



## PACIFIC FOREST RALLY

Subaru clinches title thanks to L'Estage's win in Merritt, BC

Antoine L'Estage and Alan Ockwell overcame tricky conditions to win the 2017 Pacific Forest Rally.

Story and Photo courtesy Carsrally.ca  
**A**ntoine L'Estage and Alan Ockwell emerged triumphant over varied conditions on the final day of the Pacific Forest Rally in Merritt, BC. Ice and snow characterized the morning stages, while the afternoon roads were all gravel. L'Estage made an unusual mistake in the morning loop of stages, opting for gravel tires.

The choice cost L'Estage two stage wins, but was not a threat to his overall lead, as the top of the field all opted for gravel tires as well. Following a mid-day service, teams once again went out for the final two stages consisting of two passes of the new Spius stage. Conditions were warmer and the road was clear of snow, allowing the first chance for teams to truly push the pace. It was here where L'Estage and Ockwell pushed the pace, taking a second a kilometre from Brandon Semenuk and John Hall in second.

The victory also helps L'Estage and Ockwell in their championship hunt after a difficult start to the year.

Brandon Semenuk and John Hall are continuing to prove that another victory is only a matter of time, pushing their pace at every

event. The pair remained in striking distance to L'Estage and Ockwell for most of the rally, but once on the dry gravel of Spius, was unable to match Subaru Rally Team Canada.

Conditions left many competitors at an impasse in terms of tire strategy and how to pace their efforts. Teams wrestled with the unusual road surface as they tried to squeak out the most speed possible from their efforts and equipment.

The difficult conditions proved advantageous for a few teams, including Leo Urlichich and co-driver Sam Roxon. Running a Production Class Subaru, the team would normally be farther off the pace had conditions been the typical dry gravel. Instead, slippery roads minimized the power differential between Production and Open class cars. Once the competitors got to Spius, the gaps opened as expected, though Urlichich and Roxon were able to hold on to third overall.

Travis Nease and Krista Skucas put in a patient drive to claim fourth. The pair came to the rally with really limited resources. They had only gravel tires, and no service crew.

Vilnis Dimpers and Liga Kotane edged out Eric Pehota and Jennifer Daly to finish

second and third in the Production Four-Wheel-Drive class respectively.

Dave Wallingford and Leanne Junnila finished seventh overall. The duo was leading the Two-Wheel-Drive class at the end of the first day in a tight battle with Jason Bailey and co-driver Shayne Peterson. Dave Clark and Jamie Willetts were on pace as well in the hunt for the class victory, but the difficult conditions on the second day started to break apart the field. Tire choices saw Bailey and Peterson take a lot of time from Wallingford and Junnila early in the ice and snow. However, Bailey's snow tires didn't hold up against the warming conditions and a flat tire led to greater damage, sidelining Bailey and Peterson. With Bailey sidelined, Clark and Willetts moved into second, though the slippery conditions had left the team off the pace and they finished 11th overall.

Nick Wood and Steve Stevenson rounded out the Two-Wheel-Drive podium in their 1973 Datsun 1200.

The results were enough to hand Subaru the manufacturer's title. Additionally, Subaru has swept the podium at the Rallye Perce Neige, Rallye Défi and Pacific Forest Rally. **IT**



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