

# **MEDIA RELEASE**

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### **TWO TIME WINNER BACK TO ADD TO CATLINS RECORD**

Gore driver Andrew Graves has a phenomenal record in the Catlins Coast Rally and he will be looking to extend his run of success when he lines up for the 2017 event on Saturday 12 August.

Graves, winner of the event in 2010 and 2013 in his venerable Mitsubishi EVO 3, could count himself unlucky not to have added a third victory last year when as the top seed he encountered the worst of the treacherous conditions in the icy stages. After the first stage he was in a lowly thirty-fifth place, nearly one and a half minutes behind the leader. However as the conditions improved he stormed back into contention eventually finishing second, 33.9 seconds behind the winner, Vaughan Edie of Invercargill.

“We were the first guinea pig and we just had to make the best of a tough day,” said Graves as he contemplated the 2017 event. “I was absolutely rapt with second. I tried my hardest over the last four or five stages. We were taking time out of the lead and we even set some new stage records which was awesome. We just ran out of day to catch Vaughan although he kept his nose clean in the conditions so all credit to him.”

Graves is looking forward to this year’s event although he is hoping for better weather. His strike rate in the sport is impressive. In addition to his two wins and last year’s second place he also finished third in 2011 and second in 2012 at Catlins. He has also won the Eastern Southland Car Club’s Rankleburn Rally on two occasions, in 2012 and 2014 while he finished second in that event in 2015 with his then 12-year-old son Hayden alongside.

Two things stand out about Graves rallying efforts. One is the fact that he does not get behind the wheel all that often, part of the reason being that he is also a highly regarded rally co-driver. He actually won another Catlins Rally back in 2005 when he was a co-driver for Derek Ayson. He also rode shotgun for Tony Quinn in 2014 and 2015 and currently co-drives for Josh Marston as part of the Holden Rally Team in the National Rally Championship, his next mission after Catlins being co-driver duties for Marston at the Rally Of Coromandel.

Since last year’s rally he has competed, and won the Eastern Southland Car Club’s Dusky Forest Rally in November and more recently he won the Otago Sports Car Club’s Circle Hill Rallysprint by .3 of a second after a great battle with good mate Jeff Judd. “That was great, we have a good friendship and we had a good battle all day.” Those two events are his only competitive driving since last year’s Catlins Rally.

The other unique feature of Graves’ career is that he does not possess the state of the art equipment of some of his rivals. His EVO 3 is an older car but in it he more than holds his own. “You have to credit my mechanics, Lindsay Tressler and new man Murray Harris. The key is preventative maintenance and not over thinking things, just keeping it simple.”

While he would dearly love another win this year at Catlins he acknowledges it will not be easy. “There will be plenty of stiff competition.” However you just know that despite his lack of miles and the fact he is in one of the older cars in the top ten he will definitely be a factor in this year’s event.

The 2017 Catlins Coast Rally is Round 5 of the Stadium Finance 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  
03 217 4288/021 351 499

For further comment: Roger Laird – Eastern Southland Car Club – 0274 368 876



Andrew Graves in action in his Mitsubishi EVO 3 in last year's Catlins Coast Rally – Photo Euan Cameron