

## Ben Hunt flies into second in Whangārei

- › **Hunt “at home” behind the wheel of the Škoda Fabia R5 in his second season in the car**
- › **Aside from a minor blow-off valve issue for 2 stages, the Škoda Fabia R5 drove flawlessly**

**Auckland, New Zealand, 16. May 2023** – Škoda New Zealand Rally Team driver Ben Hunt was in his element during a shortened International Rally of Whangārei, claiming the second step on the podium this weekend.

With six previous wins at Whangārei, full time professional driver, Hayden Paddon was always going to be the one to beat, but Hunt’s signature smooth and consistent driving technique ensured he was within striking distance should Paddon have had an issue.

Fellow Škoda driver, Rana Horan and Supercar ace Shane van Gisbergen also laid down the gauntlet, both laying down fast stage times throughout the event. But Hunt and Co-driver Tony Rawstorne held focus and stayed consistent across all stages and took the podium, behind Paddon, but clear of Horan.

With two stages cancelled and torrential rain in the days leading up to the event, it was anticipated the road conditions were going to be slippery, Hunt was surprised at how well they had dried out.

“Nah, the roads were actually mint! Definitely if you dropped too far into a rut or came off the road at all you knew it had rained heavily, but we were surprised at how firm the surface underneath was, there was even dust at times, fantastic rallying conditions, suited the nimble Škoda Fabia R5 perfectly.”

Now in the second season piloting the Fabia, Hunt is now at home behind the wheel.

“I’m one with the car this year, where last year I was still getting used to the shorter car, the wheelbase and how it put power down to the road. It was very different to past cars I had rallied, but now I feel comfortable and it’s just awesome to drive.”

Aside from a minor blow-off valve issue, the Škoda Fabia R5 ran faultlessly.

“The turbo blow off valve was bleeding off a little boost and we had to drive through that on stages 3 and 4, but we kept the engine revs higher so boost couldn’t drop too far. Again, my familiarity with the Fabia R5 this season really helped, I have the confidence in the car to adapt my style slightly to suit changing situations.”

“The team also brought some setup data from last year into Whangārei so that helped too, the more I drive the Fabia, the more I love driving it.”

Hunt is excited about heading to South Canterbury for the next round of the New Zealand Rally Championship on the 17 June.

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