

Rally RAV4 Clinches First Season Title at NEFR

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Plano, Texas, July 24, 2017— Ryan Millen and the Rally RAV4 officially are the 2017 American Rally Association's 2WD class champions after winning the New England Forest Rally (NEFR).

Millen and co-driver Rhianon Gelsomino entered NEFR needing just a single point to claim the title, thanks to winning the first four races in the series. The ARA awards each team a point at the start of each rally, meaning the moment the Toyota RAV4 SE crossed the timing line on Saturday morning, the team won the championship — with more than a race and a half remaining.

“This is pretty cool,” Millen said. “I didn’t plan on it, but I worked as hard as I could to make it happen, and then it happened. We’ve had battle after battle after battle. We did our homework, and we earned each win.”

The run of victories en-route to the title showcases the unsurpassed reliability, fastidious preparation and the team’s ability to take full advantage of the RAV4’s considerable abilities over the most demanding terrain. The 2WD class features highly modified rally cars that are both lighter and more powerful than the stock Rally RAV4.

Reflecting on the run of victories, Millen said, “We’ve overcome cars that are faster than us, so it’s very, very sweet. It’s hard to make a car finish these rallies, let alone win them, so to be finishing and winning them consistently like this is huge.”

The stock four cylinder engine and six-speed automatic transmission in the Toyota are the epitome of reliability, despite nearly 1,000 miles of extreme abuse over the course of the season.

The same can be said about Millen and Gelsomino, who worked tirelessly since the beginning of the season to fine tune their pace notes. Further, Millen prepares for every rally by studying last year’s video to memorize the course and find areas to improve. The hard work is rewarded in the form of not just faster stage times, but zero points lost due to driving errors.

New dampers and Pirelli tires for this season helped Millen extract every ounce of performance from the Toyota. The rougher and more tricky the terrain, the more he and Gelsomino are able to maximize the RAV4’s ride height, stability and durability advantages.

The RAV4’s capability are a pleasant surprise for Gelsomino in her first full season with Millen.

“The Rally RAV4 has been absolutely incredible,” she said. “I honestly couldn’t believe what we can do in that stock car. To see the times we can put down, to see the jumps that we do in the RAV4, flying through the stages and seeing the spectators supporting us. It’s pretty incredible.”

Millen and Gelsomino know there’s more work to be done. Their next goal is to attempt to finish ahead of many competitors from the much faster 4WD Classes to claim third overall in the ARA championship. Now a perfect five for five, the team looks to keep their perfect season alive at the Ojibwe Forests Rally on August 25.

More information on the Rally RAV4 program can be found at rallyrav4.com.