

'Plan B' works out OK

2006 Wild West Rally organizers cope with weather

BY RON SOREM

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OLYMPIA — Pacific Rally Group presented an abbreviated version of the 2006 Wild West Rally under the sanctioning of Rally America. Wild West was the concluding event of the Rally America National Stage Rally Series for 2006.

Wild West was originally scheduled for earlier in the year, but was postponed to Dec. 2 and 3, due to fire danger. With winter weather arriving a month early, snow covered most of the rally's stage roads until the day before the event, when heavy rains melted away the snow in most areas while super-saturating the roadbeds. Most of Wild West roads are owned by a timber

company and their management decided the risk to the "asset" was too great, and, with prodigious run-off would come prodigious fines from the ecology-friendly State of Washington. Silt and mud might ruin future salmon spawning areas, and in Washington, fish come first over rally cars. With only three days initial notice, and negotiations ongoing as late as Friday (opening day of the event), the rally nightmare was in full bloom.

The organizers were faced with the proverbial rock versus hard place situation. Most teams were en route to Olympia. Permits were paid, lodging and banquet venues paid, overhead was building rapidly and commitments to local economies had been promised —

and deserved — as well as commitments to the competitors. With no likelihood of stage roads, alternate plans were discussed, revised, dismissed, then reconsidered in lengthy and frenetic meetings.

Plan B, of who knows how many, saw the Friday Press Stages moved to private land near Shelton; Saturday confined to the Off-Road Vehicle Park at Straddleline, a joint Thurston-Grays Harbor county park venue complete with camping, grandstands, concessions and a RallySprint dirt track; and for Sunday, a last-minute rental of Pacific Raceways near Kent, for several runs of a 2.25-mile "tarmac stage."

Friday's stages saw teams winding through stumps and bumps, most still



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Bruce Davis and Jimmy Brandt power their Dodge Neon SRT-4 through the mud at the Straddleline Off-Road Vehicle Park.