

Cruel luck ends Ben Hunt's charge in Rally of South Canterbury.

- **Ben Hunt Rally ends cruelly during 'Maximum Attack' push for bonus points**
- **Fellow Škoda driver, Raana Horan would go on to win the event**

Auckland, New Zealand, 22 June 2023 – Ben Hunt and the Škoda New Zealand Rally Team suffered a cruel setback in the Rally of South Canterbury this weekend, despite maintaining a commanding lead throughout most of the event.

During the first eight stages of the ten-stage Rally of South Canterbury, Ben Hunt and his co-driver, Tony Rawstone, were on track for a rally victory and a potential lead in the New Zealand Rally Championship, surpassing full-time professional driver Hayden Paddon. With Paddon unable to compete in the event, securing maximum points for the win, along with additional bonus points available in the power stage (Special Stage 9), would have put Hunt in a strong position to claim his third New Zealand Rally Championship.

Having already won five out of the eight stages, Hunt and Rawstone entered the power stage with an impressive 36-second lead for the entire event. However, what mattered most for the Championship were the extra five points available for winning the Rockwood Road Special Stage 9 power stage. Understanding the importance of this stage, Hunt knew that only a victory would give him the best chance of securing a historic Championship win. Settling for second place was not an option.

"In rallying, there's a well-known saying: 'To finish first, first you must finish.' All drivers understand this mantra very well. However, there are times when drivers must drive at what we call Maximum Attack—pushing themselves to the absolute limit and taking more risks in order to score rally or championship-changing points. "Tony and I knew that Stage 9 could be the difference between a third Rally Championship or second place. We've been in second place four or five times before. We went for the Championship," said Hunt.

Hunt pushed his Škoda Fabia R5 to its limits but misjudged a fast left-hand corner over a crest, causing the car to oversteer. Although Hunt managed to regain control of the slide, the section of road had a camber that tilted inwards, with a sharp camber in the opposite direction on the outer edge. Consequently, the car became stuck on a ridge, and despite no damage, the wheels were unable to regain traction.

In a stroke of unfortunate luck, Hunt and Rawstone had to witness their hard-earned lead evaporate.

"It's gutting, to be honest," said Hunt after the rally. "The Škoda New Zealand Rally Team put in a massive effort to give me the best chance today, and we had to go for the bonus points. If the car hadn't come to rest in such an awkward position and we had managed to keep going, I believe we would still have been in contention for the stage. Motorsport can be unforgiving at times, but we will regroup and aim to grab as many points as possible for the remainder of the Championship."

Despite the Did Not Finish (DNF) result and zero points from the South Canterbury rally, Hunt maintains his position in third overall in the New Zealand Rally Championship standings.

Fellow Škoda driver, Raana Horan would claim victory in his Fabia R5 and now sits second overall in the Championship.



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