

Racers hit new roads for Mountain Trials

BY LEE TOOP
news editor

Racers from around the Pacific Northwest will be quenching their need for speed this Saturday as Merritt hosts the annual Mountain Trials Rally once again.

This year, however, the event is breaking new ground by moving to some different routes further from town as a way to test roads for October's Canadian Rally Championship event to be held here once again.

West Coast Rally Association spokesman Ken Kwong said spectators will be able to stay close to home to see the action — or take a further trip to watch the drivers try out a new race area.

"We're trying out a new section of road — if it works out for us, we'll use it to incorporate into the national event," commented Kwong of the change, which will take competitors onto forest roads east of Merritt off Highway 97C. "We've actually used these roads for our winter navigational event for a few years now, and we've always loved them. It's been about a ten-week project to get the road permissions in place, but everyone's on side."

The WCRA has been using routes along Nicola Lake, the Helmer Road area and south of Merritt for the past few years for both the Mountain Trials, round three of the Western Canadian Rally Championship, and the Pacific Forest Rally, which is part of the Canadian national series. Using a new section of road means that spectators will be going further afield to get the wilderness action — and there will be

less visibility of racers in town.

There is an opportunity to check out the cars and drivers to start the event; the race vehicles will be on display Saturday from 10:30 to 11:30 a.m. at the special spectator point on the Active Mountain grounds.

Spectators can head up Midday Valley Road and follow the signs to the parking area, where they will be directed to a spot to watch the stages from. Racing gets underway there at noon, with the cars making two passes through the area in the course of roughly an hour.

From there, the cars and drivers head east, to the area around the Vinson Lake recreation site. Spectators are asked to head out Highway 97C to the Loon Lake exit, then follow the Shrimpton Creek forest service road past the Vinson Lake site, where marshals will direct parking.

That site will be active for about five hours, with cars making five passes between 2 and 7 p.m. It's expected to be a great site for action, with a sweeping corner perfect for drift.

This year, the service area for cars will be in the bush; spectators at the Vinson Lake site will be able to see service work as well as racing. There will be opportunities for people to make their way out during the day, but Kwong advised that they come prepared for a few hours in the wilderness.

Kwong said there is expected to be around 30 entries for the rally, with a large number of American participants jumping in as part of the new Cascade Cup series for two-wheel-drive vehicles.