

Rally RAV4 Wins National Championship

November 03, 2016

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Torrance, Calif., (November 3, 2016) — We are all moved by a great story about overcoming adversity. After a bittersweet DNF at Lake Superior, the team bounced back in triumphant fashion over the weekend at the Empire State Performance Rally (ESPR). Ryan Millen, Christina Fate and their virtually bulletproof Rally

RAV4 won the 2WD Class National Championship in NASA Rally Sport's winner-take-all event. National Championships are always something to be incredibly proud of, but to put an even finer point on the accomplishment Millen and the RAV4 finished second overall. With that, they bested every single car in the competition, save one, regardless of class, drive wheels, power level or really anything else.

The first hurdle for the team was the fact that their Rally RAV4 had a lot of hard miles on it and hadn't been prepped extensively yet. Rallies at Prescott and Gorman, plus testing and media drives at DirtFish and Lake Superior, had placed a lot of wear and tear on the car. Luckily, the tough RAV4 was up to the challenge and ready to take the abuse about to be thrown at it at ESPR.

During reconnaissance the team didn't get a full picture of just how rough the rally would be, as there was a lot of water that hid rocks and other serious obstacles. When the rally started it would prove to be brutal on man, woman and machine.

"We bent the subframe, which we've never done before, and we bent three wheels," said Millen. "Twice I knocked the wind out of myself, and I know Christina got pretty banged up. In terms of how rough the rally was, this was definitely the most brutal."

The rally would take place over just a few miles of roads run in different configurations and directions, but the total rally would cover 100 miles over a whopping 21 Stages. In the 2WD Class, a very potent Ford Escort RS1800 from Europe would lead the way, putting some time each stage on the Rally RAV4. But Millen and team stuck to their game plan and the Escort would eventually crash, paving the way for the Rally RAV4 to take over the lead.

In Stage 5, Millen and the Rally RAV4 moved into the lead, and would keep it for the rest of rally. They would finish an amazing six minutes ahead of their nearest 2WD competitor, punctuating how potent the RAV4 is with Millen and Fate behind the wheel.

After the Escort retired, Millen was careful to take care of the car, driving smartly to prevent failures or off-course excursions. The strategy worked perfectly and kept the equipment out of harm's way, despite the rough terrain.

With the rough terrain came an advantage for the Rally RAV4: wheel travel. As a crossover SUV, more wheel travel meant the vehicle could take on the tough stuff much better than a lot of the field. The reliability sealed the deal as it had so many times before in both the Rally America and NASA Rally Sport series.

Fate continued to stick to the team's new system of pace notes, which proved solid during the 21 Stages of ESPR. The win marks an end to the historic 2016 rally racing chapter, but not an end to the story.

"It felt really good to be back in the car and end on a high note," said Fate. "We're hoping to get to do it again next year. We have the coolest job in the world."

For Millen, 12 rallies pushed him and the team to the limit, but it's hard to imagine he'd want it any other way. Not to mention a national championship is among the most coveted wins in the sport.

"Winning the championship gives you that sweet taste at the end of the year," said Millen. "I'm really proud of what we accomplished all season long. We're going to take everything we learned from this year and refine."

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

High-resolution photography can be downloaded at toyotaneewsroom.com.