problems during the event as he concentrated on just keeping it on the road in the slippery conditions. He secured four stage wins throughout the day. The victory extended Buist's points lead in the Palmside New Zealand Mainland Rally Series and also saw him qualify for the finals of the NZ Truth Rally Xtreme Series.

After the event Cross said he was "rapt with the outcome." He and co-driver Wade Horrell were immediately on the pace, recording the second fastest time in the first stage, and maintaining a constant presence in the top four in every subsequent stage. "I'm normally a slow starter," said Cross, as he savoured the performance. He described the effort a highlight in his rally career to date and said it was fantastic to be matching times with the likes of top ranked drivers such as Teece and Kieran Hall.

Going into the event hoping for a fifth or sixth placing Cross didn't feel he had enough speed in the early stages as he used rally tyres as opposed to mud tyres in the very slippery conditions. However he soon realised he was on the pace and despite deliberately not keeping an eye on the times he kept up the momentum. He had a few "moments" in the second stage and managed to "wriggle out" of a water table after a small "off" in the fifth stage. He also suffered a fuel pick up issue in that stage although it was quickly cured at the next service.

Teece started and finished the rally well, winning the first stage and the last two. He blamed wrong tyre choice during the middle part of the rally for a lack of pace.

Fourth place finisher Regan Ross only drove his Mitsubishi EVO 9 in anger for the first time on the first stage after poor weather precluded any testing prior to the event. He struggled in the morning with diff set-up but came home strongly in the afternoon including a win on Special Stage 6.

Meanwhile Timaru driver Paul Dickson was fifth in his EVO followed by Gore driver Andrew Graves in his Mitsubishi EVO 3. Seventeen – year – old Daniel Harris of Nelson was seventh in his

EVO followed by former Mainland Series winner Les Summerfield of Rangiora and Blenheim driver Richard Bateman, both in Subaru Impreza's.

The defending champion, Derek Ayson, rounded out the top ten in his Ford Escort. Ayson said the result was surprising considering he was only running a standard engine in the car. Ayson's tenth place meant three Eastern Southland Car Club drivers – Cross, Graves and Ayson - finished in the top ten on their home event. It also meant Ayson, the top two-wheel-drive car home, has finished his home rally in the top ten in every one of the nine year's he has entered it.

Top seed Kieran Hall of Nelson was in second place, just 14 seconds behind Buist, when an electrical problem shut the engine down in Stage 5. He had just won Stage 4, describing the last part of it as "primo" and said it was a \$130 part that caused his demise. The "gutting" retirement has ended his Mainland Rally Series hopes although he has qualified for the Rally Xtreme Finals. Other top retirements were Jeff Judd who withdrew as planned due to engine problems after starting the event in an ultimately successful attempt to secure a place in the Rally Xtreme Finals and John Giltrap of Lincoln who was out after leaving the road in Stage 5. The South Island Rally Xtreme 4-wheel-drive leader coming into the event, Paul Nicoll of Nelson, had withdrawn prior to the start.

The top finishers from neighbouring province Otago were Steve Wellington in fourteenth place overall with Mike Wellington one place behind.

Buist won the Rally Xtreme section of the event from Teece and Ross while Marcus Van Klink sealed the 2-wheel-drive section from Dean Bond and Carter Strang. Cross was the top Laird Motorsport Southern Rally Series finisher ahead of Graves and Ayson.

Fifty cars finished the event after seventy-five had started the rally. Among the finishers was sixteen -year-old Ethan Curtis in his first rally after receiving a free entry package into the event from the Eastern Southland Car Club for winning the National Junior Clubsport Championship earlier in the year.

Major sponsors for this year's Gore Rally included the Matura Licensing Trust, Scenic Circle Croydon Hotel, SouthRoads, MWH, McNeill Drilling, Century Batteries and Ernslaw 1 Limited whose support allows the use of the forestry where much of the rally is held.

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