

Review:

Cochrane Rally of the Ranchlands

Held each year at the beginning of March, the Cochrane, Alberta event is notable as being *the* snow rally on the Western Canadian Rally Championship calendar. This year the rally truly fulfilled its reputation.

Running on the weekend of March 12-13, the weather looked set to provide typical spring conditions. During the recce portion prior to rally start, the competitors drove roads and made notes based on the surface of mud with icy patches. Cornering lines were selected and tire choices discussed. Sometime in the small hours of Sunday morning it began to snow. Not much it first appeared but as organizers and competitors made their way out to the hills surrounding Cochrane it was discovered that a pretty blanket of snow was covering everything under nearly 10" of soft powder. Many of the worker crews were seriously challenged just getting to their appropriate locations.

The cars set off to do battle and battle is what they enjoyed. The big scrap was always going to be the one between Norm Leblanc and Scott Trinder. Norm was newly paired with Keith Morrison as co-driver and Scott and navvie Bill Westhead were getting used to sitting on opposite sides of the car than normal. Bill was still the one reading notes but the new RSport rally car is right hand drive and this gave Trinder a lot to think about. Not only must he master smooth shifting with an unfamiliar hand but more importantly he must adjust his perspective when positioning the car on the road. 13 years of reflexes had to be relearned in order to keep the wheels out of the ditches. Perhaps in recognition of this challenge, the Leblanc/Morrison team checked into start control early and gave themselves a challenge of their own. Suffering a



Clearcut Racing plowing the road to victory

Photo by Shawn Bishop

minute in penalties, Norm transformed his driving style and began trying to claw back time.

It seems that many teams faced adversity with a **variety** of techniques. Eric Hagerman went into a snowbank headfirst, fortunately(?) there was a stump concealed and it bounced the car straight back onto the road. The RSport service crew were unable to get to the service area through the deep snow and hitched a lift with the crew of Easy Rider Racing. Team driver Warren Currie performed a 360 pirouette at speed between the snowbanks but kept his head and lost little time. Matas and Matas in their Dodge Neon went tobogganing and ended up lodged against some trees, a steep slide below the road and out of the rally. Behind the scenes, Car zero had a big off and a pair of sweep trucks swapped tugs to get each other out of trouble. The team

that seemed to benefit most from all the snow was not equipped with AWD, nor were they experienced winter rallyists. No, it was the brand new team and car of Aaron Neumann and Graham Coates in a P2 Honda Civic that were storming up the leader board. Even when the two final stages were dropped for scheduling reasons, at the end of a very long day it was only three cars that beat them to the podium. Leblanc and Morrison had fought hard enough to get back in front of Trinder and Westhead who in turn got the hang of the strange car well enough to edge the Burnleys behind them into third.

Event organizers at the Calgary Sports Car Club ran a great event where no one got hurt, everyone had fun, and most people made it out of the hills in time for the awards dinner.