

An Exciting Finish

WCRA TSD Championship settled at Totem

By Geoff Gauthier

Nearing the end of September it looked like R.J. Carroll's run at a BC TSD hat-trick was over, as Gary Webb from Arizona held a marginal lead. Heading in to the weekend of November 19 at Totem, Webb had 25 class points and Carroll trailed by two with 23. The uncertain weather conditions and stiff competition that showed up for Totem would definitely pose a threat to both teams.

Previously at the Loop rally in Calgary, Carroll and his father and navigator Ren Carroll came up with a lucky win to get back on track and challenge Webb and his navigator John Kisela, who placed fifth in that event.

Webb, not one to be rattled by a shy finish, came back to battle Carroll to a perfect tie at Midnight near the end of October, the Carrolls squeaking out the victory on zeros, but still short of the mark in class points to officially tie the race. It would come down to Totem to see who would be the 2005 WCRA BC TSD Champions; whichever team finished ahead of the other would win.

Day one of Totem began fairly warm and mild for mid November in Cache Creek, especially since rally master Paul Westwick had been reporting heavy snow and cold conditions in the two weeks leading up to the event. But that was at the base of the mountains. Westwick assured all competitors that there were more difficult conditions at the higher elevations. The fog – or “low clouds” – made visibility very poor for the first stage as the cars headed up into the hills.

The second regularity showed Totem for what it really was – a rally in snow and ice. Up into the hills North of Savona the sky was packed with low cloud and the terrain became jammed with reasonably deep, loose snow. This is where Webb's Alcan winter endurance rally experience showed as he and John Kisela pushed ahead of the Carrolls, who were not too far behind.



Carroll and Carroll on their way to the '05 TSD Title

During this section of the rally the road conditions were very poor. Car #1, Lee and Rod Sorenson of California in their Subaru Impreza 2.5 RS, ended up going off an embankment, rolling several times. The veteran driver and navigator reportedly understeered the corner and rolled several times, landing shiny side up but quite a few feet down. Both Lee and Rod were fine plus they were able to get the car out of the ravine, drive it home, and get to work on time Monday morning. All pleasantries aside, the crash served as a warning to the other drivers that these roads were to be taken seriously.

Heading back down and out of the clouds there was time for a quick gas stop and on to the next regularity. The cars headed across the North Thompson River and up towards Sun Peaks. It was just starting to get dark. Facing the oncoming traffic of early opening skiers returning home from the mountain, the rally headed east toward Johnson Lake and back into the clouds. The challenging combination of clouds and night reduced visibility to a few scarce metres from the hood. This was the stage that sorted the foolhardy from the brave. In between fumbling with lighting combinations and slowing for blind corners, teams were dropping seconds and even minutes. In this stage, Carroll showed growth as the defending BC TSD champ, coming through in second place (-12 seconds) a full minute ahead of his main competition.

At the overnight halt the Carrolls were sitting in second place, six seconds down from the overall leader - Seattle's Eric Horst and Stephen Willey in their all wheel drive BMW - , and roughly one minute ahead of Webb and Kisela.

Day two began early on a dreary Clearwater morning. All of the muddy rally cars in the hotel parking lot were covered in the fresh dew and collected rain of the previous night. The sky was dark and the drivers and navigators knew there would be more snow today, and with that snow more attrition.

Sunday, November 20 saw the cars heading west, back over the mountains towards 100 Mile House via Bowers Lake and Hathaway Lake. The Carrolls were looking to set up for a steady pace and to maintain their position ahead of Webb and Kisela. An unfortunate event saw Webb lose some time behind a truck hauling heavy logging equipment, then a fairly large early penalty shortly thereafter. Trying not to make any mistakes, the Carrolls pulled together a solid second day.

When the final scores were tallied, the Carrolls had won the entire event by two seconds and taken home the hat trick, winning the BC TSD championship once again.