

Toyota RAV4 Looks to Continue Hot Start at Olympus

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Torrance, Calif., May 9, 2017— Ryan Millen and the 2017 Rally RAV4 head to the Olympus Rally with plenty of momentum, thanks to back-to-back 2WD Class wins to start the American Rally Association's six race season. Millen can put his championship rivals under extreme pressure by making it three-for-three on the year at Olympus, an event Millen's father, Rod, won four times in five years in the early 1980s. Ryan is looking to repeat, having won Olympus last year as well.

With nearly all of the rally's 140 competitive miles spread out among just eight of the 10 stages, Olympus presents unique demands for both drivers and vehicles. Some stages feature up to 25 continuous miles of sandy, gravel-covered roads littered with potentially hazardous large stones. Unlike rallies with shorter stages, drivers can't expect to limp a damaged vehicle across the finish line without suffering severe time losses.

It's here that the Toyota's superior dependability, ride height, and suspension travel should be decisive advantages that enable Millen to push harder than his competitors without running the same risk of damage.

"We're putting heavier sump guards and protection under the bottom. For this one, you armor up a little bit and do what you can," Millen notes about his plan for maximum attack across the stone-filled and technically demanding terrain.

Co-driver Rhianon Gelsomino sums up the RAV4's advantage at Olympus in a single word: "Endurance."

"Our car is extremely reliable," said Gelsomino. "Some others drive cars that aren't as reliable. Long stages are a huge advantage to us, as far as reliability is concerned."

The length and relatively low number of stages also means Millen will have fewer updates about his competition's times. He'll have to drive aggressively from the outset of each stage, or risk losing a large chunk of time over each stage.

"As always, the RAV4 is bulletproof. This is going to be over 100 miles of me cutting every single ditch, running over every rock, going full throttle over jumps, and braking as hard as I can. There's no conservation of the equipment," Millen added.

Adding to the challenge, all but one stage is new for this year, so Millen can't prepare by studying video of his winning drive from last year. Instead, he's watching a much slower vehicle drive the route in fast-forward as he learns the new stages.

Continuing the season-long theme of Millen and Gelsomino perfecting their pace notes communication, the duo are again evolving their language by using fewer syllables wherever possible, so they can add more detail. Rather than describing a challenging curve as "five left tightens a bit," for example, Gelsomino now says "five left nips."

Ultimately, that means the duo can add one or two additional terms without wasting time in the high-stress environment, giving Millen the confidence he needs to push the RAV4 to its limit. The strategy this season has been and continues to be to focus on many little things that add up to something big.

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

The Olympus Rally dates back to 1973, and played host to the World Rally Championship during the fabled Group B years of the 1980s. More information can be found at olympusrally.com.

