

# Škoda New Zealand Rally Team third in New Zealand Rally Championship

- › **Škoda Fabia R5 cars claim second and third in the NZRC title**
- › **Ben Hunt finished the Bay of Plenty Rally in third behind Paddon and van Gisbergen**

**Škoda New Zealand, 16 October 2023** – Škoda New Zealand Rally Team and driver, Ben Hunt, have concluded the 2023 New Zealand Rally Championship in third place after a season of very close competition against some of the world's best drivers.

The Championship was decided at the weekend's Bay of Plenty Rally, where Hunt and Co Driver Tony Rawstorn finishing third behind Hayden Paddon / John Keynard and Shane van Gisbergen / Glen Weston. Battling visibility in the dust proved a challenge for all but the lead cars and a minor error on SS8 saw Hunt slip down the running order.

"We were actually having a great rally, everything was working well, and we were very happy with our times against Hayden and Shane, but it was very dusty, on SS8 I missed a corner and opted to head down an escape road to avoid hitting a bank. That broke my rhythm a bit and our pace wasn't where we wanted to be for the later stages of the rally. But happy to be the first home behind those two." Hunt said of the rally.

The 2023 Championship was ultimately won by professional rally driver, Haydon Paddon, who has claimed the event now seven times, while Supercar Champion, Shane van Gisbergen also demonstrated exceptional performance all year. But Ben Hunt is certainly not deterred by the challenge of matching the professionals.

"It's tough, of course, as an amateur, with a business, and a family, and modest budgets etc going against two drivers who are literally among the most respected drivers in the world. Hayden dominated both the NZRC and European Rally Championships this year and Shane set the world on fire doing what he does, but I have to say, in many ways I have enjoyed NZRC even more this year because of that." The former New Zealand Rally Champion said.

"To be chasing these guys and looking for every chance to improve and be close to their times has been really motivating for me. I have learned a lot and sure, winning would've been great, but I know I'm a better driver for competing against two drivers of their calibre, I think a few of us in the field feel that way and I will just carry that motivation into next year." Said Hunt.

“Seeing the little things Shane was doing following his recce runs and some of his processes as a professional (circuit) racer, has been interesting and we’ll look to adopt some of that methodology going forward.”

Two of the top three cars in the championship were Škoda Fabia R5 Rally cars with Raana Horan pipping Hunt and Co Driver, Tony Rawstorn for second place in the standings by just eight points.

“Coming off the road at the Rally of South Canterbury in the middle of the year hurt my championship battle this year, it happened late in the rally so I wasn’t able to get the car back into the competition and reclaim any points that round. We just missed out on second, but I loved the battle this year. We have scheduled engine rebuild ahead of the 2024 season, but I can’t wait to get back into the Fabia R5 for next year’s championship!” Said Hunt.

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