

Rally win marks sixth for L'Estage



Car 199 clocked in at 2:10:10.6, coming in just shy of first place at this year's rally. Behind the wheel of the Subaru WRX STI was Travis Pastrana from Davidsonville, MD with co-driver Robbie Durant from Bicester, Oxfordshire, UK. / ROBERT SZTUKA Special to This Week

By Nick Dasko

Antoine L'Estage won out against harsh conditions in his 2015 Subaru WRX STI at this year's Rally of the Tall Pines ? even up against conditions that put 14 other cars out of the race.

The 2016 race, held Nov. 26, featured some truly impressive driving. Teams fought bravely against some of the most challenging conditions seen in years.

Quebecois driver L'Estage and his Welsh co-driver Darren Garrod beat out American Subaru driver Travis Pastrana and English co-driver Robbie Durant in their 2016 WRX STI by just over four seconds. It's L'Estage's first ROTP victory since 2014, his sixth overall.

Early Saturday morning spectators were discussing two key race factors ? the weather, which had turned the roads into a muddy yet icy bog, and the long day, which featured a multitude of night stages that would exhaust drivers.

At the ceremonial start, L'Estage remarked, ?These conditions are probably the worst I have seen in the 15 years I've done this rally.?

According to the Trailer Park Boys themed Ford Fiesta team of Jason Bailey and Shayne Peterson, the conditions would likely put cars into ditches. Peterson chuckled as he said that even his Fiesta ?can't put its power down in these conditions.? The laughs were over the fact that front-wheel-drive Fiestas make about a third of the power all-wheel-drive Subarus do, despite his car having ?a fully tuned engine? as he put it.

Returning for the first service of the day, drivers had 20 minutes to work on their cars. Most were rapidly swapping tires, trying to get some grip on the mixed conditions.

Porsche driver Ian Crerar said he was hoping to get some improvement as he swapped his tires, but he didn't have high hopes. The tires he had on the car were over five years old. They had been used in four previous rallies.

Crerar didn't end up finishing the day due to mechanical issues.

The rear-wheel-drive Subaru BRZ team of Ian Topping and Rachelle Kaltak ran out of traction in a corner on the first stage. They hit a tree but were able to re-enter the race later in the day. The team was unable to finish due to damage from another off-road journey later in the race.

All in all, 14 cars out of more than 30 entries were unable to complete the race due to mechanical issues, damage from collisions caused by the road conditions and strain of the long day.

This win puts L'Estage in first place in the Canadian Rally Championship, which features the ROTP as one of its flagship events.