

ANTOINE L'ESTAGE WINS

Contributed by Shawn Bishop
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ANTOINE L'ESTAGE WINS TIGHT BATTLE AT SUBARU CALGARY ROCKY MOUNTAIN RALLY

Morley, ALBERTA, MAY 27, 2011 – Antoine L'Estage (Ste-Jean-sur-Richelieu, QC) and Nathalie Richard (Halifax) won the Subaru Calgary Rocky Mountain Rally, their second event of the 2011 Canadian Rally Championship. L'Estage and Richard triumphed after a day-long battle with the rival Subaru Rally Team Canada pairing of Pat Richard (Squamish, BC) and Leanne Junnila (Calgary). The Rocky Mountain Rally is Canada's highest altitude rally and unpredictable weather played a key role in this year's edition.

Organizers were immediately challenged by overnight snowfall that made sections of the rally route impassible. Volunteers worked feverishly to create a new schedule, and the rally started after a three hour delay.

L'Estage and Richard were first on the road, which meant they would be sweeping the loose gravel and snow from the road surface, making the road faster for the teams behind. Teams completed four passes of the Cox Hill stage before heading to service, where L'Estage hoped for a reseed to put someone else first on the road.

“It was really tough this morning, very bad to be first on the road,” said L'Estage. “In the time where we turned around to do the next stage, the road covered over in snow, so again I had to clear the road.”

Pat Richard struggled as well with the slippery conditions. Running Yokohama mud tires, Richard was confident that they were the correct choice – the same tires chosen by L'Estage.

“In the snowy sections, it's so slippery that you really have to stay on the line and stay clean,” said Richard. “It's tough because the camber of the road is so severe that the car will slide sideways down into a corner even if you go slow.”

Benefitting from L'Estage's road sweeping, Richard moved into the lead, and maintained a small margin heading into service. Teams made repairs and the cars were sent back out to complete two more passes on the Cox Hill stage before heading to the final three stages at the Jumping Pound Forest Demonstration Loop. With no reseed, L'Estage would have to continue first on the road, clearing the worst of the road conditions.

Leo Urlichich (Toronto) and Martin Brady (Meath, Ireland) moved into a secure third place after a fast start.

“We beat Antoine on the first stage, which shouldn't happen,” laughed Urlichich, who had chosen a deep snow tire that allowed him to push harder in the sloppiest conditions. “Of course, after that, he destroyed me on every stage.”

The two wheel drive cars found the conditions particularly grueling, often struggling for grip. Jan and Jody Zedril (Winnipeg) lost control and slid off the road, losing almost 40 minutes before continuing. Zebe Szweczyk (Calgary) and Shabir Haji (Calgary) also struggled, spinning at high speed and losing time as well. This opened the door for Eric Grochowski (Calgary) and Keith Morison (Calgary) in their VW Golf to take the lead in 2WD.

“I think we're leading 2WD by about a minute,” said Grochowski. “It's great, but we still have a few stages to go, and anything can happen.”

On the first pass on the Jumping Pound stage, Richard and Junnila hydroplaned at a watersplash and hit a signpost, damaging the right rear corner of the car, and costing 5 seconds of their 8.8 second lead. The next stage, they lost another 5.9 seconds, giving up the lead for the first time in the rally, with just one stage to go. Both Richard and L'Estage drove at the limit over the final stage. L'Estage was again faster, winning the event by 5.3 seconds.

“The tension in the last few stages was super high,” said L'Estage after the rally. “Today had some really tough conditions, and it feels really good to fight from behind for the win, and of course to take it!”

“Antoine was definitely quicker after service,” said Richard. “When we got to the Jumping Pound stage, we had some confusion with our notes and the location of the watersplash, and damaged the car. It's tough, but it is good to know that we're competitive and can lead and win a rally.”

Urlichich was satisfied with his result, a comfortable third place.

“We stuck exactly to the plan,” said Leo. “I wanted to continue to learn, and for that of course you need to stay on the road. I've had a lot of changes to the car, the notes, and have a new co-driver, so there's plenty to

learn.”

Grochowski and Morison won 2WD, though the pair had concerns over whether they would make the finish.

“We were using an old clutch and it started to slip on the final transit, so we're happy to finish,” said Grochowski.

Szewczyk finished second in 2WD, with Jeremy Foster and Chris Kremer finishing third.

Morison also served as the event organizer, but handed over control of the event for the day so he could compete.

“I've worked with a really strong team of volunteers on this, and they were good enough to let me take today off to race. Everyone did a great job,” said Morison.

“We had a lot of challenges today, but everyone did their job,” said Clerk of the Course, Peter Hill, after conditions proved so difficult that a completely new schedule had to be created. “Once we saw what we had to work with, we were able to put a plan together to run the rally.”

The 2011 season continues July 1-2, at the Rallye Baie Des Chaleurs, in New Richmond, Quebec. Featuring the largest fan attendance of the series, the event is characterized by some of the fastest roads in the series.

The Canadian Rally Championship is comprised of six events held nationwide in a season that extends from February to November. The series is presented by Subaru Canada, supported by Yokohama Tire Canada and features contingency programs from Subaru Canada and Mitsubishi Canada. The Canadian Association of Rallysport (CARS) is the official sanctioning body for rallying in Canada.

Rally is often described simply as “real cars, real roads, real fast.” The all-season motorsport sees drivers and their co-drivers take modified road cars to the limit as they achieve blistering speeds over closed-road courses that typically cover more than 150 kilometers of gravel, dirt or snow covered roads. Fans can get up close to the cars in the service areas and catch all the action from specially designated spectator points located at the best spots on the route.

Full coverage of the championship will air on RDS and TSN. Check local listings.

For more information: www.carsrally.ca or www.rockymountainrally.com

Subaru Calgary rocky Mountain Rally Final Results

1. Antoine L'Estage – Nathalie Richard – 43 minutes, 23.6 seconds
2. Pat Richard – Leanne Junnila – 43:28.9
3. Leo Urlichich – Martin Brady – 45:07.4
4. Hardy Schmidtke – John Hall – 48:14.6
5. Warren Haywood – Jennifer Daly – 48:53.5
6. Graham Bruce – Forest Fyrberg – 49:19.7
7. Taylor Nelson – Remington Edwards – 49:49.3
8. Mike Goodwin – Martin Burnley – 50:33.4
9. Ian Crerar – Doug Draper – 50:34.4
10. Eric Grochowski – Keith Morison – 51:32.1

FOR MORE INFORMATION - Canadian Association of Rally Sport offices : (905) 640-6444