

South of the Border

By Max Etak

Since last issue the American Rally Championship has completed three more rounds and the leader board for the title is starting to take shape. With five of the eight events finished we see the much speculated battle between Stig Blomquist and BC-boy Pat Richard hotting up. Sure there's other drivers out there but we aren't really interested in Open class or PGT this time around. What we want to know is how our man Pat compares with world level talent and Mr Blomquist has plenty of that so Group N is where the action is.

At the beginning of May Pat partnered with California company Easy Street Motorsports and prepared a 2004 WRX in his Squamish shop liveried in exciting red. The new combination debuted effectively at Rim of the World Rally where they repeated last year's success of first overall. As this was not a National grade event there was no chance to measure the car against the regular competition.

Rally America Round 3 was the Susquehannock Trail Pro Rally in Pennsylvania held the first weekend in June. The roads there are open and very fast and some solid talent turned up in proven machinery. Pat and co-driving sister Nathalie campaigned their 2002 Gr N car but unfortunately it was not long before turbo problems hampered the Richards. They battled on with one eye on the Championship points available from a finish and

Photo by Matthew Simmons



The Richards win Rim of the World, again

Photo by Matthew Simmons

accepted second in Gr N right behind Stig who finished 3rd Overall. Former World Champion or not, the Gr N cars could not keep up to the horsepower of the Open class missiles and at the end it was last year's victors Shane Mitchell and Glen Patterson that conceded the win to the most successful pair in the history of the event, Paul Choiniere and Jeff Becker with their Hyundai Tiburon.

Just two weeks later the teams were facing off again. By now the 2004 car was back in Pat's hands and with a big number #1 on the doors they were the ones to beat. The rally started and fast out of the blocks were last minute substitute driver Stephan Verdier in an Open class WRX and Doug Shepherd in a blistering quick front wheel drive Dodge STR-4. By the start of final stage 7 the Dodge had faded and Verdier led second place Richard by almost a minute but Stig was only ten seconds further back. Part way up the mountain a halfshaft broke in Pat's car but he was determined to press hard to the finish. Just seconds from the finish the overworked engine

gave up and their speed was lost. Stig Blomquist took Gr N honours by .6 of a second but a strong last stage effort by Leon Styles saw him squeeze through to second overall in his Open class Evo 7. The Rocket Rally team hung on to fourth overall and second in class.

Maine Forest Rally is round 4 and is the last weekend in July. The challenge was on but a loose coil wire slowed Stig and co-driver Ana Goni after only a couple of stages. Their service crew were able to make repairs and an impressive string of stage wins saw them clawing their way back towards the leaders from 12th place. The Richards kept things moving to hold their position at the front of the leader board but a broken driveshaft on stage 6 threatened disaster. The shaft was replaced and with memories of Pikes Peak fresh in their head they continued with a gearbox that was less than 100%. Luck held and Pat and Nathalie collected first overall with Blomquist and Goni second while a good drive by Ken Block and Alex Gelsomino made it a 1-2-3 for Gr N cars at the top of the list.

Now we wait to see what happens at Ojibwe Forests August 26/27. We have seen both of our key players really light the fires when needed and as the end of the Championship gets closer the action can only get hotter.