



MEDIA RELEASE

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HUSBAND AND WIFE TEAM BRING CHEER TO CATLINS COAST RALLY

Husband and wife team, Mike and Helen Cameron of Stratford, will bring a fair bit of cheer to the 2018 Catlins Coast Rally hosted by the Eastern Southland Car Club on Saturday 11 August.

Co-driver Helen has become known as the Lolly Lady after she saw an official standing in “shitty, wet conditions” at the Wairarapa Rally in 2007. “He was wet and bedraggled and I asked do you want a lolly mate? That put a smile on his dial and since then I have given out truckloads of lollies.”

However the Cameron’s are serious competitors having achieved plenty of success over the years while also giving back to the sport they love.

Helen says Mike was already competing while she was still at high school, Mike having started out in circuit racing with a Chrysler Valiant. “I was going round and round”, he says and then in 1976 a mate invited me to co-drive in a Ford Escort on a rally. I decided then that I wanted to be in this game myself. I went to the Todd Dealer Network and said I wanted something different and traded the Valiant for a brand new Mitsubishi Lancer. My first event in it was the Pall Mall Rally in Wanganui. The car had 342km on the clock at the start, which was the drive from Whakatane to Wanganui”. By the end of the season Mike was the 0-1300cc Group 1 Champion. “I’ve stayed with Mitsubishi all my life since then and have no complaints.”

Meanwhile Helen married into the sport in 1983. “I used to ride horses and I went from one horsepower to lots. I discovered a rally car had a heater and it didn’t hurt as much when I fell off. My only Motorsport had been watching stock cars in Stratford before that, but that was all.” Her first co-drive with Mike was the Taranaki Rally the year they married. “I was the first female home but I spewed my ring out all day. They gave me a bucket as a booby prize.”

With tough times in farming and babies, after a while the couple took a break until the 1990 25th Anniversary Shell Silver Fern Rally – “we decided to do the Marathon rallies,” says Helen while she also used the car for a year in the Central Region Rallysprint Series, winning the ladies title. Helen also drove in the Taumarunui Rally, making it to the finish.

We had more time out for the kid’s sport and then built a 1977 Lancer for the 2006 Silver Fern and then did the National Rally Championship in 2007, 08 and 09, winning the Classic Championship in 2009. Plenty of other success has followed including the 2010 Silver Fern where they were one of only thirteen cars to complete every stage, finishing second in class, plus the 2011 Rally Of New Zealand where they finished 17th overall and first in class.

2017 was Mike’s 40th year of rallying and Helen says, “I let him come back and do the full national championship”, finishing third in their class. Since their second rally car was built it has done 45,000 kilometres in competition although the cars Ralliart motor let go at Otago last year.

Since 2013 Helen’s health has been what she describes as, “dodgy”. “I had my latest operation in March and I was good again by South Canterbury and that was a bucket list event. So too was Catlins, but as Secretary/Treasurer of the South Taranaki Car Club, the event has always clashed with the club’s street sprint.” However on the return ferry crossing from South Canterbury pressure was brought to bear by friends and enough volunteers put their hand up to run the event in Mike

and Helen's absence so they can tackle Catlins. "We have done bits of some of the stages in the Silver Fern but that is about it," they say.

The dedication to giving back and the local club are also a big part of what Mike and Helen are about. Mike is a Steward and organises licence exams and along with Helen is a Competitor Relations Officer. Helen has joined the Volunteer Commission and recently won a Distinguished Service Award at the Motorsport NZ Awards this year. Mike takes up the story. "She had been up on the stage helping and they sent her back to the table only for her name to be read out." Helen says, "when they said it was someone from the South Taranaki Car Club I was opening and shutting my mouth and nothing was coming out. I was actually running through our membership list in my mind to see who it could have been." A fortnight later she purchased the trophy for the Club Person Of The Year for the South Taranaki Car Club. "I had organised the trophies and the engraving, especially liking that particular one. One of the Committee Member's was in New Plymouth and said he would pick them up for me and asked for the list to check all was correct – I would normally do that. On the night I won it."

Keep an eye out for the Cameron's and their L1L EVO on the Catlins Coast Rally – they will be driving hard out and you may just get a lolly for being there.

The rally will begin adjacent to Owaka Motors in Campbell Street, Owaka, at 10am on the day with competitors facing six high speed Special Stages over a total of 150 kilometres before the event concludes in Owaka at 3.44pm. The rally is Round 6 of the MRF Tyres Mainland Rally Championship and part of the Eastern Southland Car Club Rally Championship.

Major support for the 2018 Catlins Coast Rally comes from Rosebank Lodge Balclutha, Fulton Hogan, Owaka Motors, Yuasa Batteries and Stadium Finance.



Mike and Helen Cameron in L1L EVO at the Nelson Rally in 2007 while Helen was learning to read notes, Regan Ross in his Subaru WRX that cannot be seen here passed the Cameron's on Helen's side of the car within 100 metres "exciting stuff" – Photo Lance Hastie



Special Stage 11 at Levels in the 2018 South Canterbury Rally this year Photo Andrew & Lyn Humphry.

Lindsay Beer
Publicity Officer
Catlins Coast Rally
021 351 499

For further comment: Roger Laird 03 208 5247 / 0274 368 876