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WAIKATO DRIVERS HEAD SOUTH FOR SILVER FERN RALLY

Five Waikato based rally teams are amongst the 56 entries for the eight day NZ Silver Fern International Marathon Rally, which gets underway in Christchurch on October 16th.

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 locally prepared 1978 Ford Escort MKII.

Hamilton's Mazda expert Charlie Evans and his Taupo co-driver Paul Matthews have converted Evan's RX7 from its specialist tarmac setup, to one which he says will be equally competitive on the 50, gravel, high speed special stages on the South Island event.

In the last 5 years of competition, on tarmac, Evans has never finished outside the top 4 overall. He will start the Silver Fern event from the number 9 position.

Silver Fern Rally chairman, Gary Smith (Hamilton) will drive in the event, as well as being one of the key organisers. He and his Wellington co-driver Richard Skilton have been seeded 41st, and will drive Smith's MKI BDA Ford Escort.

Smith's car has been built specially for the event with his two sons Troy and Adrian as project managers. The car was tried out for the first time on the recent Possum Bourne Memorial Rally, which was part of the Hamilton based Repco Rally NZ.

Gary is quoted as saying "I am extremely proud of the car that my two sons Troy and Adrian have provided me with, and I hope that I can live up to their expectations. It's been a very long time since I have driven one of these old cars and 1200kms of stages is a very long way."



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International marathon rally competitor, and Hamilton business owner, Nelson Marshall will use his Ford Capri RS3100, a similar car to the one he used on the 2006 Silver Fern event. Marshall has competed in the 2003 London to Sydney and 2006 Carrera Sudamericana marathon rallies, and enjoys endurance events which he says “allows plenty of time to sort the men from the boys”.

Marshall has been involved in motorsport since beginning in go-karts in 1962. Finishing 12th overall on the 2006 Silver Fern event, he and his Hamilton co-driver Allan Glenn will this time start from position 31.

Cambridge’s Donald McPherson and Warwick Levis have entered a Nissan Pulsar N14, which has been purpose built for the event, and will start the event from 46th position. Originally rallying in the UK in the 1970’s, McPherson has driven and co-driven many times on NZ’s Targa rallies.

The fifth of the Waikato entrants is another Hamiltonian, Ken Arnold who with co-driver Lynita Hill (Hamilton) who will drive a 1973 Toyota Corolla from the number 47 position in the field. Arnold is new to rallying, his first event just over a year ago in Tauranga.

The 2008 NZ Silver Fern International Marathon Rally, held over 8 days 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 details and the latest info on the rally visit:- www.silverfernally.co.nz

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Gary Smith's Ford Escort BDA & Charlie Evans Mazda RX7 – photos courtesy Steve Russell.

