



Name: Mark Tapper
Date of birth: 05.02.1981
Nationality: New Zealand
Started rallying: 2001
Co-driver: Jeff Judd

Stepping straight up

After just one year in the sport, Mark Tapper made the switch from two to four-wheel-drive rally cars, after his burgeoning talent was spotted by Ralliart New Zealand, the local Mitsubishi competition tuner. For the next four years, Mark would drive a selection of Lancer Evolutions VI and VIIs, collecting stage wins and Group N success on various rallies. Understandably, one of the biggest events in the New Zealand motor sport calendar is Rally New Zealand and to finish top Kiwi on that event is no mean feat; Mark managed that in 2005.

Taking a step backward to move forwards

In terms of outright speed, the Ford Fiesta ST Mark switched to for 2006 was no match for the Mitsubishi he'd been driving in the seasons before, but it was a savvy move for the Aucklander. Sixth on his debut in the new car, he put many of his rivals with more powerful machinery to the sword on Rally Rotorua – an event which qualifies for both the New Zealand and FIA Asia Pacific Rally Championships. That was just the start of a great relationship with the diminutive Ford. He won the two-wheel-drive category of the New Zealand Championship in 2007. He also won five out of six rounds of the Fiesta Sporting Trophy New Zealand, posting fastest time on all but 10 stages through the season.

A quiet, but exceptional season

The year which would go on to become the biggest season of his rallying career to date began with mixed fortunes. Mark only competed on four rallies in 2008. He finished second, driving a Mitsubishi Lancer Evolution VIII, on the opening round of the New Zealand Rally Championship, but then retired with engine failure on his next event, Rally Whangarei. His third rally of the year

was a Malaysian National Rally Championship round, in preparation for the Rally Malaysia – the FIA Asia Pacific Rally Championship round which would decide the region's entry for the Pirelli Star Driver programme. Despite rarely having competed under such high-pressure conditions, Mark came out on top, ending the event third overall – but with the Pirelli Star Driver award.

Taking the Silver Fern to a new stage

Having won the biggest prize of his life, and coming from a nation with such a notoriously ferocious sporting pedigree, Mark is looking to place New Zealand rallying firmly on the map. Beyond rallying and all other forms of motor sport, Mark is also keen on Motocross, using the bike discipline to complement his fitness regime.

Career highlights

2008 won the FIA Asia Pacific Rally Championship Pirelli Star Driver place

2007 won the New Zealand Fiesta Sporting Trophy