



MEDIA RELEASE

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PARSONS COMES SOUTH TO TACKLE ICONIC EVENT

Each year the Catlins Coast Rally, organised by the Eastern Southland Car Club, attracts exciting entries from far and wide and this year one of those is Mark Parsons of Drury, south of Auckland.

His journey to the event, which takes place on Saturday 11 August actually started in 1990 when Parsons tackled the 21st Anniversary Silver Fern Rally in a Holden Monaro. "It was a lot of fun and my first experience of South Island roads. I wanted to come back and study them in more detail and now I am back." There was a 2006 appearance at Otago in the car Parsons is synonymous with, a V8 powered Triumph TR7, which whet the appetite further and this year he has leased a car from Jeff Judd of Magnum Motorsport and has tackled several South Island events. "Rallying to me is an adventure from the time you leave home until you return. That is how it was in the 70's and 80's but we have lost that in the North Island. South Island rallying and events like Catlins are growing and going from strength to strength." Parsons co-driver for Catlins and his next event at Hanmer is long time mate, co-driver, mechanical preparer and sponsor, Mal Clark of Bygone Autos. The pair have driven and co-driven for each other, often in each other's cars for many years.

Parsons has a wealth of motorsport experience, much of it at the wheel of big, powerful, exciting cars. He started out co-driving in 1971 and his first drive came in 1975 on his 21st birthday when he tackled the Woodhill Rally in a Holden Monaro. "They are great cars, I learnt a lot," he says.

A Mazda RX3 was next and a big season was had in 1978 with a win in the Riverhead Rally and a lot of top five's. 'Unfortunately there was no Top Half Championship in those days,' says Mark.

Parsons had a season off and sold the car to buy a house before re-entering the sport with the ex-Jim Richards/Rod Coppins L34 Torana that had placed third at Bathurst. "It had been converted to a road car but I put a cage in it and finished third overall in a Pukekohe Car Club rally." The ex-Andy Walker MK1 RS1600 Escort fitted with a 1700cc BDA followed and so did more success. Over a four-year period Parsons won the Riverhead and Maramarua Rally's and in 1983, the Top Half Championship. In the next part of his career he drove a lot of cars for other people, lower powered cars in which he learnt a lot. The Escort was sold to Graham Lorimer and Parsons took five years off although he did co-drive a lot in that time.

The car that Parsons will always be best known for is his Triumph TR7 V8. "I got it 29 years ago, in 1989. I used it on tarmac in the early days and never did much gravel as I didn't want to knock it around." Parsons has used the TR7 in several Targa events including Targa Tasmania in 1996 and 97. "We were sitting fourth outright in 96 when we broke an axle on the last day but we returned the next year and finished third outright and first on handicap. I stood on the podium with Jim Richards which was the highlight of my career."

Parsons also won a Targa Bambina in New Zealand in the TR7 while he was second in Targa New Zealand one year in a Torana XU1 with Greg Kirkham. He also spent three years co-driving for Kirkham in 1997, 98 and 99 winning the Top Half Championship as a co-driver to complete a rare double in New Zealand rallying of winning a championship as a driver and then as a co-driver.

After a colourful career which also includes time working in England for kiwi Grant Clearwater, Parsons is now competing in South Island events in a Subaru GC8 H6, a 6 cylinder normally aspirated car. "It's a little unusual, Jeff's is one of the first but there is a few more thinking about

them. Big ups to Juddy, he is making our campaign so much easier and he is so good to deal with.” He also has praise for Stadium Cars owner, Tony Gosling – “his enthusiasm for rallying is rubbing off on people in the South Island and he has done so much with drivers like Hayden Paddon and Dave Holder. He is doing probably even more than we know for the sport.”

He is looking forward to Catlins, “Assistant Clerk Of The Course Roger Laird has been so supportive.” A note accompanying Parsons entry to the event simply says, “I’m looking forward to coming down and sampling what has become an iconic New Zealand rally event.”

Even better is the possibility that if Parsons deems the roads are suitable for the TR7 we may see it at the Catlins Coast Rally in the future. “I haven’t rallied the TR7 for six years and it needs a freshen-up and a makeover, but I am keen to bring it back to the South Island.”

The Catlins Coast Rally takes place on Saturday 11 August and will begin from Owaka Motors Campbell Street, Owaka at 10am. Competitors will tackle 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.

Photos:



The 1995 Subaru GC8 H6 in action in the recent South Canterbury Rally with Mark Parsons at the wheel - please credit Kevin Corin



The Mark Parsons press on style in the Triumph TR7 V8 on the way to third outright and handicap honours in the 1997 Targa Tasmania.

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