



**BNT Mason
Motorsport**

3rd September 2008

The 2008 Rally of New Zealand lived up to expectations as being a mixed bag event. We were anxious leading up to the event, having no idea how the control tyres would go. Come the event, Richard adapted his driving style quickly to storm through the stages and take a commanding lead against some of the worlds best in our class. However our excellent weekend was finished with an ill feeling of 'close but no cigar'....

RALLY NEW ZEALAND—PRE EVENT

Leading up to the event our biggest concern was tyres, which we consider are one of the most important components of the car. This year there is a requirement for all 4WD competitors of a world rally championship round to run a Pirelli control tyre. This event a hard compound (Scorpion tyre) was designated, these are really heavy and we were also not allowed to groove them. Our biggest concern was a lack of testing on the tyre, with us only casting our eyes over some the day before shakedown. We asked around the service park to try to gain any information we could on car set up but pretty much we were left out in the open with a feeling of anxiousness and 'hit and miss' mentality. Our goal for the first few stages was to take it easy and come to grips with the tyres as fast as possible. Adapting was going to be the key to the rally. We were car 39 (number 61) on the road, 54min behind Sebastien Loeb and 10 cars behind the NZRC leader (with us being first non PWRC seed).

RALLY OF NEW ZEALAND—DAY 1

Friday dawned fine and driving up to the start line of stage 1—Pirongia West, the feeling was one of uneasiness. We had no idea what to expect, which was a strange feeling! Because the tyres are so hard, we had to really warm them up before the stage start to get them softer and gripping the road. '54321' we were off, all was going well up to the first corner then it was 'woooooow' as the back snapped out and we got our first attempt of a competitive corner on the tyres. First corner over and Richard now knowing where we were at, we were off! He changed his style straight away to suit the tyres, starting the stage off quite sideways to get the heat into the tyres then driving to ensure they stayed hot for the rest.

Over the finish we had no idea whether our time was good, the stage felt good but the truth is in the times. We were pleasantly surprised to get 1st equal group N with Nutahara and 12th overall!

The next stage up was Waitomo which had to be cut in two due to a slip taking out a section of the road. This suited us fine, it broke up the 44km into two technically different sections, one 25.8km long, made up of fairly fast roads and open corners and the other 17.4km composed of tight and twisty 'motu' like corners. We entered stage 2.1 with still a glint of apprehension. This quickly passed as we just concentrated on getting through as fast as possible. By the end we got second fastest group N time but more surprisingly we were 14th overall, sandwiched between two world rally cars—the Suzuki of Gardemeister in front of us by 2.8seconds and Rautenbach in his Citroen behind us by .3 of a second. We now had a 31.6second lead on the next New Zealander and couldn't wait to get stuck in to stage 2.2 which, with its more twisty nature, suited our Subaru more than the previous two.

Waitomo 2.2 went incredibly well, better than we could have ever hoped for. Taking no crazy risks, we got 10th overall for the stage, only .7seconds/km slower than the winner of the stage (Hirvonen). We were only 1.2seconds behind Chris Atkinson in the WRC Subaru and ahead of Gardemeister and Petter Solberg (by 10.2seconds!).



DAY 1 CONTINUED...

We knew our time was correct due to our stopwatch but wondered if they'd miss-timed the world rally cars — apparently they hadn't! We suddenly found ourselves 13th overall, leading Group N, leading New Zealander (by almost a minute) and on a real high!

After giving the car a freshen up at service, we returned to the Pirongia West stage held previously that day. It was from here we began our great little battle for stage wins with Fins Juho Hanninen and Mikko Markkula. They got us by .1 of a second through here, although together we were 10seconds quicker than the next group N car. Due to Hanninen crashing in the first stage, he was already way down on time so it wouldn't affect our results if he did well.

We only managed third Group N in the Waitomo 4.1, but we were now only 5seconds behind the WRC Citroen just in front in 11th overall. In Waitomo 4.2 we didn't repeat our mornings performance but still finished a solid 2nd behind the fast and furious Hanninen. All that was left to do for the day now was to bring it home and complete the super special stage held around Mystery Creek events centre.

We found a disadvantage to running so far down the field when we entered this stage, the road was so bumpy and rough it reminded me of the worst roads we had driven on in China. We finished 22nd but still first Kiwi.

So overnight, we slept well. What an awesome day we had, we ended the day 12th overall, 1st Group N by over half a minute, first New Zealander by 1min 48seconds and we were only one day in to our three day adventure. Due to today counting for points for the NZ rally championship, we also took maximum points, having won every stage. Bring on Saturday!!!

RALLY OF NEW ZEALAND—DAY 2

This morning dawned drizzly. We decided to bolt new tyres on, due to reports of rain out at the stages and although the tyres were really expensive (\$2000 per set!), it was relatively cheaper than crashing due to running 'past their best' tyres.

The first up for the day is the really fast Port Waikato. We thought this stage was not going to be one of our strong ones, with the Mitsubishi's better suited to the fast. However it was still good enough to be first group N and not too far out of touch with the World Rally Cars immediately in front of us.

The next stage up was the 13.8km Possum. We found out going into here that our water spray was not working, this would cost us time in the stage as intake temperature would be much higher. We tried hard to fix it but to no avail. It didn't slow us down too much though, as we came out with a 12th overall time and beat Chris Atkinson in the Subaru WRC by 3.1seconds, in fact the gap separating us and 8th place was only 5.6seconds. We came out of the stage and realized we had a slow leak puncture so had to stop and change it. At this point in time we were still 12th overall and had been playing quite a game of cat and mouse with the WR car right in front, with the gap between us and him opening then closing stage by stage. Richard wanted to chase him, with the gap now 16.6 seconds. Behind us was the next Group N car but he was 54.7seconds behind. We had a great lead in the first New Zealander stakes, with the closest being over 2min behind.

DAY 2 CONTINUED...

Franklin was the next stage up and at 31.6km it was quite a long one too. We enjoyed this stage and had a good run, apart from having to go off the road to avoid a competitor who had stopped and was blocked across the road. We finished only .7 of a second behind the group N leader (so close over so many km!). It was good enough though to move us up in front of Rautenbach in the Citroen WRC in to 11th place and extend our group N lead to over 1 min.

The super special was up next and this turned out to be our worst stage so far. We hit a bump really hard about the 4th corner in and it managed to rip the tyre off the bead of the wheel! We had to drive the next 3km with practically only 3 tyres! Richard fought hard to get us through and we managed to lose not too much time—in fact still finishing 5th New Zealander. Rautenbach however got in front of us again and we were pushed back to 12th.

Next were Richards favorites... the Te Akau's. These stages are FAST! I'm still not sure how he manages to get our Subie hauling like he does through these two. In Te Akau South we were a lone Subaru packed between Mitsubishi's and World Rally Cars... we finished 2nd group N behind Hanninen.

Te Akau North went well, we never got to do this one at speed last year as our gearbox broke so I finally got to see it in competition.... Its fast! There was an interesting jump too, we hit it flat out in top gear and man did it jump! I'd love to see some photos or a video from it, it felt amazing in the car but I don't think the in-car camera would do it justice! We were first group N on this stage (first new Zealander by 17.9sec), however we didn't take the New Zealand record which is still held from Possum in his world rally car in 2001. It shows how fast these group N cars are though, with this stage the only one still in Possums name and last year Hanninen beat it by 10seconds... but not this year and not yet by a New Zealander. So to wrap up Day two, it was another excellent days rallying! We were 12th overall, Rautenbach pulled out a gap in front of us on the fast stages but behind we also had a good gap—1 min 23.5seconds back to the next group N and more surprisingly over 3min back to the closest New Zealander. We were amazed that we had so far been .7sec/km faster than the next New Zealander, that included doing the super special with only 3 tyres. We also won the day for the NZ Championship.

RALLY OF NEW ZEALAND—DAY 3

Richard and I had a talk on Saturday night and after much 'ummming' and 'arrring' we came up with a game plan for Sunday, the final day of the rally. We had big gaps in front and behind and although Richard would love to chase the WR cars in front we had to think tactically. We decided to drive slower but not to the point where we would cool the tyres down too much and in turn make it more dangerous than if we pushed hard! Today was to be all about balance and showing that pace is needed to be coupled with maturity.

The first stage of the day went to plan, we took it easy and made sure that there was no pressure on our position.

You know those 'however's' I was talking about last newsletter? Yeah well. HOWEVER, come Whaanga Coast everything went wrong... very wrong. The car felt way down on power off the line and after trying to persevere and analyze what was happening, 2km in we were forced to pull over with a suspected broken oil hose and blown turbo, we could go no further.

The disappointment I can tell you was and still is incredible. I was face to face with the most testing time in my 7 years of rallying... much worse than our rollover at Whangarei. We love this sport for the highs, but the only thing that makes the highs so great are the fact that the lows can be so heartbreaking. We were also told we cost someone \$20 who lost a bet that a New Zealander could win Group N... next time!

RALLY NEW ZEALAND WRAP-UP

Something we did notice at Rally NZ this year was that our top speeds were down on previous years, probably due to how heavy the control tyres are. Although the car got up to it quickly, 180kph was all our poor girl could do where as normally we would be closer to 200kph. The control tyre however doesn't seem to have affected the group N cars quite like the WR cars who were a long way off their records, with similar conditions compared to last year. We were happy to have a control tyre because it made such a better level playing field. Certain national and international competitors would other wise have run on expensive confidential factory tyres, which some still run in the NZ championship. It shows how good these tyres must be when you look at how much slower the WR cars are when not on them.

THANKS

I'd like to take this opportunity to congratulate Richard on a stunning drive. It was an honor to be able to sit next to someone setting the times he was. I couldn't believe how he managed to change his driving style so much to suit the tyres and still manage to feel comfortable to push on. Each stage was approached with thought and our car didn't get a scratch on it.

I'd like to congratulate our service crew on giving us an excellent car that was capable of occasionally keeping up with million dollar World Rally Cars! The car ran very well as we gave it its ultimate test on Friday and Saturday. Thanks to all our sponsors, without whom we wouldn't have stood a chance to stretch our legs—many thanks BNT!!!

Thanks to the timing guys, the rally ran very smoothly and I always love catching up with the crews and finding out what's going on when I get to time controls!

Thanks to the Meier team for help during the rally and in particular Anton for taking Greg up in the plane and following us all the way through some stages.

Thank you New Zealand and our international fans, your presence at Rally NZ was hard to miss and we hope we put on a good show for you. Rich and I were humbled by the many who stayed around for so long after the first car to watch us and even more so by the amount of people who wanted to help push our car over the finish ramp on Sunday.

JUNIOR DRIVERS

Andre and Jason started the rally with the hope of winning the NZRC Rookie title. This goal they achieved. Congratulations to them, it was an awesome way to start a national championship campaign. However, we weren't so happy to be spectating with them in Whaanga Coast... we heard on our fleetlink they had a small off a kilometer down the road from where we were and had to park up with a bent A-arm! However the corner we were on was great viewing—anyone that wants to see some action next time needs to be there. Whaanga coast ended up claiming 7 Subaru's and 3 WR cars!

Andre/Jason, Kirsty/Michele did a great job in that they all had their first attempt of writing notes for a rally. Although both had trying rallies, with Andre loosing a brake line and Kirsty loosing the centre diff. Kirsty withdrew on Sunday as their car is off to Malaysia two days after the rally and they had a bit of work to do to it. We wish them all the best at the Malaysia rally and hope they have a good run.

It has been very rewarding from our teams point of view to see both these teams grow over the year and we are sure they will continue to go from strength to strength.



NEXT ON THE AGENDA...

Every year that the WRC comes to New Zealand we have many people saying to us we need to be doing the Production World Rally Championship. We agree! We would love more than anything in the world to do it or to drive a world rally car if even just as a One-Off would be amazing. I think the PWRC would be a difficult championship, but what an adventure and what a challenge! We have the determination, the passion, the team, the car, the will and the desire. We are just lacking the last, rather important factor (\$\$\$). Anyone with any ideas or contacts, please drop us an email or call. I think that with all the lessons we have now learnt over the years, it is a challenge we and New Zealand are ready for.

So aside from our dreams what is next on the agenda? Rally Nelson. Congratulations to Hayden Paddon and John Kennard on winning the NZ championship, a steady and consistent year has rewarded them with success. We are currently 2nd and will be going to the last round of the championship, held in my old hometown Nelson on the 21st September.

Wrapping up the season to date we have actually had a great year, winning 3 out of the 5 rounds so far—winning all of the stages at Otago and bar that super special puncture would have won every stage of the NZRC at Rally New Zealand. The result just hasn't been there due to not getting any points at Whangarei or Hawkes Bay.

I'm going to drive my little old Levin in the Taupo Classic 2wd Rally held the weekend before Nelson rally and have some fun... Although the speed is going to feel incredibly slow having just had the ride of my life at Rally NZ!

2001 SUBARU TARMAc RALLY/RACE CAR FOR SALE

Newly built by BNT Mason Motorsport for targa/production racing series. Only used once in gravel trim (waitomo rally-4th overall with no notes) but selling in tarmac spec as originally intended. Clean white colour, blueprinted engine by ScottSpeed, Motec ECU, MCA tarmac suspension, chrome molly cage, large diameter Brembo brakes with 2 piece discs and new Endless pads etc etc. Wicked car in almost brand new condition, well under cost at \$45,000. Phone Richard 027 244 1401. Car is similar to the one in the photo.



TV COVERAGE

Check out NZ championship coverage of Rally NZ day 1 on TV 1 this Sunday (7th September) from 5-6pm.

Day 2 coverage will be on Sunday 14th September from 5-6pm also.

www.richardmason.co.nz

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New Zealand Rally Championship Dates

- Rally Nelson 21st Sept