



Photo by Alyssa Lloyd

Team MaNick of Hampton, Ont., whips past spectators at Iron Bridge Stage. Nicola Narini is the team's driver, and Massimo Narini is the co-driver. The team has been together for 13 years, reaching their peak season in 2010.

Bancroft hosts Rally of Tall Pines

By Alyssa Lloyd

For a week, the Dungannon Recreation Centre just outside of Bancroft was transformed into an overcrowded whirlwind of roaring cars and bustling people.

The petrified grass of summer soccer fields, depressed under the weight of trucks and trailers, were loaded down with gas and spare parts. The main attraction was the souped-up rally cars, half-hoisted off the ground with technicians sprawling under them tinkering with last-minute changes.

In the small rural area of Bancroft, the Rally of the Tall Pines was about to bring just the right amount of havoc to the town.

Thermometers dipped to a brisk -12 celsius while the cars warmed up. Workers hustled in and out of rally headquarters with schedules, timers and radios, getting ready to hit the small back roads of the Bancroft area to begin the first stage of the rally.

On the first stage of the day, Upper Hastings, media and rally officials already lined the sides of the road with an intense anticipation. When Car No. 000 went through, traffic stopped, and people got to their designated spots. Car No. 00 passed through, stopping to kick people off the wrong sides of the road knowing that, if the rally drivers did go off, that's where they'd land. The air was so crisp that you could hear Car No. 0 flying through the track a couple kilometres away, with crowds cheering as the officials would make their own vehicles lift off the jumps.

The course was officially opened and soon after, North American Rally Champion Antoine L'estage was tearing past spectators nearly extinguishing their road side fires with dirt.

The frostbit roads were harder to navigate than the year prior's foot of fresh snow. Ice patches challenged drivers' skill. Without knowing what was around the next corner, they only had their co-driver's instructions to go by.

Eleven teams had to drop out before the end of the day, complete with one incredibly harsh rollover confirmed. Martin Rowe of Whistler B.C., and Nathalie Richard of Halifax, N.S., were driving their brand new Subaru Impreza WRX STI when they lost control, sending them to the hospital right before the night stage of Golton. Their injuries were unofficially reported as non-life threatening.

Antoine L'Estage of St. Jean-sur-Richilieu, Que., finished with the fastest speed on almost all of the stages, taking the No.1 spot of the Rally of the Tall Pines with his co-driver Alan Ockwell.

Coming in a close second with only a five-second difference between him and L'Estage, Alexandre Beland of Val-d'Or, Que., and co-driver Philippe Poirer of Saint-Rédempteur, Que.

Even though the rally committee pushed back the date of the event by a week in hopes to uphold the rallies reputation of "winter roads, summer ditches" there was nothing more but a skiff on the roads by the morning of the rally, and that didn't last more than two passes of rally cars.

Considered another success, the Rally of the Tall Pines has come and gone from Bancroft for another year and



(Above) Nicola Narini and co-driver Massimo Narini lift off as they speed past spectators having a campfire on Lower Hastings stage of the Rally of the Tall Pines.

(Left) "Crazy" Leo Urlichich and his co-driver Carl Williamson cruise past spectators on Upper Hastings stage at the Rally of the Tall Pines. Urlichich is known for pushing the boundaries of his rally car and pleasing the crowds.

Photos by Alyssa Lloyd

Antoine L'Estage and co-driver Alan Ockwell slide through the first corner of Golton Stage in the Rally of the Tall Pines. L'Estage is an accomplished rally driver, winning seven Canadian championships as well as winning 2010 Rally America.

