



BNT Mason Motorsport

9th June 2009

WHERE IS LADY LUCK!?!?!?

Some times you seem to never put a foot wrong, other times you can never put a foot right...

RALLY WHANGAREI

Leading up to the 2009 Rally of Whangarei, we spent many hours of preparation on the car and ourselves. We have had a bad run at Whangarei in the past; in 2006 with a puncture, 2007 retiring due to 5 out of 6 tyres being flat and kissing a rock wall, in 2008 due to rolling. This year our goal was a seemingly simple one—finish and still lead the NZRC by the rally's end. We came equipped with a good service crew; the BNT Subaru was in the experienced hands of Dwight, Spud, Nick, Hamish & Stu. It was great to have Stu back on board for this event as we all value his level head and finesse. We must also mention our extra service crew member, Rodney, who was allocated to us as part of an apprentice programme run by event sponsors Northtec. Rodney had a baptism of fire working with us and handled our fast services well. Murray Huband also needs a mention, he normally crews for us, however decided to take up the reins himself and was competing in his local event in his Subaru.

The rally was to bring with it a new challenge to previous years, with many of the stages being run in reverse or in different configuration. This year also saw the re-introduction of the famous Batley stage, last used many years ago in the WRC. The Rally Whangarei is quite different to other rallies in New Zealand, in that the rally is high speed but not due to the long straits like Otago, but a huge amount of 4th gear, medium speed corners. We were seeded as 8th in the field (due to the 7 APRC competitors getting preferential seeding as a group).

Pre rally Wednesday night started well, with a Mystery Mayoral Tour through Whangarei. Thursday was a long day of recce which went very well, the roads appeared in good condition with mostly medium gravel. On Friday, Richard woke early to take a young girl for a ride to school in the rally car. We then took some event sponsors for a ride in the rally car through the shakedown road, and were very pleased when (with Chicane's Greg Pike in the car) we took the top spot on shakedown times. Richard then competed in the Waka challenge, whereby a team of 5 NZ drivers paddled against a team of International drivers and junior drivers. New Zealand drivers won this too so the day ended with us gaining two first places already! After spending hours signing at the prevent display, we were ready to dispel our jinx and get on top of the Rally of Whangarei.



DAY 1

Day one started with Mangapai Caves, this stage includes about 2km of flat out tarmac and has a last section that is very fast over difficult crests and huge drops. In 2007 Emma had her huge crash near the end of this same road. We decided to take this stage with caution, carefully sticking to our tyre management plan, and we eased our way through the last 3km with those yucky crests and drops. This certainly is not one of my favourites!!! We were content with 4th place.

Next up was the 30km long Cassidy stage. This stage is great, its fast but flowing and not far from where we rolled in 2008. Richard enjoyed this stage and the times showed, we won it by 7.4 seconds and so took the lead of the rally by 1.9seconds.

Mititai was next, this stage was longer than Cassidy by 4km, however more interestingly I had the same number of pages in my notes which meant the stage was a lot higher speed. Even so, we still won it by a nice margin—10.7seconds and so extended our lead.

Next up was the super special stage, which is very similar to the shakedown road run on Friday. We missed out on winning it by .6 of a second.

After a service held at the Whangarei town basin, we headed back out to repeat the same 4 stages as this morning. Richard and I had been flat out all day, with our tyre management plan we were changing tyres left, right and centre between stages! This time through the stages, we would have no advantage to the cars in front as the road would be swept to the same standard so it was to be a more accurate indication of pace. However the repeat of the stages pretty much went the same as the first runs through!

This time we went faster through Mangapai caves, getting second overall. In Cassidy we took out a larger chunk than the first run, 13.8seconds. We also took a huge 33.3seconds off our first time through (more than 1second/km). The winning margin in Mititai was less, but more like where we thought it should be for such a high speed stage—0.9 second. It was still 24seconds faster than the first run though and had an average speed of 109km/h; this is quite huge when you consider that wasn't due to a high number of very long straights.

We stuffed up the hairpin on the final super special for the day and so only managed 6th fastest time.

So the conclusion of Day 1? We were stoked! And finally getting on top of our Whangarei Jinx! We led the international field by 25.1seconds and also took maximum NZ rally championship points. We had a great day's rallying, the BNT Subaru went well and we knew starting Day 2, we had a competitive package.



DAY 2

This morning we were again seeded 8th on the road. The game plan was to be very similar to day 1, keep ourselves out of trouble and preserve our tyres for a clean run to the finish.

Richard told me before the start of the rally that he enjoys the Waipu Gorge stage run the same format as this year, in reverse to previous years. We had a problem free run and posted fastest stage time.

Next up was Batley, I was looking forward to this one, having never competed on it myself I had heard many good things from when it was used in the WRC and remember spectating on it with dad. Richard warned me that it would probably not be suited to us due to large uphill climbs with high speed corners. However, he must have forgotten all of that once the start lights went out as he got his teeth stuck into it—winning it by 7seconds from Australian Brendan Reeves.

Wairere was next. This was the only stage we were able to do last year (as it was stage 1). We had a clean run through here, with no dramas. We again won it, this time by 3.7 seconds. Our lead for the NZRC day was now 21seconds and the rally overall was a huge **46.1seconds**.

The fast and furious Millbrook stage was to be the last stage before a service break back in Whangarei. We scraped through to win this one also, by .1 of a second.

So I'm sure you can imagine, we were pretty happy! The afternoon was to be a repeat of the same 4 stages and we could almost taste the champagne already. We had, by now won 8 out of the 10 real rally stages (or 12 if you count the super specials) and had a great lead.

Unlucky stage 13 however, was to transform all our feelings in an instant. It was with disappointment you can hardly describe, that we were forced to pull over early into the stage, in a huge amount of smoke and a blown turbo. We persevered and tried hard to clamp it off but it was no good and so we pulled over and parked up with an also broken down Chris West and Chris Cobham. We could only watch as we gifted the win to the next competitor in line. I guess 'frustrating' can best describe this end result, every member of our team put in so much effort and no-one put a foot wrong but in the end it came simply down to lady luck not being in our camp this weekend.

Interesting to note was we were towed out of the stage by our main sponsor, BNT general manager Greg Horne, and we wonder how many others would have sponsors that would do this. Richard told me it was also one of the best tows he has had!



JUNIOR DRIVER

On a high note, we must mention how proud we are of Kieran Hall and Peter Hart. These guys did such an awesome job at this rally. We are ecstatic to report they have qualified 2nd in the Pirelli Star Driver programme and so are one of only 4 crews in the Asia-Pacific region to have done so. Rally Australia is the final shootout round and so we hope they can gather the funding to compete there. They also got 3rd NZRC Group N for the rally (their first podium) and took maximum rookie points.

Its also great to see the enthusiasm of the other rookies and juniors in this year's championship!

THANKS

Huge thanks to Dwight, without a doubt the best Subaru tuner you can get. You gave us a great tune and left many wondering how you are able to get so much out of an engine as I'm sure they similarly thought when you tuned Possum's cars too... the comments were it sounded like a World Rally Car. Thanks Nick, Spud, Hamish, Rodney and Stu for an excellent weekend. It's great to know we have such trustable hands working on our car.

Thanks Chris, Mum and Dad Mason, Mum and Dad Randall and Greg and Pauline Horne for support and for being at the end of almost every stage!

One great thing about Whangarei rally, is the high level of organisation. Thanks to the timing crews, sponsors, marshals and event organisers. Taking our retirement out of it, we really enjoyed ourselves! It's also interesting to note that mum said the speed in carrying out a safety check after we didn't reach the first radio point in Waipu Gorge was excellent, its nice to know we are in good hands while in each stage.

Thanks to Greg Pike and the crew at Chicane for kitting us out in some awesome team wear—we recommend Chicane for high quality and smart looking clothing.

Thanks BNT, Subaru NZ, Fram, Dunlop, The PC Factory, B.W. O'Brien, Randall and Associates, Toms Auto Services, UCD Quality Foods, Murray Coote Suspension, ScottSpeed Performance Engines, Pagid, Health Kix Osteopathy and Andersons Meats for your continued support.

Lastly, a huge thanks to the hundreds of people who have emailed, called, text or popped in to work to extend their commiserations. It really brings it home to us just how many people are watching and supporting us and feel our highs and lows.



COMMENTS

We had an extra passenger on board for the rally—a care bear teddy was loaned to us to strap in for the weekend. Stu kindly kitted him out with a BNT FIA spec helmet. If the owners want him back before Wairarapa, please email me your address and I'll post him back... physically unharmed but possibly traumatized.



And this was his expression before the event!

Congratulations to Murray and Ben for getting 4th in the Clubmans rally and third in class! Well done guys.

Happy Birthday to Nick (on the 6th June) and Murray on the (7th of June).

I would also like to mention the crews in the competing cars that had large accidents. We wish Nicola Burley/Abbie Barrett, Daniel Harris/Darryn Green, Rob Wylie/Paul Turner a speedy recovery and we hope to see you all out there competing again soon.

WHAT ARE WE UP TO?

The car is back at Dwight's who will have a look and analyse what went wrong and why.

Wairarapa rally is next on the agenda on the 18-19th July. It's a rally we really enjoy and we see they are running it in exactly the same format as last year.

We are also looking into the viability of doing WRC Rally Australia as with no Rally NZ this year it's the only time we get to race against the best in the world. If anyone has some ideas as to how we can do this, please let us know, our contact details are below.

NZRC GOLD STAR POINTS

1	Hayden Paddon	200
2	Richard Mason	173
3	Emma Gilmour	162
4	Matt Jansen	105
5	Chris West	80
6	Kieran Hall	79

Unfortunately we have dropped back considerably in the NZRC points. Richard has commented the whole way along that this year, due to the points system, our championship is about consistency rather than speed, which is a shame considering we are in a sport seemingly focused around speed!

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Check out www.chrissport.co.nz for more detailed results and points



WHANGAREI PHOTOGRAPHS

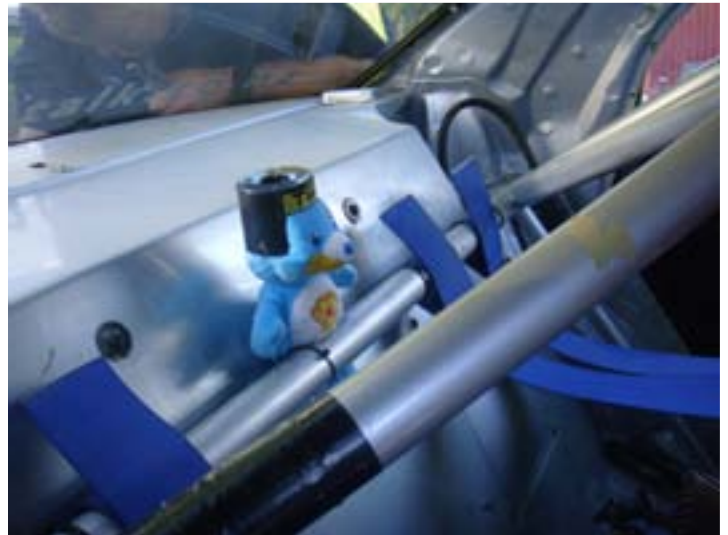


Teddy getting the pre rally briefing to sit down, shut up and hold on.

Strapped in and ready to rock ...



Richard (in the middle) just before the Waka race.



The BNT Subaru on song.
Courtesy of Euan Cameron