

Rallying around the World

2005 FIA Asia-Pacific Rally Championship, Round 4 in Japan

The fourth round of the 2005 FIA Asia-Pacific Rally Championship continued through Asia and on July 22-24 was held on Japan's island of Hokkaido. The FIA Asia-Pacific Rally Championship is one of the premier regional championships in World Rallying. For 2005, the eight rounds will be in Australia, New Caledonia, New Zealand, Japan, Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, and China. The event attracted crews from Finland, New Zealand, Australia, Russia, Japan, Great Britain, and Canada.

There were some top drivers there with WRC experience including current points leader of the APRC, Jussi Valmaki and teammate, Taguchi Katsuhiko. As well as current PWRC points leader, Toshi Arai. All stages were completely new except for the 2.7km Rikubetsu Circuit Special to avoid practicing for the upcoming World Rally Championship round in September. Rallying on new stages makes pacenotes that much more important as crews have no prior knowledge of stages. The stages vary from smooth, flat and fast runs



Local boy Brian rallying in Japan

Photo by Brian Wende

through the forests to narrow and technical with no room for error. There was a wide variety of corners, with some flat-out crests.

The rally was great, meeting lots of great people, and like every event was a good learning experience for the team and myself. Like all rallies we had some issues from SS1, coming down hard on flat-out jump, damaging the front end of the car but were able to continue and later in the rally had two punctures, but that's all part of

rallying. The car we competed in was a GrpN, Subaru Impreza STi and it was fantastic. Finishing 18th overall and going over the finishing ramp was very satisfying and I am already looking forward to the next event!

By Brian Wende

World Rally Championship

Five more stops in the World Rally Circuit; victories, upsets, and the return from retirement of a favourite driver. For your Richard Burns update, it is reported that he is doing well after undergoing a recent operation related to the discovery of a brain tumour in 2003, with doctors describing the outcome as "very successful".

First up, the Supermag Rally Italia Sardinia. A departure from the previous Sanremo, the sun drenched Sardinia boasts sandy gravel stages compared to the asphalt of recent years. Loeb takes an early lead as Marcus Gronholm rolls his car on SS3. "We were just too quick - we ran out of grip and rolled. It's a real pity," said Gronholm, taking the blame for the incident.

They made it back to service with only cosmetic damage, but lost over a minute and a half. The big battle, however, was not just between manufacturers, but also between the tyre companies. Michelin correctly predicted the hot dry conditions, while Pirelli admitted that it's miscalculation of bringing too soft a tyre caused some difficulty for Solberg and Subaru. Solberg takes second to S. Loeb, with Gronholm battling all the way back from 22nd (after his roll) to take the third spot on the podium. Duval, despite early optimism, comes in at 11th, after having to pull out of the event on Friday. Ford gathers some manufacturer's points from Gardemeister and Kresta, in fourth and fifth, respectively.

Off to the Island of Cyprus, and the seaside resort of Limassol, where to the west, near Paphos, some very tough, mechanically demanding gravel stages had been set. Temperatures can soar to over 50 degrees inside the cars, putting added stress on the drivers and co-drivers. Sebastien Loeb consistently took one stage after another, winning SS2 through SS15, in an event where just finishing was a valid goal. Petter Solberg and Marcus Gronholm were both forced out early due to mechanical trouble, while Francois Duval had a falling out with his co-driver, Stephane Prevot after an off that ended the pair's hopes of a finish. Privateer Manfred Stohl takes second, with Peugeot taking third thanks to Markko Martin keeping a cool head, yet pushing hard in the final leg.