



Photo by Thomas Surian

Alexandre Ouellette and David Lamarre round a corner at the Rally of the Tall Pines on a cold snowy Saturday afternoon in their 2007 Subaru. The duo ended up withdrawing from the race.

Slipping and sliding car rally

By Kaitlin Abeele

The Rally of the Tall Pines truly lives up to its motto this year— winter roads and summer ditches.

The annual car rally, now in its 43rd year, has been hosted in Bancroft, Ont. since 1997.

The rally, which was held Saturday, is organized by the Maple Leaf Rally Club, with Ian Wright serving as the co-ordinator for the event.

Wright said he was pleased with the fresh snow that fell earlier in the week, which created a better challenge for the drivers, and a better chance of crashes.

“The Pines’ motto has always been ‘winter roads, and summer ditches.’ For the last four or five years, we haven’t had that. The amount of snow we had on Tuesday changed that. The roads today were in great shape, very slippery, very treacherous and they caught a lot of people unaware,” said Wright.

Tall Pines is actually four separate rallies in one – the national four-wheel drive and two-wheel drive rallies, and the regional four-wheel drive and two-wheel drive rallies.

That means that there were 12 champions during the day-long event.

The event is also part of three rally championships: the Canadian National Rally Championship, the North American Rally Championship and the Ontario Regional Rally Championship.

This year saw 35 teams of drivers and co-drivers race along the gruelling 498-kilometre closed course, featuring 16 special stages. The course is mechanically challenging, which resulted in only 13 cars actually finishing the full rally.

A leading contender for the national four-wheel open competition was Leo Urlichich, a Russian-born driver from Thornhill, Ont. Urlichich, better known by his rally name ‘Crazy Leo,’ had a substantial lead over the other teams going into the final stages of the rally. But mechanical problems forced him to withdraw from the race.

“Crazy Leo had an eight-minute lead on the event, with maybe four stages to go, then broke a camshaft, on the road section, which destroyed his lead, and which took him out of the rally,” said Wright.

After Urlichich withdrew, Chris Martin, of Richmond Hill, Ont., ended up taking first place in both the National and Regional four-wheel open rallies.

Spectators of the event braved the cold weather to watch cars careen around hairpin corners and navigate the icy gravel roads, stirring up clouds of snow in their wake.

For Creslin Johnson, of Ottawa, Ont., it was the first time attending the rally, after being invited by friends to attend. After a great day, she said she hopes to return again next day.

“We all came together, to come watch the rally. It’s been awesome,” said Johnson.

Volunteers for the event also had to cope with the cold temperatures, to ensure the smooth operation of the event and the safety of participants and spectators. Over 200 volunteers helped in staging the event.

“We have over 200 volunteers who were out in very cold temperatures all day and without them the event wouldn’t happen. They are wonderful people, very enthusiastic, very supportive. They make the event,” said Wright.

The Rally of the Tall Pines will return again to the town of Bancroft next year for its 44th season.



Photo by Kaitlin Abeele

Jeremy Norris climbs out of his 2000 Subaru Impreza 2.5RS while his co-driver John Merry remains trapped inside after sliding into a ditch, which flipped the car onto its side on at the 43rd annual Rally of the Tall Pines in Bancroft, Ont. The accident forced the team to withdraw from the rest of the events because of mechanical issues.



Photo by James Wood

(Above, left) Race official Donna Huber yells at drivers to slow down and watch their curves after a racer spun out and flipped into a ditch at the Rally of the Tall Pines.

Photo by Kaitlin Abeele

(Above, right) Martin Walter celebrates with a champagne shower at the 43rd annual Rally of the Tall Pines. Walter, along with his co-driver Ferdinand Trauttmansdorff, placed seventh overall at the rally, with first place finishes in both the national and regional four-wheel open championships in their 1991 Nissan 240SX.

Photo by James Wood

(Left) Spectators react as a rally car flips into a ditch at the Rally of the Tall Pines.

