

Win at Olympus Marks Back-to-Back Victories for Toyota RAV4

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This past weekend at the Olympus Rally in the deep forest of Shelton, Wash., Ryan Millen and the Toyota RAV4 SE put another exclamation point on their season, winning the 2WD Class with ease, and finishing ahead of all but four 4WD competitors. The class win was punctuated by a gap of over five minutes ahead of their nearest in-class competitor.

With well over 100 stage miles over two days and over 2 hours of total race time not including transits, the rally really showed what the RAV4 was made of. Not a single significant hiccup impeded Millen and the stout Toyota from forging ahead. In fact, the only repair was to a small crack in the aftermarket exhaust.

The rally presented a wide range of obstacles, chief among them gravel littered with massive stones that pounded relentlessly at the RAV4's undercarriage. Spectators at every viewing area witnessed the compact two-wheel drive Toyota utility vehicle out-perform many faster, more powerful vehicles of different classes and makes.

“We know that thousands of hours have gone into the engineering of the RAV4, and we don't mess with a good thing,” said Millen. “To be honest, I was a bit skeptical when we first started development, but even out of the box, the RAV4 is bulletproof. And it's really amazing how much speed you can carry. You wouldn't expect a vehicle this size to handle and turn the way it does.”

Millen and navigator Christine Fate showed superb consistency, quickness, and composure while fighting their way up from a staged 10th position to fifth overall.

By the end of the first stage, Millen and Fate ended first in their class and a heady fourth overall. Little did they know at the time their fast pace would set the tone for the rest of the race, as their reliable Toyota eclipsed competition wearing Ford, Honda, and Subaru badges, to name a few.

Usually staged about 10th on the road, moving up the fifth proved challenging to the team, as they wouldn't have a path cleared quite as well by the cars starting ahead. Still, Millen and the RAV4 attacked the corners, got the car to rotate, and stayed on the gas.

Fans were constantly amazed at the fact that the RAV4 SE retained its stock engine and automatic transmission, often replaced or modified with exotic racing-specific hardware. It served as a true testament to what a RAV4 can really do out of the box as a stock vehicle.

Unlike the last round where the top spot was determined by a gut-wrenching final stage battle, at the Olympus Rally, things were a little less exciting for racers and spectators alike. Instead, they were treated to a clinic in mechanical consistency and honed driver prowess by the RAV4 and Millen.

For Millen, this latest win at a former World Rally Championship (WRC) course represented more than a place to earn valuable championship points.

“This is a race I've been coming to as a young child, and I've seen my dad win it,” remembered Millen. “To follow in his footsteps is huge. It's hard to express how much this means to me and my family. This one is special, a real career highlight.”

The Olympus Rally marks the halfway point in the season, with four rallies down and four more to go. The RAV4 now sits atop the championship points standings for 2WD, and Toyota stays in the hunt for the Constructor's Championship as well.

The team now prepares for the Susquehannock Trail Rally on June 3 in Pennsylvania, the next stop of the Rally

America series.

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

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