

MEDIA RELEASE

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MEMORIAL TO ROBINSON INSPIRES KEAST COMEBACK

Invercargill rally driver John Keast last competed in a rally in 2014 and did his last motorsport event at the Ben Nevis Hillclimb in 2020 but he will cross the startline at Wyndham on Saturday 7 October when the Wyndham Rally is resurrected with the running of the MLT Barry Robinson Memorial Wyndham Rally.

Keast was inspired to enter because of the memorial to Barry Robinson. Keast first came across Barry when the latter was running in a Triumph Vitesse and the pair struck up a fairly good relationship. John also did a bit of rallying with Barry's brother Darryl. Keast even co-drove for Barry when he was running a Viva in the West Coast Rally. The pair also worked together in a workshop in Winton building Barry's Chevette rally car. "We would have a cup of coffee and Barry would have about thirty San Remo's." At one point during the build Barry and John were at the top of the South Island and they took a trip across to Wellington to the GM Motors workshop where Peter Parnell was building two works Chevette's. "On the way home Barry was adamant that his car would be built to the KISS principles – Keep it Simple Stupid rather than being too sophisticated. When we were building the Chevette, Barry would turn up at quarter to three, have a coffee and two San Remo's and we would work on to 10 or 11 at night."

Keast remembers the year Barry finished second in the National Championship, a championship he would have won if he had finished the final rally in Auckland. "At the Rally Of Southland that year some of the hot shots from further north were a bit quicker than Barry on a couple of stages. He couldn't quite figure it out and reckoned they had been down practicing before the rally to get that sort of speed. At that final round the engine expired early in the rally and Barry got out of the car and kicked the door and it broke the window in the door. That upset him even more and three hours later he was still annoyed because that was entirely his fault. Ironically even being out of the rally early, one by one some of his main opponents dropped out during the event and Barry realised that he could still win. Barry would still win the National Championship if Malcolm Stewart didn't win the last stage." They watched and reckoned that Malcolm wasn't going that quick but Stewart did indeed take it out and Barry was the runner-up in the championship.

John drove several of the old Wyndham Rallies including the first one in 1977. "It was always an event I looked forward to. It was a fun day but with serious competition. They were fantastic roads. It was always like an international rally at club level. My best result there was a second. I should have won that one."

Keast's son George is a regular rally competitor but only once have they competed in the same event. "He kicked my arse," says John. At the moment John is entered in the family MKII Escort and George the MKI but that could change before the event.

The rally will be centred on the township of Wyndham, 45 kilometres east of Invercargill and 25km south of Gore. It will start at the MLT Three Rivers Hotel in Redan Street, Wyndham at 9.30am on Saturday 7 October from where competitors will embark on five Special Stages consisting of 126km of magic, gravel special stages with no stage repeated throughout the day.

The rally then ends where it began, at the MLT Three Rivers Hotel in Wyndham after 126km of Special Stage competition linked by 110km of touring stage mileage.

With the start and finish plus two Service Parks in Wyndham, the township will be a real focal point of the event.

The event prizegiving will take place in Gore at the MLT Croydon Lodge with the winning crew awarded the Barry Robinson Memorial Trophy. The rally also carries points toward the Eastern Southland Car Club Rally Championship.

Rally Secretary, Roger Laird says, "we are delighted to have the support of Matura Licensing Trust, as our naming sponsor, plus that of Traffic Management Services, Rayonier NZ, the Southland District Council, Gore District Council, Prime Range Fresh Shop Lorneville, Matt McRae and the landowners on the rally route plus of course all of our Special Stage sponsors.

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Photograph – John Keast in action in his MKII Ford Escort.