

MEDIA RELEASE

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A SOUTHERNER RETURNS



Neil Dodds cut his teeth rallying down south. Originally from Dunedin he started competing when he was fifteen and contested rallies throughout Otago and Southland for the next few years. Now domiciled in Gisborne he has ventured south for the Rally Of Otago for the past two years and this year he will tackle the Catlins Coast Rally, scheduled to take place on Saturday 12 August, for the first time.

“I started out in a Datsun 1600 and had many vehicles over the years – Datsun 1600’s, Datsun 1200’s, Ford Escort’s and Mazda RX3’s. I did the Wyndham Rally, the Gore Rally, Claytons Rally’s – I was second behind one of the McKay boys one year – and the Rally Of Southland when it was a National Round. I rallied until I was about thirty-two. I stopped when I went to learn how to fly helicopters,” says Dodds who now runs the Eastland Community Trust Rescue Helicopter service. “I’ve been doing that for about 15 or 16 years now. It is great giving something back to the community. I love it. We do night vision work and long line recovery. Before that I had jobs such as a Sales Rep and Jet Boat driver.”

Rallying is Dodds other passion and he got back into it 4 or 5 years ago. He has built “Rally HQ” on his property – a 205 square metre shed that houses his rally car collection from the AE86 turbocharged Toyota Corolla that he will bring to Catlins plus a Datsun 1600 P510 that is undergoing a rebuild and a TE71 Corolla that he purchased as a wreck and rebuilt from the ground up. Classic 2-wheel-drive cars are his love. “When I came back from overseas I had a Subaru RS Legacy. We went pretty good, but shit I was bored!” The 4-wheel-drive car lasted just one year.

“In recent times we have done the Otago, Tauranga and Gisborne rallies. My younger brother has co-driven with me. However my fiancée Rachel Davis will co-drive at Catlins.”

Dodds has chosen to do Catlins as he is keen to “tick it off the list.” “It made sense. We did Otago and left the car down south. I know how well the Eastern Southland Car Club run events and it is a place that offers some of the best roads in New Zealand. It’s a family affair too. My brother-in-law Wayne Scott from Dunedin services for me and my younger brother will come from Queenstown to service as well. The goal is simply to throw some stones around, enjoy some cool scenery and make it to the end.”

While he lived down south for some time he is not particularly familiar with the roads of the Catlins. “I have driven through Owaka once,” he says.

Dodds has many great memories from his rally career but he lists two very special moments. “Doing the Whare Flat stage in Rally Otago was one. I once lived just 3 kilometres away and it was like driving through the back garden which was really quite cool.” He laughs as he recalls another enjoyable memory. “One of my mates lent me his BDA Escort to do the Rally Of

Southland one year. It was fantastic. He was brave enough to give me the drive and brave enough to sit beside me in the event as well!”

The 2017 Catlins Coast Rally is Round 5 of the Clearwater Painting Mainland Rally Championship and also a points round for the ESCC Rally Championship Trophy.

The event is scheduled to depart from Owaka Motors in Campbell Street, Owaka at 10am on 12 August. The rally will be based in Owaka this year with servicing of the rally cars taking place in the township between stages. Six Special Stages await competitors before the rally finishes in Owaka at approximately 3.44pm.

Major support for the 2017 Catlins Coast Rally comes from Rosebank Lodge Balclutha, Fulton Hogan, Owaka Motors, Yuasa Batteries and Stadium Finance.



Lindsay Beer

On behalf of the Eastern Southland Car Club

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Photograph – Neil Dodds in action in the AE86 turbocharged Toyota Corolla he will drive in the Catlins Coast Rally on Saturday 12 August. (Photo Credit – Euan Cameron)