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ESCORTS THE CHOICE OF CAR BY INTERNATIONAL COMPETITORS IN NEW ZEALAND SILVER FERN RALLY

Four weeks out from the start of the 2008 NZ Silver Fern International Marathon rally, one thing stands out with the international competitors, already signed up for the eight day October 16th – 23rd event, and that is their choice of rally car.

While it was Porsche's in the 2006 event, all but one of the twelve cars entered to date from the UK for the 2008 event, are Ford Escorts, in their various forms, from a MKI Mexico and RS1600's, through to GP4 MKII RS1800's.

Interestingly also four of the five Australians entered to date, will also be running Ford Escorts, with the John and David Hills father and son team returning with their colourful MKI RS1600 versions.

Former V8 Holden Monaro owners Keith and Mary-Ann Callinan has been "converted" to Escorts, after competing in last years Classic East African Safari Rally in one. They tried out their new car in the Dunlop Classic Otago Rally in May and commented "it sure doesn't chew through tyres like the big Monaro did!".

Like the UK and Australia, New Zealand's rally heritage began with English cars, and Ford's Escort models were extremely popular here, with Finnish driver Hannu Mikkola winning the 1973 Heatway Rally, and NZ's Mike Marshall the 1975 Heatway, the first International Rally win by a MKII Escort.

Escorts in the hands of the likes of Blair Robson, Jim Donald, Tony Teesdale, Paul Adams, Alan Mitchell, and many other competed successfully here in the 1970's and 1980's.



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Christchurch car owner and team manager Bryce Biggs, is currently looking after 3 cars, for UK based drivers, Jimmy McRae, MKII RS1800, Andrew Barnes, GP4 BDA and Peter Smith in a MKI RS2000. Biggs, who recently spent time talking with drivers in the UK, is continuing to work hard to place another driver in his "spare" car.

Englishman Ian Freestone (who builds Escort rally cars for a business) returns after a competitive 2006 event with his RS2000 MKI Escort. Freestone speaking from his home base recently commented "after a silly driver error which caused a crash on the 2007 Classic Safari, I'll be looking to finish well here."

Privateer Escorts coming from the UK include Keith Cornell (RS1800), Vincent Bristow (MKI Mexico), Grant Shand (RS1800), Simon Tysoe (RS1800), Stephen French (RS1800), while Jacob Scannell and Bruce Lyle will use locally built Escorts.

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 details and the latest info on the rally visit:- www.silverfernally.co.nz

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Grant Shand's (red) and Keith Cornell's (white) English Escort's being loaded for the trip to New Zealand

