



Subaru's Antoine L'Estage and Alan Ockwell rebounded from a frustrating Rocky Mountain Rally to get their title bid back on track. PHOTOS BY JASON NUGENT

L'ESTAGE AND OCKWELL BOUNCE BACK

SUBARU RALLY TEAM CANADA EARNS MAXIMUM POINTS AT RALLYE BAIES DES CHALEURS

Courtesy Carsrally.ca

Antoine L'Estage and Alan Ockwell of Subaru Rally Team Canada finished the 2017 Rallye Baie des Chaleurs triumphant, earning maximum points in their hunt for the championship battle. The two did not make it through the rally unscathed, with driveline issues on day 1 that left them with two-wheel-drive only. Overnight repairs had the car working in its full four-wheel-drive specification for day 2 and L'Estage and Ockwell put on a charge to extend their lead.

L'Estage and Ockwell added more than a minute to their lead in the first two stages of day 2 and pushed on to the finish to open up a lead of three minutes and 14.7 seconds over second place.

"This is very good for the championship," said L'Estage. "There's no big strategy at an event like this. You go hard and hope everything will go well. Everyone worked really hard at the shop and got the car into really good shape at Rocket Rally."

Subaru Rally Team Canada now has 24 points in the overall championship and has moved into contention for the top position with four events remaining on the calendar. The result was a turning of the tide following the frustrations of the Rallye Perce-Neige and Rocky Mountain Rally. L'Estage is a nine-time Canadian Rally Champion while Alan Ockwell holds five titles.

Last season, early problems had the team playing catch-up for most of the season. This season is perhaps a little more open, with a number of drivers all in striking distance of the points lead.

Jean-Sebastien Besner and Yvan Joyal earned a hard-won second place. For Besner, the result is very special and the driver was overcome with emotion at the finish.

"What a rally," said Besner. "It's so tough this event. This is my first podium here at Baie. I have come here so many times and my best result had been a fourth place. I had so many DNFs, so this is very special for me. To do well at Baie is truly special."

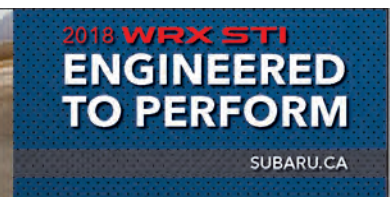
New Richmond, QC brothers André and René Leblanc have finished on the podium at Baie before and were able to finish in third place this year. They are keen to prove they aren't just hometown heroes and can finish on the podium at other events. For now, the pair is celebrating their success at home in front of family and friends.

"The feeling of the result is really good. The frustration of the mechanical problems can be set aside for now, but we will take a look at the car later," said André.

"This is a really hard event, with 36 cars starting, but there were so many things that went wrong for so many teams," added René. "Some could restart, but for others it was the end of their rally."

Mikael Arsenault and Amelie Bélanger were another local team and finished in fourth place. Arsenault has struggled at Baie in the past and, until this year, had not even finished the event. The pair fought in a close battle with two other teams over the fourth place position, overcoming their rivals to come out on top.

Fifth place went to Nicholas Laverdiere and Vincent Trudel. Notably,





(Above) Overall runners-up Jean-Sebastien Besner and Yvan Joyal. (Below) Dave Wallingford and Leanne Junnila won the Two-Wheel-Drive class.

the team won the Production 4WD class battle at the rally, finishing 11 minutes, 41.5 seconds back from the overall winners.

Nicholas Spencer and David Ma took second in class while Leo Urlichich and Alex Kihurani clawed up the order after difficulties on day 1 to finish third in class.

A tight contest developed on the first day between four two-wheel-drive heavyweights. With a slim margin to close the first day, Dave Wallingford and Leanne Junnila continued to set the high water mark in their class, winning two-wheel-drive by more than two minutes over Jason Bailey and Chris Kremer.

"I love this rally," said Wallingford, who made his Canadian Rally debut here one year ago. "Challenging roads, top notch organizers and on top of all that, Leanne and I had a near perfect drive."

Bailey and Kremer had managed to stay close to Wallingford, but suffered three flat tires, one after another, in their pursuit of the class leader. Ultimately, the time lost due to the tires was too much to recover and the pair settled in to second place.

Wallingford and Junnila finished second in the NACAM Rally Championship standings, following the Mexican team of Ricardo Trivino and co-driver Marco Hernandez. Trivino and Hernandez took part in the Rallye Baie des Chaleurs last year and decided to return this year when the event was included as round 3 of the 2017 NACAM schedule. Problems midway through the second day created a setback for the team, but they recovered to claim top points in the NACAM series. Bailey and Kremer finished third in the NACAM points.

Mathieu Leblanc and Alex-Samuel Litalien-Leblanc took third place in two-wheel-drive with a solid drive in their Honda Civic. •

