

## Škoda claims third place in Rally of Otago



- › **Hunt flies into third place in Otago**
- › **Closer stage times in 2023 bode well for upcoming rallies**

**Škoda New Zealand, 6 April 2023** – New Zealand's 2023 Rally Championship season kicked off this weekend with the world-renowned Otago Rally. The Rally of Otago presents significant challenges for drivers and teams, with varied conditions making setup and composure critical. Škoda New Zealand Rally Team and driver Ben Hunt got to grips with the task at quickly following the off-season to claim third place overall.

"There's always a little trepidation after a long period out of the car, but the Fabia R5 felt as great as always. Very positive through corners so confidence grew and we're happy to have claimed a spot on the podium."

This was the first time in eight months that Hunt and co-driver Tony Rawstorn had been in the car together, and it took a few stages to find their form.

"Tony and I were probably more conservative in the early stages of the rally than I would usually be, and I stalled the car on a tarmac stage (SS4), and we lost about 19 seconds. But that was probably the kick in the butt we needed. It fired me up, and from there, we were operating at a more familiar pace and rhythm."

This confidence was reflected in the times, as Hunt claimed second place on several stages, finishing behind professional driver Hayden Paddon.

"It's always going to be a challenge competing against a professional driver who is in their car all the time, especially at their home rally. But we see positives with closer times to Hayden this year, especially on day 2."

Hunt and Rawstorn were the second fastest on all but two stages of day two and consistently within 10 seconds of Paddon, fresh off a round win in the European Rally Championship in March.

"I was suffering a bit with blocked sinus, which hurt times on SS10 and SS11, but I took some paracetamol at the service, and that helped."

The Škoda Fabia R5 also benefitted from some attention at that service. A Škoda Motorsport technician from Europe reviewed some data and updated the car's fuel and ignition map over the air, which helped to smooth driveability for Ben in the second half of the day.

"I think we got as close as 6 seconds to Hayden on one stage. That's closer than we were last year, with Hayden contesting the AP4 specification car. We feel like the Škoda Fabia R5 is within striking distance for the rallies ahead," says Hunt.



#### Press Images

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