

L'Estage breaks records at Rally



By Nate Smelle

For 44 years in a row speed freaks and rally car fanatics have been gathering along the backroads of central Ontario to watch the Rally of the Tall Pines. Since 1997 the rally has been based in Bancroft, using the Dungannon recreation centre headquarters since 2003. Over the weekend teams of drivers and their crew members, along with droves of rally fans returned to the Bancroft area to watch the champions of the 2014 season be crowned.

The Rally of the Tall Pines actually brings together four rallies in one. Drivers compete in the National Rally for four-wheel-drive cars and for two-wheel-drive cars. Drivers also compete in the same two categories in the Regional Rally.

The Canadian Rally Championship series begins in Québec each year with the Rallye Perce-Neige Maniwaki. The championship series remains in Québec in June for the Rallye Baie-des-Chaleurs; and again in September for the Rallye Defi. In October and November the competition moves West to British Columbia for the Pacific Forest Rally and the Rocky Mount Rally. The Rally of the Tall Pines is the last competition in the series of six composing the Canadian Rally Championship.

Some competitors will take in all six of the national events, whereas others will focus on the Ontario regional events. The National Rally has 17 special stages which make up 191 km of the total 490 kilometre of the rally. The Regional Rally has 123 kilometre of special stages in their 355 kilometre event.

When the dust and settled and the rally was over Antoine L'Estage and Alan Ockwell had taken home first place in the four-wheel-drive division of the national championship, while managing to set a number of records at the same time. With his fifth Tall Pines win L'Estage became the first driver ever to make a clean sweep of the Canadian Rally Championship series. The win also marks L'Estage's seventh Canadian Driver's Championship and Ockwell's third. Finishing in second place was the team of Alex Beland/Philippe Poirier, followed by third place finishers Sylvain Vincent/Simon Vincent. Will Hudson/John Hall dominated the two-wheel-drive division of the Canadian Rally Championship in their R2 Ford Fiesta. Finishing second was Martin Walter/Ferdinand Trauttmansdorff, followed by Simon Dube/Pat Lavigne.

Martin Donnelly/Angela Cosner's won first place overall in the four-wheel-drive Ontario Regional Championship. Second place went to Walter and Trauttmansdorff, with Ian Crerar/Jen Horsey coming in third. In the regional two-wheel-drive division, Walter and Trauttmansdorff came in first, with Gary Sutherland/Yevgeniy/Gospodinov in second and Zoltan Kovacs/Guy Boudreau in third.

For a full list of Rally results visit www.rallyscoring.com.