

Rally RAV4 Comes out of Gate Strong with Win at Perce Neige

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Torrance, Calif., Feb. 7, 2017— After more than 140 brutal stage miles, Ryan Millen and co-driver Rhianon Gelsomino took their RAV4 to the top step of the podium this past weekend at the Perce Neige Rally. The result was the best possible way to start the season, and it put the pair out front early in the 2WD Class for the newly formed American Rally Association (ARA) championship.

Perce Neige is in the town of Maniwaki, Quebec, and it doesn't get much colder or snowier than Quebec in the winter time. The rally actually consisted of nearly 300 total miles (including transit miles between stages), some of them in a complete snowstorm. Still, Team Millen prevailed.

“When you get that first win, it really sets the tone early,” said Millen. “Now people have to chase us. My goal is to have an error-free year in terms of both driving and car prep.”

Before the race season started, Millen and team did a thorough comb-through and prep on the Rally RAV4. In addition to the parts replacement and inspection basics, the team was able to get a bit more camber from the control arms, helping to give the already capable mostly stock vehicle even more grip in the turns.

The hard work paid off, as no major repairs were needed during the rally. A few cosmetic bits of damage occurred, but they were minor and expected.

Gelsomino's more than 10 years of experience as a navigator entering the race enabled Millen to push himself and step up his game.

“This was one of the hardest and longest rallies I've ever done,” said Gelsomino. “I'd been in the Rally RAV4 in the gravel and dirt, but I didn't know what to expect in the snow. The RAV4 was absolutely incredible. It performed flawlessly.”

The driver/co-driver relationship is critical, and fortunately the pair had a chance to drive last year together to start to get familiar and build chemistry. Meanwhile, 2016 co-driver, Christina Millen, was able to really focus all energies on managing the team, which gave even more firepower to the first race of the season.

The Rally RAV4 and Millen got out to an early lead and often won stages by a minute or two over their nearest competitor. Once the team had a significant cushion, it was time to focus on keeping their head down and not making mistakes. The last stage of the rally occurred in complete white-out conditions.

Having both extra ground clearance and more suspension travel certainly gave the Rally RAV4 an advantage over some of the other cars in the field, and the automatic transmission meant it was never at risk of stalling out, like some of the others as the snow increased. The team could charge into the turns and the bumps without slowing down as much, and that was just with front-wheel-drive.

“It doesn't seem like we even had an off season,” said an exhausted Millen after the race. “It was just a little blip of a break, and now we're back into it. We're working harder than ever to bring home the championship this year.”

Fortunately for the team, they get to take a short break before preparing for Rally America's 100 Acre Wood Rally in Salem, Mo. on March 17.

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

Information on American Rally Association can be found at www.americanrallyassociation.org.

Information on the Rally America series can be found www.Rally-America.com.