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763.553.2742
8014 OLSON MEM HWY
SUITE # 617
GOLDEN VALLEY
MINNESOTA, 55427

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Travis Pastrana wins New England Forest Rally

Saturday, July 18, 2009



Subaru Rally Team USA's Travis Pastrana and co-driver Christian Edstrom sailed to their fourth win of the season at the New England Forest Rally Saturday, to further extend their lead in the national championship.

Pastrana entered Round 6 of the Rally America championship with a 21-point lead over his closest challenger, and said his strategy from the start was to avoid taking unnecessary risks and get his car to the finish in one piece.

"It's hard to know you've got that little more speed in reserve and not use it, but it's that little more that can get you," he said. "We weren't the fastest here this weekend, but I'll take the win however I can get it."

Ken Block and co-driver Alex Gelsomino set a blazing pace at the start, but lost more than 20 seconds to a spin early Saturday afternoon, then had a flat tire. They were unable to make up for lost time in the final stages of the day and finished in second-place overall.

"It's extremely frustrating," said Block at the finish. "I put myself in the right position to win and it didn't work out for us."

Even so, the result moves Block into second place in the championship, behind teammate Pastrana.

Canadians Antoine L'Estage and co-driver Nathalie Richard were also in the running for a win early in this event, but they lost time to a power steering failure in their Mitsubishi Lancer Evolution X Saturday afternoon and finished in third.

"It's good to taste champagne again, but I really wanted to win," said L'Estage after the ceremonial champagne spray. "I thought this morning we had a shot at it."

L'Estage is developing a new Mitsubishi Lancer Evolution X that debuted with Tanner Foust in the US earlier this season under a sharing arrangement. He hasn't had much luck with the car so far, battling the teething problems that are typical with a new car build. But he says the car has potential and he's looking forward to the next round.

Bill Bacon and co-driver Peter Watt finished in fourth place; Art Gruszka and co-driver Lukasz Wronski rounded out the top five.

The Super Production class win went to Roman Pakos and Maciej Sawiki in their Subaru STi, while John Conley and Keith Rudolph took the two-wheel drive win in their 2003 Dodge SRT-4.

The roads on this event are generally wide and fast, but peppered with massive rocks that can do big damage to competition cars. As is typical, attrition claimed a number of contenders. Subaru Rally Team USA's Dave Mirra and co-driver Derek Ringer were out with engine trouble on Saturday, while Andi Mancin and co-driver Maciej Wislawski retired after Day 1, apparently with engine issues of their own.

It was tough luck for both drivers. This event presented a good opportunity for Mirra to make up some

ground in the championship against Super Production rivals Piotr Wiktorczyk, Jimmy Keeney, Matt Johnson and Pat Moro – all drivers who are sitting out this round as they prepare for X Games.

The X Games contest is the biggest event on the calendar for invited teams and cars are due on the other side of the continent in just over a week. Open class drivers Andrew "ACP" Comrie-Picard and Tanner Foust have also opted to sit this event out while they prepare for the Los Angeles contest.

The two-wheel drive competition was fierce this weekend, with more than two-dozen drivers running the weekend's two regional events: Friday's "Drive Your Future Rally," presented by the National Guard, and the "I Can't Drive 55" Rally on Saturday.

Among those teams is the interesting last-minute entry of Lucy Block and Chrissie Beavis in a Volkswagen Golf. Block is married to Subaru Rally Team USA driver Ken Block and this was her first-ever event as a competitor. Chrissie Beavis is a regular championship co-driver for Foust and competes in California as a driver in the regional series. The duo swapped driving and co-driving duties over the weekend.

Twenty-one teams also signed up to run this event for the MaxAttack! subseries, designed to raise the level of two-wheel drive rally competition. Chris Duplessis and Catherine Woods set the fastest two-wheel drive times in their 1990 Volkswagen GTi during the weekend's regionals.

For 2009, organizers will pay out a total cash purse of \$15,000 USD to be divided among the fastest teams competing in the MaxAttack! events.

All results are considered informational pending official race processes.

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About Rally America, Inc.

Based in Golden Valley, Minnesota, Rally America sanctions the premier rally racing series in the United States, the Rally America National Championship Series. In 2009, Rally America will conduct nine National Championship events at venues across the country, from Portland, Ore., to Newry, Maine. Rally America competitors reach speeds well over 100 mph in modified street-legal rally cars on natural-terrain courses consisting of gravel, dirt or snow.

Additionally, through a partnership with the leading sports network regarding action sports, ESPN, qualifying Rally America drivers are invited to compete in the Summer X Games, the annual leading action-sport event that is broadcast live on ABC and ESPN. The X Games Rally Car Racing event airs live on Aug. 2. For more information, visit www.rally-america.com.



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