

From The Land of the Rising Sun to Middle Earth

By Brian Wende



The Tour de Kyushu, which was the 1st Round of the 2nd Japan Rally Championship, held April 9-11. In the Japan Rally Championship, there are two separate championships, one for the 2wd, an all tarmac series and the other championship consists of gravel, which both 2wd and 4wd cars can compete. This event was a two-day tarmac event with 17 stages. There was 45 cars entered in the rally, which had three classes, cars were seeded in reverse order, factory teams start from cars 32-45. The car that we used was a 2wd Honda Integra Type R (car #31), and competed in the B-class. The driver was Toshihiro Takeshita of the Matsuyama Auto Club. During Day 1, the car was quick and being the first rally on tarmac, the stages went well and the pace notes were good. The roads were very technical and there wasn't much room for error, and tire choice was important. Stage 5 was cancelled, as two cars went off. We got a chance to drive the stage at a slower speed, to get to stage 6, which gave us a chance to check the notes as we would run this stage later in the evening. During stage 6, we had problems with 3rd gear and lost some time, finishing the day in 14th position. Day 2 stages were a repeat of Leg 1 on Day 1, and we were quick, and made back some time that we lost, and finished the rally in 12th position. It was excellent learning experience, and I had a wicked time!

The next rally that I co-drove in was the Hella Battery Town Rally of Rotorua, on July 9-10 in New Zealand. This is the 3rd round of the Asia-Pacific Rally Championship and the Parker ENZED New Zealand Rally Championship. The team is the SAS Kenshindenso Rally Team and the driver is Hideaki Ito of Japan, and the car will be a Subaru Impreza WRX STi ver6, Group A. The FIA Asia-Pacific Rally Championship is established as one the premier regional rally championship in World Rallying. The FIA Asia-Pacific Rally Championship runs in accordance with the SUPERally format, a concept planned for the 2005 FIA World Rally Championship. In accordance with the regulations, a competing car which fails to finish any leg of a rally will be permitted to restart the next leg, assuming it has not been excluded on the grounds of technical ineligibility. At the end of an event, points are awarded for the overall general classification, as well as for each championship, on the same points scoring system as the FIA WRC – namely 10, 8, 6, 5, 4, 3, 2 and 1 point respectively for first to eighth position.



However, bonus points are also awarded at the end of each leg, with the first, second and third placed crews amassing 3, 2 and 1 point respectively for their positions in the overall and championship classifications. The Motu Road gorge in the Eastern Bay of Plenty will be run as two consecutive special stages totaling 46 kilometres of competitive driving, which is widely regarded as the worlds most challenging rally stage. The Motu stage was made famous during the 1990's when it formed part of the New Zealand round of the WRC. The stage is winding and twisting its way from the coast of Opotiki to the township of Motu. New Zealand gravel roads are smooth and have rhythmic camber changes, which makes for very quick, fast flowing roads. But unfortunately we had to withdraw from the rally after finishing the reconnaissance. It was a team decision after we had an accident on the way home from reconnaissance.

The next rally that I attended was Rally Japan, the 11th round of the World Rally Championship, on September 3-5 in Hokkaido. Helping do service for the SAS Kenshindenso Rally Team. It was an exciting rally, with Petter Solberg and Phil Mills winning overall for Subaru.

