

Chris Duplessis, THS '05, takes the flag in New England Forest Rally held at Sunday River

Rally racer Chris Duplessis of Mason Township grew up driving the back roads of Maine and New Hampshire, and those miles paid off for him during the New England Forest Rally (NEFR) hosted earlier this month at Sunday River Ski Resort.

Duplessis placed first in both Regional Division events, the Mexico "Drive Your Future" Rally on Friday and the Berlin "I Can't Drive 55" Rally on Saturday.

The NEFR event was hosted over the weekend of July 17 and 18, and was the sixth of nine rally events in the Rally America National Championship.



Chris Duplessis and Catherine Woods

Duplessis and co-driver Catherine Woods of Chelsea, Quebec City, competed with dozens of regional rally teams from across the northeastern United States and eastern Canada.

The Duplessis/Woods team competed in the Group 2 Class, in his 1990 Volkswagen GTi.

The event covered more than 125 miles of gravel and forest stages, with regional racers, such as Duplessis/Woods, competing on the same roads as the national teams. When asked what his favorite stage of the rally was, Duplessis said Concord Pond was the hands-down favorite because it's like no other he's ever done.

"It's very technical and flows so well that even a well-driven, under-powered car can perform well," he said.

"And with thousands of spectators on the stage watching, you have to push and put on a good show—since without them we'd have no sport."

He also acknowledges that one large contributing factor in his win was being near his hometown, which allowed him to sleep in his own bed.

"It takes a lot out of you to travel thousands of miles to run a rally," Duplessis said. "Low-budget teams like mine can't just 'arrive and drive,' so being at home was the next best thing."

"My brother, Forest, and I have already started to re-prep the car for the next race [Aug. 28-29, in Bemidji, Minn.] and we don't go on stage unless it's 110 percent ready," he said.

"We spent two weeks prior to NEFR checking it out and we were very happy with the fact we didn't even have to jack the car up all weekend, just add fuel and go."

Duplessis, Telstar 2005, has been learning to rally race since he was 12.

He is currently a driving instructor at Team O'Neil Rally School and Car Control Center in Dalton, N.H. He was the 2008 Two-Wheel Drive National Champion, and to date he is first in the Group 2 class, and stands a good chance at the champion title once again in 2009.

Rally car racing is considered the extreme sport of automobile racing, often described as “real cars, real roads, real fast.”

The all-season motorsport sees drivers and their co-drivers taking modified road cars to speeds of up to 100 miles an hour over “stages” that can cover more than 100 miles of gravel, dirt or snow-covered roads.

And the co-driver is considered key to the driver’s success, as the two communicate constantly regarding the route that lies ahead, including its hazard warnings, junctions, hills and turns.

Duplessis also said he couldn’t have done it without the support of his sponsors Advanced Recovery 2 Mobility, Pooh Corner Farm, Techtonics Tuning, Team O’Neil Rally School, GW Hoss Racing, Wilcox Industries.

To follow the Duplessis/Woods team through the rest of season, go to the official Rally America website at www.rally-america.com.

Sponsors for this year’s NEFR included Subaru of America, DC Shoes, Endless Brakes, Exedy Racing Clutches, Q Racing Oil, Army National Guard, Sunday River Resort, Team O’Neil Rally School of Dalton, NH, The Ogontz Group, and the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA).