

Young Victorian Brendan Reeves is the first entry for the 2010 International Rally of Whangarei, the third round of both the FIA Asia Pacific Rally Championship and Vantage New Zealand Rally Championship, being run from 2 – 4 July.

Having first ventured outside Australia to contest the 2008 event in a Ford Fiesta, Reeves returned in 2009, finishing third overall. Aiming to climb further up the podium in 2010, he will again campaign a New Zealand prepared Subaru Impreza WRX STi. Paired with his sister Rhianon Smyth as co-driver, Reeves says the roads through the Kaipara and Whangarei Districts are part of the lure for what will be his third successive start here.

“They are amazing roads and we’ve had such friendly competition there,” said the 21-year-old who drives trucks when he’s not competing.

“One of the most challenging things I’ve found about the roads is that they are very fast, undulating and cambered. So I’ve learned a lot about having to be more committed through the corners. You tend to drive half a gear up through the corners to keep the momentum up.”

“It’s nice to come back and we’re really looking forward to it.”

Covering 285km of gravel divided into 16 special stages, Reeves is likely to encounter his toughest opposition yet for the two-day rally. Current New Zealand Rally Champion Hayden Paddon, winner of last year's event and the regional Pirelli Star Driver in this year's World Rally Championship, is among the expected entrants. Former World Rally Championship factory drivers' Chris Atkinson and Alister McRae are also expected, bringing two Proton Satria Neo Super 2000 cars to the region.

“Those guys are very experienced drivers who have done a lot more and achieved a lot more than I have so far. I’ve done a few rallies in New Zealand and I think that the conditions there really suit me, so I’ll drive as hard and fast as I can to achieve a great result.

The young Australian pair have entered the FIA Pacific Cup for the first time. The International Rally of Whangarei is the first round of this competition followed by the International Rally of Queensland in July, and Rally New Caledonia in late August.

“I just love New Zealand's fast open undulating roads, it is one of my favourite events and I enjoy coming over. I think that's why we both continue to come back, because we think they are fantastic roads and some of the best in the world,” said Reeves' 29-year-old co-driver Rhianon Smyth.

The International Rally of Whangarei is the pair's third rally of the season, and the first on gravel for Smyth since a competition accident with her brother last August left her with serious leg fractures.

“It'll be great and I am really looking forward to coming back.”

With the event headquarters and service park located at the Quayside Town Basin in downtown Whangarei, the two-day rally uses roads between Whangarei and Paparoa.

Key spectator points are incorporated in to the weekend, including a double run of the Whangarei Super Special Stage at Pohe Island on Saturday and two passes over the Hella Wairere stage featuring the world famous Hella Bridge on Sunday. The cars then return to the Quayside Town Basin on Sunday afternoon for the Ceremonial Finish from 3:30pm.

With considerable support from the Kaipara and Whangarei communities, the event provides half the proceeds of all spectator ticket sales back to the community via groups such as the Maungaturoto Co-operative.

Rally fans can enjoy meeting the star Asia Pacific and New Zealand drivers including the official driver autograph signing session in Whangarei's Cameron Street Mall from 4pm on Friday 2 July, before the ceremonial start at 5pm.

More details about spectator options are updated on the event website, www.rallywhangarei.co.nz on a regular basis.

Official event release