

Pukekohe hosts round two of BNT V8s Championship

After an action-packed opening round of the 2008-09 BNT V8s Championship in Taupo early in October, the potentially 30-strong field of New Zealand V8s heads to Pukekohe Park in the Franklin district for round two of their seven round motor racing championship with Hamilton's Kayne Scott leading the championship contenders.

Testing for the Hydraulink 200 at Pukekohe takes place on Friday 7 November, qualifying and race one on Saturday 8 November and two races on Sunday 9 November.

Two big questions await answers as competitors complete their preparations for the Hydraulink 200.

Firstly, who's going to replace the injured Paul Radisich in the HPM Racing Ford? Radisich was delighted with his performance at the rain-affected opening round, scoring 184 points to share top spot on the points' table with former V8s champion Kayne Scott. The vastly experienced Scott also had a very successful weekend in Taupo with a notable drive in the reverse grid race; having started in 26th position, Scott fought the Fujitsu Ford through the field to finish third.

However, the following weekend saw Radisich badly injured in a horrendous high speed crash in the Supercheap Auto 1000 at Bathurst, Australia. The popular Kiwi racing driver is still in hospital and progressing well, but obviously his New Zealand Tracer Motorsport team needs to find a replacement driver to continue in the series. Points are allocated to each driver, not the team, so to do well in the championship overall, the HPM-backed Tracer team needs another top driver to take on the talents of Scott, John McIntyre, Andy Booth, and others.

HPM Racing team manager Greg Bellingham says a replacement driver recommended by Radisich is testing with the team on Tuesday 4 November and an announcement will then be made.

"It's a great shame that Paul won't be competing in the Pukekohe Hydraulink 200," says Scott, who is rapt with the pace his Fujitsu Ford showed in the dry in Taupo. "When I was younger, Paul's determination to succeed as a professional race driver inspired me in my own racing career. I believe Paul has paved the way for a lot of Kiwis overseas and he's always been helpful and supportive. I wish him well in his recovery."

Mark Petch, team owner for Scott's Fujitsu Ford, adds: "We take absolutely no pleasure from not having to compete against Paul next weekend because he is a worthy adversary, but with Paul no longer in contention for the championship, we can now concentrate on trying to increase our points' lead over John McIntyre."

The second significant situation involves top competitor Angus Fogg who, following his win in the reverse grid race three in Taupo, was disqualified from the results by the event director for an alleged technical infringement involving a wheel. Fogg has appealed the penalty and a stewards' hearing is due to be held a day or two before the Pukekohe round which will resolve the situation one way or the other. Until the hearing outcome is announced, the results for round one are officially classed as provisional. If Fogg is successful in his appeal, the winner's 75 points would be reallocated to his total and the leader-board reshuffled with Radisich head of Scott, Booth and McIntyre then Fogg in fifth.

But as things stand with the Fogg decision, Scott leads the championship with 184 points (technically first equal with Radisich) going into the Pukekohe round point-wise. Nelson's John McIntyre and Auckland's Andy Booth – both in new cars that debuted at Taupo with great success – are third equal with 165 points. In fifth on the points' table with 117 points is Pukekohe's Michael Bristow, at 21-years-old the youngest competitor in the field. Bristow is a former V8s development series champion now contesting in his first full season in the BNT V8s. The top ten is rounded out with Rotorua's Paul Pedersen sixth, Christchurch's Eddie Bell seventh, ex-pat Gold Coast-based Kiwi Craig Baird eighth, Gold Coast's David Besnard ninth and West Aucklander Andrew Anderson in a strong tenth position.

In other team news prior to the Pukekohe round, long-time V8 racer Dean Perkins, from Pukekohe, rejoins the field in the distinctive number 75 GT Radial Tyres-based Ford. Perkins may contend only some of this season's rounds, with the team confirming on a round-by-round basis.

Wellington's Dave Stewart also rejoins the BNT V8s field in the Altherm Window Systems-backed Holden Commodore. Stewart was a well-regarded competitor in this class several seasons ago before entering and winning the V8s development series three years ago. He contested several rounds of the 2007-08 New Zealand V8s Championship and intends contesting some of this season's rounds.

Defending champion John McIntyre reports his Hastings-based team has been busy following their successful first weekend of racing with their brand-new Castrol Ford in Taupo.

"After repairing minimal damage sustained at Taupo, we have prepared the car for Pukekohe and taken the chance to further develop our new car by installing a new differential and housing, a new gearlever better suited to the new Jerico gearbox and a helmet fan to provide clean cool air to my helmet," says the popular driver known as 'Johnny Mac'.

"While we have not tested prior to Pukekohe, we are confident the new car will run well. Last season we set pole position and won two races and the round at Pukekohe, so it's certainly a circuit we usually do well on."

Amongst the newcomers to the BNT V8s this year, Christchurch's Andy Knight, last year's Toyota Racing Series champion, says the Milwaukee Ford showed pace, but the team didn't get the results they were hoping for. "We surprised a few people with our qualifying performance. Everything is new, the team is all-new and there is definite potential," says the 22-year-old.

Former Mini Challenge champion Eddie Bell , also from Christchurch, is taking on his first full-time drive this season in the ex-Clark Proctor Metalman Ford and was delighted to finish seventh overall at Taupo's opening round.

"It's a great result," said Bell . "I was gutted after qualifying. The car had the pace but I tried too hard and went slower. It was disappointing to pull out of the second race but this is a great result. I'm looking forward to the rest of the season and it is great to reward the sponsors who have stuck with me through the horrors of last year. I am particularly indebted to Independent Fisheries who have kept the faith and I must also give special thanks to Andrew Porter and Clark Proctor for their help in getting me back on track."

Several teams have been doing further developments on their cars. Timaru's John Hepburn has a new motor in the John Hepburn Racing Holden as does Cambridge 's Nick Ross in the Total Lubricants Holden. Auckland 's Tim Edgell is amongst those who had to tidy panel damage after some close racing in Taupo; the Chesters BNT Ford is now restored to its normal smart black finish.

The BNT V8s' competitors have their official testing sessions for the Hydraulink 200 on Friday 7 November while the three-part qualifying programme takes place from 12:20pm on Saturday 8 November. All competitors run in an initial 20-minute qualifying session, then the fastest 20 run for a 15-minute session, and the top ten effectively run a top ten shoot-out for another 15 minutes. Race one – 12 laps – is scheduled for 3:55pm on Saturday with a 16-lap race at 11:05am on Sunday 9 November and a 20-lap reverse grid race at 3:10pm on Sunday afternoon, all with rolling starts.

A new-look BNT V8s website has recently gone live – www.nzv8s.co.nz – and features the latest news, driver profiles, photos, event information and options to purchase tickets for each of the championship rounds. Results and news from the weekend's racing are loaded to the website throughout the weekend.