

# Škoda New Zealand Rally Team secure lead in the NZ Rally Championship



- › **Ben Hunt has claimed an 18-point advantage over Hayden Paddon after the Daybreaker Rally**
- › **With just two rounds remaining, composure will be key for Hunt's championship chances.**

Auckland, New Zealand, 17 September 2024 – Škoda New Zealand Rally Team driver, Ben Hunt is thrilled to be leading the New Zealand Rally Championship after a Palmerston North's Daybreaker rally event, which tests teams with night stages and technical roads.

Hunt and Co-driver, Tony Rawstorne, came out of the mid-season break with just a one point difference in the championship between rival Robbie Stokes and knew clean driving and flawless execution was going to be required to stay in the championship chase for the final three events in the championship. And Hunt couldn't be happier with the outcome after the Daybreaker Rally and finishing with an 18 point lead.

"It's been a very tough championship so far, with Robbie and I really pushing each other round after round, you have to drive your own rally and keep a level head, but knowing there's nothing in it points wise, especially now in the back half of the championship, you don't want to be taking risks. As a team we know how to just execute and focus on the task at hand so well. And with the Fabia Rally 2 car running very well, it all came together to make the Daybreaker rally a joy to contest."

"Daybreak is a very tight and technical rally, which took time to settle into after the past three rounds in the South Island being so fast and open, as well as the night stages, which were awesome in the Škoda."

Following the opening Super Special Stage at Trust Arena the night before, SS1 and SS2 were, as the Rally's name suggests, before dawn. But the darkness didn't impede Hunt's charge and he went 2nd fastest on those stages. With Robbie Stokes experiencing mechanical failure an exciting duel emerged between Hunt and fellow Škoda driver, Zeal Jones.

"I feel for Robbie who had mechanical issues, but also great to see Zeal at the front of the field on his maiden 4WD NZRC drive. I was enjoying the back and forth battle we had going between us. Very exciting to see the new talent coming through!"

With worsening rain both SS4 and the final SS11 stages were cancelled and driving conditions became treacherous, but Hunt relished the slippery conditions.

"The Škoda Fabia is excellent in the wet and I can keep it pretty smooth on slippery roads, Tony and I found a good rhythm in the car and the team worked perfectly all rally to get the podium result. To come away leading the championship is a great feeling, but there's a lot of work ahead too, we will just keep doing what we're doing and I look forward to Tauranga!"

Škoda dominated the podium with Hunt and the Škoda New Zealand Rally Team finishing the Daybreaker in second overall and up and coming star, Zeal Jones, in third on his 4WD NZRC debut.

The next round in the NZRC is the Rally of Bay of Plenty October 5.

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