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CHRISTCHURCH DRIVERS SET FOR SILVER FERN RALLY

Nine Christchurch based rally teams are amongst the 54 entries preparing for the eight day NZ Silver Fern International Marathon Rally, which gets underway with a rally show and ceremonial start in Christchurch's Cathedral Square on October 15th. The competition stages commence on the morning of October 16th in the Geraldine area.

The event which features predominantly classic and two wheel drive rally cars has drawn 17 entrants from the UK, Europe and Australia including five times British Champion, Scotland's Jimmy McRae, who will drive a 1978 Ford Escort MKII.

Heading the field of starters for the 50 high speed gravel special stages on the 1200km marathon event is the 2006 Silver Fern event winner, Waikuku Farmer Brian Stokes. Previously Stokes was National Rally Champion in 1985 in an Escort and 1988 in a Sierra XR4x4.

Stokes won the 2006 event driving an "invitation entry" Escort Cosworth 4x4, but has built up a brand new "classic era looking" Ford Escort MKII to defend his Silver Fern title.

Stokes describes his new car as a "real weapon" with its 2.5litre injected Cosworth engine, six speed gearbox, and special suspension. The new all red Escort has been tested at Ruapuna Raceway, followed by a session on gravel, and he "is looking forward to the magic event which he says is an real adventure on the neatest roads in the world."

Starting from 5th will be Christchurch's Jeff Judd and Greg Kennedy also in an RS1800 Escort MKII, but in a more original set-up. Judd is always spectacular, and is prominent in both the classic Escort, or his Subaru Impreza which gained him the 2007 Rally Xtreme 4wd championship.



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Long time rally stalwart Brent Rawstron also from Christchurch, has sold the Porsche 911 he used to finish 6th in 2006, and will use one of his MKII Escorts, the left hand drive car last used by Michele Mouton at the 2008 Dunlop Otago Classic Rally in May. Rawstron who has been around rallying since 1974, and travelled the world competing in rallies, was the first Porsche finisher last event, but will have a bit more work to do amongst the field of Escorts this time. Rawstron starts from 11th.

Adding a four wheel drive pre 1992 class Subaru Legacy to the field will be Leigh and Josh Marston also from Christchurch. Marston's car is basically standard with strengthened suspension, and has been re-painted in the colours of his hero, the late Colin McRae's 1990 Subaru team car. Marston will start from position 16.

1970's and early 1980's British Rally Championship contender, and now resident of Akaroa, Willie Rutherford will drive the only Porsche 911 in the event, previously the Rawstron car. In 2006 there were seven of the classic rear engine, rear wheel drive cars entered. Rutherford says tongue in cheek, he's "coming out of retirement after 22 years to drive a nice simple car in an easy little event – should be fun."

Andrew Grundy with co-driver Mark Smith both from Christchurch will drive their Mazda RX7 from the number 28 starting position, while husband and wife team of Dean and Kennys Pester from Cust competed in the 2006 Silver Fern event, and return again with their Escort Mexico and will start from position 38.

Starting from 40th will be another Christchurch team, Merv Hatcher and James Cowles in their replica Group A Mitsubishi Starion Turbo, while Dermot Martin will start his front wheel drive Ford Focus from 44th in the field. Martin said he considered the 2006 event one of the best weeks of his life and is eagerly waiting for the start of the 2008 version.

The 2008 NZ Silver Fern International Marathon Rally, held over 8 day's in New Zealand's South Island, is the longest duration motor-sport event currently being held in NZ, and takes its roots from the Silver Fern and Heatway Rallies of the late 1960's and early 1970's.

The October 16th - 23rd 2008 event, will start in Christchurch's Cathedral Square, and take competitors south to Queenstown, Dunedin, and Invercargill, back to Dunedin, Timaru and Christchurch before finishing at the new Marlborough Convention Centre in Blenheim.

For event driver profiles, details and results on the rally visit:- www.silverfernally.co.nz

For further media information contact
Rally Media Manager - Paul Smith
Ph +64 274 852234

