

TARGA NZ SUPPORT FOR MARK TAPPER AT THE P-WRC.

28-year-old rally driver Mark Tapper is from Brookby in South/Eastern Auckland. He and Co-driver Jeff Judd impressed during their first Pirelli Star Driver outing in the Production World Rally Championship (P-WRC) event held in Portugal over last weekend.

Having never rallied on the demanding Portuguese roads before, Tapper brought the Pirelli-backed Mitsubishi Lancer EVO X home second amongst the Pirelli Star Drivers and a very credible 5th in the P-WRC for this event and 8th on the P-WRC points table.

Targa NZ have supplied Mark with a Hans Device. It is a precision carbon fibre head and neck support device which reduces the chances of head and/or neck injuries. Something of a U-shape, the back of the U set sits behind the back of the neck and it's two arms overlay the shoulders onto the chest. It is attached to the helmet by two anchors on either side and it stops the head from whipping forward in a crash.

Tapper has participated in Targa, in a Ford Fiesta shared drive with PJ's son (aka Peter Johnston), however they did not finish having run out of road. He has also co-driven with Targa's Modern Class front runner Jason Gill in the Taranaki and Waitomo tarmac rallies.

Targa's Event Director, Peter Martin said: "When Mark arrived back in New Zealand from the testing and training he organised a fundraising dinner and auction with more than 200 people. We decided to sponsor Mark with something more tangible than cash - a Hans Device".

Day 1 in Portugal saw Tapper finish as the top Pirelli Star Driver, despite having been seeded to start behind his four fellow Pirelli competitors due to his lack of knowledge on this specific European event. Throughout the first day, Tapper improved his relative stage times, first 26th fastest, then 25th, 21st, 19th, 17th and, through the day's final stage, 15th fastest from 62 competitors. Tapper's time was 85 seconds slower than five-time world rally champion Sebastién Loeb, a noteworthy achievement.

Day 1's strong performance also saw Tapper ranked 4th in the P-WRC field, so he started much further up the seeding order for Day 2 and four places head of the other four Pirelli competitors in identical cars.

Regrettably Saturday's competition included the challenges of a failed power-steering unit for Tapper and Judd. The sole Kiwi driving combination in the Portuguese rally retired from the day and had their Lancer EVO X repaired to resume competition for the final day, taking time penalties to keep them in the overall rankings.

Achieving more modest 28th fastest stage times as other competitors fell out of contention, Tapper improved to finish second place behind fellow Pirelli Star Driver, Jon Williams from South Africa.

"Road conditions were so vastly different throughout the event, it added to the learning curve. They are just so technical and so demanding, the brows and the turns, and if your notes aren't 100% right, boy, you're in big trouble very, very quickly," said Tapper.

Round 2 in the Pirelli Star Driver schedule, is Rally Italy from 22 to 24 May.

ENDS.

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