

RAV4 Prepares for Intense Battle at the Oregon Trail

April 18, 2017

Torrance, Calif., April 18, 2017— Rally RAV4 driver Ryan Millen looks to extend his points lead in the American Rally Association's 2WD Class in this weekend's high-octane Oregon Trail Rally, which promises to be among the fastest events on the calendar.

By some estimates, nearly 20 percent of the route consists of paved surfaces. And even when the tarmac ends, vast gravel-covered straights will see the RAV4 sometimes surpass 100 mph. Such pace actually places Millen and company at a bit of a disadvantage to their competitors, many of whom run significantly lighter and more powerful machinery. As a result, the Toyota-Millen team is preparing even harder than usual for what it expects to be the toughest event of the season. Still, the massive mechanical grip, better suspension travel, and bulletproof Toyota reliability are all advantages that play in the favor of the RAV4 SE.

In an effort to gain an advantage, the Rally RAV4 team is taking its preparation to extreme measures. Said Millen of the challenge he's facing, "There are a couple spots where it's very straight, very fast, very wide open road, and then they throw a lot of chicanes in them." To help make up the difference, tire strategy is going to be a big factor. For most of the rally's 18 stages, the RAV4 will be fitted for the first time with very fast Pirelli rally tires that are specifically designed for grip off the pavement.

When faced with three purely tarmac stages, however, the team is opting to run the ultra-soft Hoosier A7, a barely-street-legal competition tire that was developed for autocrossing. Translation: it's soft enough that it doesn't need much time to come up to temp in order to perform well. It's about as fast as a DOT-legal tire can be on tarmac, but it doesn't last terribly long. It's a gamble, but if all goes well, it could help Team Millen save up to two or three seconds per mile, at a rally that Millen and the Rally RAV4 won by a mere ten seconds last year.

The team is hardly stopping at tires, though. Gasoline weighs about six pounds per gallon, so by precisely estimating how much fuel is needed to complete each stage, the RAV4 can forego the excess fuel, and reap the performance benefits of the saved weight.

"In the past," Millen said, "I've always been like, 'Just fill it all the way up and give me two spare tires.' I've been that way because, initially, this program was, 'Don't have any DNFs and let's see what we can get out of it.' Now, we have to try everything we can to win."

As one last touch of fine-tuning, Millen and co-driver Rhianon Gelsomino, now in just their fourth rally together, are working on continuing to refine their pace notes. The goal is to ensure that the RAV4 ends up coming out of the turns carrying as much extra speed as possible onto the long straights of the Oregon Trail.

"It's about trying to look at where we can refine the notes more, to make sure that we never lose momentum," according to Gelsomino, "so when we get through the corner and we're going down the straight we've not lost any RPM."

While the fast and paved stages are all about keeping some of the bigger power cars in sight, there's one area where Millen expects to carve back large swaths of time from his competitors: night stages.

“I enjoy the night because, typically, we’re a lot faster than most people,” he says. “What’s cool about the night is you just focus on where your lights point. In some senses, you’re almost faster at night, because you’re not looking for other things. All you have is what’s in front of you and the notes.”

More information on the Rally RAV4 program can be found at www.RallyRAV4.com.

Information on the Oregon Trail Rally and the American Rally Association can be found at www.OregonTrailRally.com, and www.AmericanRallyAssociation.com.