

# Young Gun!

by John McLaren

*Congratulations on becoming Western Canada Rally Champion Co-driver at your first attempt. How does it feel to be the youngest ever champion at 17?*

OK, I guess. I don't really think about it that much. I stepped in to help Norm out just 1 week before the first event, and it was just one event at a time. I never thought about the championship until we got to PFR and then it was more about keeping Joe's chances alive.

*When you won your first event outright, you became the youngest ever winner of a regional stage event. How did that feel?*

Very cool. Norm & I had such a great time on the event. It was a lot of fun. We only met for the first time, on the morning of the rally. We had a spin on the first stage and were too busy chatting in the car after that on the transit and took a very long detour. We only just made it to the start of the next stage in time. Made for a fun transit. Halfway through the rally, we hit a bridge and ripped a back wheel off. I think we still managed to win that stage, but it looked like we would be going out early. Cody did a great job getting us back in the rally and out of service on time. On one of the next stages, I called a 5 left followed by a long straight and told Norm to floor it. Which he did, only to find a chicane just around the corner. I remember adding "or, not" as we went through it at a lot of funny angles. Norm was fighting to keep control and managed to not hit any of the chicane. We had a good laugh about that afterwards. I remember that event for being relaxed, no pressure, just out to have fun. We laughed a lot that day.

Everyone should get a chance to do at least one rally just for fun.

*Then you switched driver, why was that?*

The ride with Norm was a one off. Paul, his normal co-driver was on holiday during the first event. I thought the season was going to be just that one event and then Joe asked me to do Rocky in the Specialty Subaru rally car. At first, Rocky was just another one off but we did so well Joe asked me to stay on for the season. We would have done all the other events if the car could have been repaired in time for Kananaskis.

*Rocky was your 1st national. You won the regional portion and almost made the podium in the national with 4th overall. Did you go into it thinking that you could do so well?*

No. Rocky was the high point of the season. Looking at the entry list, a top 10 place would have been a good result. To get 4th overall with only Pat, Antoine and Andrew in front of us in Open class cars was very special.

*If that was the high point, what was the low point of the season?*

Watching Norm & Paul go by us at PFR when we were out at the side of the road. You saw us go off on TV but just before that was a jump where I got thrown around in my seat, lost my place in the notes, and didn't give Joe the call in time. We were flying on that stage. The first time through we took 20 seconds off Norm and I could tell that we already 20 seconds faster than our previous time by that point in the stage. I felt really bad for not making the call, and I knew that was Joe's chance for the

*This year saw the introduction of reconnaissance and pace notes. You've used the old route book when you did course opening, so how did you get on with pace notes?*

Making your own notes is far better, and safer, than using a route book or notes that someone else has made. We used stage notes at Rocky and while the notes are not necessarily wrong, they are still not as good as your own pace notes. It's definitely the way to go and I wouldn't want to go back to the old ways.

*As a 17 year old I expect you play a lot of computer games. Do you use any rally games, and do they help?*

I have Colin McRae 04 on the X-Box. It's a really good game and I used it a lot early in the season to practice reciting the pace notes. It also helped to keep me fresh between events, as we do not do a lot of testing like the professionals you see on TV.

*What advice would you have to young people that want to get into rallying?*

Even if you want to be a driver, navigate first so that you appreciate your navigator when you do get behind the wheel. Driving's also way too expensive for a student. I also think that learning to navigate before you become an experienced driver makes for a better navigator. I had confidence in all my drivers. I left them to do the driving and I concentrated on what I had to do.

The most important thing is to get out there and take part. I was at the spectator point in Cache Creek when I was 12. I navigated in TSDs when I was 14, and was a marshal at the spectator point at PFR in 2003. That was when I had to take over navigating in the course opening car and that's how I came to be in a position to be asked to fill in when someone needed a co-driver. You learn a lot from being in the sport at all levels. What are your plans for 2005? Well, this is my grade 12 year and the plan at Christmas was to do no rallying in 2005 until I had finished high school and graduated. Then Joe came really close to securing a major sponsor that would have seen us in a full Group N car for all 3 major championships in North America, and we may even have had Pat and Natalie (Richard) as team mates. Sadly, that did not come off. With the current level of uncertainty with the organizers of the Canadian and US championships the timing was just bad for us. At least this way I don't have to work my provincial exams around my rallying.

Owen Parsonage navigates Joe Battrick and the Specialty Subaru WRX to first in class at Rocky Mountain Rally 2004.



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Thanks Owen and good luck with grade 12.