

HOPPER AND GILL FIGHT FOR TOP TARGA SPOT AT ROTORUA

Defending Targa Rotorua title holder and four-time winner Leigh Hopper and co-driver Michael Goudie (Subaru WRX) have a narrow lead after the first day of competition in this year's event after a battle royal with fellow Aucklanders Jason Gill and co-driver Mark Robinson (Mitsubishi Evo 9).

Each pairing claimed three stage wins apiece, the difference at the end of a high stakes day just 36.3 seconds.



Third overall after a total of 195km of closed special stages and 243km of transport stages in-between are Martin Dippie and co-driver Jona Grant from Dunedin in Dippie's late-model Porsche GT3 RS with fellow former Targa New Zealand event winner Tony Quinn and co-driver Naomi Tillet fourth in Quinn's similar car.

Much was made of circuit-owning entrepreneur Quinn's decision to move to the 2WD Porsche after years dominating the main Targa NZ event in a 4WD Nissan GT-R. But Hopper and Gill showed today that there is plenty of life left in the rally-based turbocharged four cylinder Subarus and Mitsubishi's.

Back in Rotorua after stages south-west of the city in the morning and in the South Waikato in the afternoon Gill had an almost two-and-a-half minute buffer on Dippie and Grant with Quinn and Tillet a further minute-and-a-half back.

Fifth overall was Perth-based Kiwi Targa regular Robert Darrington and co-driver David Abetz in Darrington's BMW M3, sixth Ross Graham and co-driver Matthew Merwood from New Plymouth in the first V8 engined machine, Graham's Holden Torana A9X.

Mark and father Chris Kirk-Burnnand from Wellington lead the Metalman Classic 2WD class after the first day, ending up seventh overall.

The other stage winner today was Mike Lea and co-driver Grant Handley in Lea's Nissan SR20 turbo-powered BMW Compact. The pair beat Dippie, Gill and Hopper in the 25.49km Rollett Rd stage north of Tokoroa after lunch then finished third behind the 4WDs of Gill and Hopper but still ahead of Dippie in the next fastest 2WD car - to prove it was no fluke - when the stage was repeated later in the day!

Bay of Plenty drivers Maurice Shapley and co-driver Kane Malasch (Holden Monaro) and Rick Finucane and co-driver Derek White (Toyota MR2) had mixed first days, finishing 28th and 34th respectively.

The event continues tomorrow with a further five stages in and around Rotorua.

Targa New Zealand events are organised by the Ultimate Rally Group with the support of sponsors AndrewSimms.co.nz, Chicane Racewear, Ecolight, Global Security, Kids In Cars, Metalman.co.nz, NZ Classic Car magazine, Race Brakes, Racetech, TeamTalk, TrackIt and VTNZ.

For more information go to www.targa.co.nz.

CAPTIONS

Leading the 2017 Targa Rotorua event after the first day are 2016 winners Leigh Hopper and co-driver Michael Goudie (Subaru WRX # 969). Debuting his new Porsche GT3 RS was Tony Quinn and co-driver Naomi Tillet (#696). And leading the Metalman Classic 2WD class was Mark and Chris Burnnand (BMW M3 #293). Photo credit: Fast Company/Ben Hughes/ProShotz.

2017 Targa Rotorua Results after Day 1 of 2

Overall

1. Leigh Hopper/Michael Goudie (Subaru WRX) 1:27:27.0
2. Jason Gill/Mark Robinson (Mitsubishi Evo) +36.3
3. Martin Dippie/Jona Grant (Porsche GT3 RS) +2:27.6
4. Tony Quinn/Naomi Tillet (Porsche GT3 RS) +4:08.2
5. Robert Darrington/David Abetz (BMW M3) +4:47.8
6. Ross Graham/Matthew Merwood (Holden Torana A9X) +5:58.4
7. Mark & Chris Kirk-Burnnand (BMW M3) +6:26.5
8. Tom & Ben Grooten (Toyota Starlet) +6:48.3
9. Mike Lea/Grant Handley (BMW Compact) +6:49.0
10. David Rogers/Aidan Kelly (Mitsubishi Evo) +6:49.7

Prepared by FAST COMPANY on behalf of Targa NZ. To find out more about the various Targa events go to the Targa NZ website at www.targa.co.nz. To talk to Targa Event Director Peter Martin tel 0-9-298 8322 or 0274 525 643. To get in touch with event media man Ross MacKay from Fast Company tel 021 677 919 or e-mail on ross@fastcompany.co.nz