

covered with some snow, but providing some very nice photo opportunities, highlighting the National Competitors alongside the regional teams.

Saturday saw a Parc-Expose in the service area of the ORV Park, open to all spectators. Saturday's first stage began on a short flat gravel section of the campground perimeter road, then... 90-left into the woods, long sweeping right, tightens, into sharp left, short two-car-length straight into 90-right, 90-left onto the perimeter road, turn 90-left, 100 meters over bridge, 20 meters through gate, into the mud bowl with a small right-left jog before the long roller-coaster climb along the fence to the top of the hill and a 90-left still following the fence, medium sharp left, slightly downhill, into sharp right very slippery, slight uphill caution, through big trees, long crest dropping shallow left along fence, downhill slippery, sharp left across the infield, rough, jump, hairpin right, jump, hairpin left, long sweeping right, tightens into 90-right, grandstand straightaway, 100 meters jump (read mosh pit) or bypass in narrow rough, deep mud, at Flying Finish, then out to the gate and Stop Control. Service ... Repeat ...

Repeat for five total runs, with the gravel getting loose, the mud trying to dry out (except for the dozer stirring it up between runs. Course opening crews and E-crews were prepared for stages in the woods, including the long Nahwatzel Stage where three cars may be needed on course for Pace at one time. Saturday saw a Car 0, Car 0-b, Car 00, and Car 000, and an abundance of Sweep and Recovery vehicles. I had the only 4wd as Car 00, so they kept me around just in case ... One pace got seriously sucked into the mudhole, as did one front-drive car, and "Cowboy Kenny" in the 690 Beetle had to be towed after losing a left axle and a right tie-rod — pigeon-toed and no power, no direction, but repaired between runs.

Throw in a couple of autograph sessions with the Subaru Rally Team USA drivers and co-drivers, and contributions to the Marine Corps' Toys-for-Tots campaign. Weather actually warmed and cleared for the later runs, and the grandstands had a fair crowd.

Saturday night, return to the headquarters hotel.

Sunday morning Parc-Expose was in the traditional downtown Shelton venue to support the businesses that support rally in the Northwest. Teams were allowed to trailer to Pacific Raceways.



Jim Culp / www.prorallypix.com

Unfamiliar rally car territory: Matt Milner and John Taylor discover that gravel tires don't offer optimal cornering traction on the tarmac at Pacific Raceways. They won the PGT class of the weather-modified Wild West Rally.

Twenty-eight cars started the day, all equipped with race transponders for timing, so that there was no need for the clocks and timing. Rally volunteer turn crews were instructed in flagging and communications procedures, including what NOT to say (as in it's not a crash-course of instruction).

Pace vehicles and turn workers enjoyed a couple of slow laps before the competitors arrived, then an official parade lap so that all could see the track. Something like straight, long, long sweeping right don't lift, into very long sweeping left, kink, hairpin right into hairpin left, kink, into sharp left over crest into sharp right, into sharp left, kink, into very long sweeping left, tightens 100, medium left straight ... Repeat ... Groups of five and six were sent out at 10-second intervals for a warm-up lap, then a standing start and three full laps at speed before checkered flag (one of the few flags that the rally drivers recognized) and an exit at turn 8 into service. With 28 cars, a 30-minute service and a short gap in the start interval, there was nearly continuous racing.

Notably, each group got further into turn one without lifting and deeper into turn 2 before braking as the day wore on. Gravel tires on pavement at speed

left a bit to be desired, and tire wear was high at upwards of 122 mph. One Mazda 323GTX lost the transmission in the hot pits and made one slow lap before returning, and withdrawing. One Subaru Legacy Turbo lost oil and turbo on the back stretch, with lots of smoke, real flames under the car, and "Alert. Alert" over the radio. Rally drivers don't see flags, so car 424 led a parade of E-crew trucks around the rest of the track, past Flying Finish and into the service area through a side gate. The fire was out, but so was the car. Bruce Davis was fast in the SRT Neon, and the top five Subies put on quite a show, even with Ken Block's high-speed engine miss. Underdog favorite was the Historic Saab 96, setting pretty good times, and passing a Group 2 car.

The banquet was back in Olympia at the headquarters hotel.

Wild West 2006 was not what anyone wanted or expected, but Plan B put every competitor on the same "stage" for what turned into a fairly fun weekend. The lemonade was still a bit tart, but all in all not a bad use of Mother Nature's lemons — again.

Find complete results and photos at wildwestrally.org.