

# MEDIA RELEASE

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### REIGNING NEW ZEALAND CHAMPION TO COMPETE AT CATLINS

New Zealand Rally Champion, Ben Hunt of Auckland, will take to the roads of the Catlins when the twentieth anniversary Catlins Coast Rally takes place on Saturday 8 August.

This is the second time Hunt has come to Catlins as the reigning New Zealand Champion. After he won his first national title in 2015, he competed at Catlins the following year in a Subaru Impreza H6 loaned to him by Jeff Judd, finishing seventh in a year plagued by icy, snowy, conditions.

Hunt has fashioned an outstanding record at the pinnacle of New Zealand rallying since his last Catlins appearance. He had a horror run in the 2016 NZRC but since then he has finished third in 2017 and second in 2018 before winning the title again last year. Other successes in a stellar career include winning the inaugural Rally NZ Rising Stars Scholarship in 2009 plus the Junior National Rally Championship and the 2-wheel-drive National Rally Championship early in his career.

The opportunity to defend his national crown this year was stymied by Covid-19 when the 2020 NZ Rally Championship was cancelled. "It is a definite shame," says Hunt, "but you can't change what's happening in the world, safety is more important than skids! We put a lot of effort into the Subaru for this year but we haven't taken it out. We will do some testing for next year at some stage though."

Without his national programme there was an opportunity to return to Catlins and Hunt will do so as the reigning New Zealand Rally Champion in another Jeff Judd Subaru Impreza H6, a 6 cylinder, normally aspirated, 4-wheel-drive car. "They are a cool little package," says Hunt. "It takes me back a bit to nimble cars. They are not the most powerful but they are a lot of fun. Of course, I am originally from the South Island hailing from Nelson so it is cool to go back to the South Island. I can't wait."

Hunt says his 2016 Catlins experience was "awesome." "That year's Catlins Rally was characterised by snow and ice but Hunt says it did not bother him. "Around the St Arnaud, Lake Rotoiti area we are used to snow and ice. It was a lot of fun. It was like night rallying – a different element. That's why we go rallying. It is not a tarmac track. We experience everything. That is part of the attraction. The roads in the Catlins are amazing. In 2016 it was snowy and icy in the hills in the morning and in the afternoon near the coast it was beautiful. I have always wanted to go back. The cancellation of the New Zealand Championship gave me the opportunity."

"I'm coming down with a bunch of mates who love rallying plus Craig Hewlett (part of Hunt's crew) is down there. We will have skids, have fun and have a beer afterwards. The Eastern Southland Car Club helped me get there in 2016 and it is a fantastic event, I am really looking forward to it."

The rally will commence at 10.00am on Saturday 8 August adjacent to Owaka Motors and will feature approximately 153 km of high-speed Special Stages at Puaho, Catlins Valley, McNab's Farm, Tawanui, Cannibal Bay and Romahapa.

The event will conclude at Owaka at 3.40pm that afternoon.

The Eastern Southland Car Club is delighted to have the support of the Clutha Licensing Trust through their Rosebank Lodge Balclutha establishment, plus Southroads, Owaka Motors, Yuasa Batteries and Stadium Finance. The club is also especially grateful to Rayonier Matariki Forests, the Clutha District Council and the McNab Family for their assistance with the event.



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Photograph – Ben Hunt / Tony Rawstorn in their Subaru WRX sti in action during the 2019 Brian Green Property Group New Zealand Rally Championship  
Photo - Scott Johnson