

Rally RAV4 Finishes Second in National Championship in First Attempt

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Torrance, Calif., Oct. 18, 2016 — An entire season of rally racing is a brutal test of man, woman, and machine. This past weekend at the Lake Superior Performance Rally (LSPR), Ryan Millen, Christina Fate, and their capable Rally RAV4 secured a solid second place finish in the 2WD Class for the Rally America national championship. It's a serious accomplishment considering their RAV4 had a stock engine and transmission, as it competed against cars with sequential racing boxes, big turbos, and radical modifications. Millen also captured top honors, winning the prestigious Rally America Rookie of the Year award.

It wasn't an easy accomplishment, underscored by a tough rally finale at LSPR. Friday was cold with temperatures in the 30s for much of the day. Stage 1 started in slippery fashion in the mud at the fairgrounds, as spectators watched nearly every car scuffle for purchase.

The next few stages before service saw Millen, Fate, and the Rally RAV4 pushing harder than ever before. Going into the first night stage, the team was down 15 seconds on the leader. This was through three stages, as the fourth was cancelled due to an unauthorized vehicle driving on a part of the course.

"We were taking a lot of risks, driving at 110 percent," said Millen. "Cameron's car is heavily modified so we needed to be flat out straight away."

When the car came into service, the Rally RAV4 was in perfect working order, a testament to both the vehicle and the prep of the team prior to the race. A quick inspection and proper aiming of the lights was all that it took to get the car ready for battle again. Millen was feeling bullish about running at night, and also wasn't willing to let the leader pick up any more time on him.

In Stage 5, Millen and the Rally RAV4 nearly matched the leaders time, only losing a single second on the stage. Still, it wasn't the four or five seconds a stage, Millen was hoping to pick up, so he again stepped it up going into Stage 6, but that's where things would take an unexpected turn.

A little bit into the stage, Millen was flat on the gas on a fast straight section in excess of 80 mph. He came over the crest a bit too fast, and wasn't going to be able to brake enough to make the hard right-hander coming up. Millen's instincts took over and he wisely didn't try to make the turn which could have resulted in the vehicle rolling.

Head down, brakes fully locked up, Millen smartly guided the vehicle straight off the course, eventually coming to a rest after hitting a few trees. Fortunately no one was hurt, but after close inspection the crew determined that the damage was extensive. Fate and Millen knew that they were not at risk of losing second place and dropping to third, so the decision was made to retire.

"It was a short stage and we were seeing what we could get out of it. We couldn't leave any time on the table like we did earlier in the season," said Millen. "Christina thought it was her fault because the note was a little late, but I wouldn't ever have done this well without her. It was my decision to change our notes system a bit, and I knew the risks. You win as a team and you lose as a team. We were going for it hard, so I have no regrets about that."

It was a bittersweet moment for Team Millen and the Rally RAV4, but they did finish a very solid second place after eight hard-fought rounds. Fate saw the totality of it all, and what they had accomplished.

"I think we did so much better than we could have ever hoped for. Second place is an amazing result," said Fate. "I don't feel like the journey is over; I feel like it's just the beginning."

The Rally America season had so many twists and turns, so many challenges. At the end of the day Millen and the Rally RAV4 were always in the hunt, always a potential threat, proven by the fact that they won several races outright in the 2WD Class.

“This has been hugely successful, and I’m very proud of it,” said a still-sore Millen after the race. “I never thought I’d be happy with second place, but we’ve gained so much respect in the rally community. You can’t buy these experiences; you have to live through them. I’m always going to look back at this and think about just how much we accomplished.”

And although the Rally America season has concluded, Millen and team still have one more challenge...the NASA Rally Sport National Championship, taking place in just under two weeks at the Empire State Performance Rally (ESPR) October 28-30.

More information on ESPR can be found at www.ESPrally.com.

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

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