

Podium Finish for Ben Hunt in Rally of South Canterbury



- **Just 0.3 seconds separated Ben Hunt from a second-place finish**
- **Hunt filled with confidence after what he feels is one of his best drives in the Škoda Fabia R5**

Auckland, New Zealand, 13 May 2024 – It was third place by the narrowest of margins for Ben Hunt and the Škoda New Zealand Rally Team in the Rally of South Canterbury this weekend. Despite missing out on a higher finishing by just 0.3 seconds, Ben Hunt is very happy overall with his and the Škoda Fabia R5's performance in South Canterbury.

"I could be gutted by missing out on second by such a slim amount, but I'm really not. I had an awesome rally and I don't think we could've gone any faster without risking the car, and the battle I had with Robbie (Stokes) in his Ford was pretty epic. It's rallies like this one where you're reminded of why you got into the sport in the first place, I felt really connected with the car, the conditions were perfect and we had the pressure on us all day. That is what good rallying is all about. It was one of the most enjoyable rallies I've had in ages, I really loved it." Said Hunt.

Hunt came straight out the gate at full attack, but he and Co-Driver Tony Rawstone dialed that intensity back on SS3 intentionally.

“SS3 was probably the one stage where we felt we need to be more conservative to ensure we didn’t have an off or damage the car. As they say in rallying, to finish first, first you must finish! After two blinding stages that change stuffed up my rhythm a little, I had a stall on a hairpin turn and lost about seven or eight seconds. But from there we went back into attack mode, the car was brilliant on the South Canterbury roads, I feel really comfortable we extracted everything from the car this rally.”

The rally was won by New Zealand’s only full-time professional rally driver, Haydon Paddon, who was also on home turf. But the championship battle is still very much between Ben Hunt and Robbie Stokes. Stokes currently leads the New Zealand Rally Championship (NZRC) with 61 points to Hunt’s 57. Paddon has 30 points.

The championship battle heads south in July for the Southern Lights Rally in Invercargill. It’s an event that hasn’t been part of the NZRC for nearly two decades so it will be an interesting challenge for all competitors. The Škoda New Zealand Rally Team Fabia R5 is remaining in the South Island ahead of Invercargill where Hunt will resume his fight for a third New Zealand Rally Championship.

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