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Ben Hunt second on debut in the FABIA R5



Photography credit to Geoff Ridder

- Hunt finishes second overall on debut with his ŠKODA FABIA R5 rally car.
- Hunt says ŠKODA FABIA R5 a huge step up from previous production spec rally car.
- Learnings from Otago will help improve performance in future events as Hunt's familiarity with the car grows.

ŠKODA New Zealand, 11 April 2022, ŠKODA New Zealand is celebrating a strong debut finish for Ben Hunt in his new ŠKODA FABIA R5 rally car, having placed second overall at the gruelling Rally of Otago this weekend.

The excellent result comes just weeks after the brand confirmed a local partnership with the two-time New Zealand Rally Champion.



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For Hunt, the result is validation he now has the equipment to challenge for future championships and to keep developing his rallying skillset with a globally recognised R5 rally car. It is also an impressive result considering he and co-driver, Tony Rawstorn, have only had very minimal proving time in the car to date.

“Heading into Otago, to be honest, we didn’t know exactly what to expect,” said Hunt. “For Tony and I, we only had a little over a day to shakedown and get a basic feel for the car, but not enough time to really gel with it.

“For the service team also it’s a radically different vehicle from my previous car: it’s a big learning curve all round. But once we got into the rally, the ŠKODA FABIA R5 was a dream to drive, and it does everything you want it to. I could feel my confidence build with each stage.”

ŠKODA New Zealand is delighted to see Ben associated with the brand and on the podium so quickly into the partnership.

“ŠKODA New Zealand couldn’t be happier with Ben’s result at Otago this weekend,” said General Manager of ŠKODA New Zealand, Rodney Gillard.

“To finish second on debut in a radically different car and with minimal seat time is truly an outstanding performance. It’s testament to both Ben and the FABIA R5, and this combination will be a force to be reckoned with in the domestic New Zealand Rally Championship.

“We’re excited to see the partnership build on this superb first outing. Not surprisingly, the ŠKODA FABIA R5 is the most popular factory-developed rally car of the current era, with more than 150 racing teams all over the world now using the platform and over 440 units of the ŠKODA Fabia in R5, Rally2 and Rally2 evo variants.

“It’s a timely success as we also confirm the exciting new FABIA to be launched in New Zealand later in 2022.”

Hunt says his team couldn’t fault the vehicle mechanically and the learnings gained from the first rally on the 2022 calendar will feed into future events including the International Rally of Whangārei in May.

“I think the biggest gains to be had are purely in building familiarity with the car,” he says.

“We need to simplify our pace notes somewhat going forward and we expect that will make a huge difference. In the ŠKODA FABIA R5 you can be flat out in corners you couldn’t be in my previous car. The speed we can now carry changes how Tony will create and read his notes. And obviously as we get more comfortable with those tweaks, we feel there’s more to unlock.”

Hunt has his eyes on a third New Zealand Rally Championship but says it is equally important to build confidence gradually.



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"It's a balancing act. You need to find the limits of the new car, but you also need to get as many seat miles in as possible to familiarise yourself," he says.

"Looking at stage times against the likes of Hayden Paddon in the AP4+ car, and obviously his years of international experience, I'm very happy with where we're at this early on with the ŠKODA FABIA R5. We're confident we can keep building incrementally from here."

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- › aims to be one of the five best-selling brands in Europe by 2030 with an attractive line-up in the entry-level segments and additional e-models.
- › is emerging as the leading European brand in India, Russia and North Africa.
- › currently offers its customers ten passenger-car series: the FABIA, RAPID, SCALA, OCTAVIA and SUPERB as well as the KAMIQ, KAROQ, KODIAQ, ENYAQ iV and KUSHAQ.
- › delivered over 870,000 vehicles to customers around the world in 2021.
- › has been a member of the Volkswagen Group for 30 years. The Volkswagen Group is one of the most successful vehicle manufacturers in the world.
- › independently manufactures and develops not only vehicles but also components such as engines and transmissions in association with the Group.
- › operates at three sites in the Czech Republic; manufactures in China, Slovakia and India primarily through Group partnerships.
- › employs more than 43,000 people globally and is active in over 100 markets.