

area was still wet from the previous week's snow, presenting a very "slippery" set of corners. Shortly after finding dry gravel again, we were forced to stop and cut away a fallen tree, before proceeding through the stage.

Brook Start was relocated from its original spot to allay some exposure fears on what was the first corner. The new start has more room for control crews and leads into a set of hairpins. After Thynne takes the rally to its highest elevation on the loop, Brook gently descends back toward the Brookmere Valley. Despite some potholes the stage was fast and generally smooth — with the exception of the Flying Finish area, which was very wet, very soft, VERY slippery. The Car Zero Crew discussed this nearly to Merritt — a brief mention that the "mud bog" had indeed degraded would suffice — no driver bulletin needed.

Advance (000) Steve Perret and Kathryn Hansen and Pace (0) Lee Sorenson and Walt Wendolowski carried out duties in Merritt prior to the start, while Slow Pace (00) Ron Sorem and Max Vaysburd did a Recce for the group on Princeton Cut-off stage. Noting the conditions — a particular imbedded rock, some new ruts, and a slightly rougher cattle guard — Princeton was essentially unchanged from our last encounter. Helmer and Nicola should be no different. Comstock South has been run before, but not by any of our team, so the new configuration would be cold on our first run. The detailed stage book, with some input by the stage crews — "a big hole" and the regraded hairpin — would be our guideline.

Merritt by Night was Day 1 of the National and the first of the Regional rallies. Twenty-five teams took the start for two runs of Comstock and two runs of Princeton before a service break in Merritt.

Antoine L'Estage and Nathalie Richard (2007 Hyundai Tiburon AWD) took both Comstock stages with 8-second and 1.6-second leads over Pat Richard and Alan Ockwell (2008 Subaru WRX STi). These two split the Princeton stages with L'Estage's Tiburon taking SS2 by 6.3 seconds and Richard's Subaru taking SS4 by 12.8 seconds!

Two more runs of the forest stages saw L'Estage taking Comstock by 32.7 seconds over Norm LeBlanc and

Keith Morison (2002 WRX). Richard, dealing with a tire issue, was 16-odd minutes on stage with a 1-minute late road penalty. It was L'Estage and LeBlanc pressing again on Princeton by only 19.4 this time, with Gord Olsen and Todd Patola taking third (2004 WRX).

Fast times on 6.13-km Comstock brought a 104.09 km/h average. On 9.20-km Princeton, narrow, twisty, uphill, 80.21 km/h was the average.

Railyard Mall spectator stage is a very compact parking lot "stage" with paved to gravel to paved, two laps, under the lights — only .57 km. Richard took SS7, then Scott and Bob Trinder took SS8 (1995 Subaru WRX-RA), with identical times of 49.2 seconds — 41.7 km/h.

Helmer by Day was Day Two of the National, and the second Regional. Twenty-four cars started. The reseed saw Losier-Poirier (2005 Mitsubishi Evo 8) move up, as did Maplethorpe-Hall (2002 WRX). The Thynne and Brook loops were all Richard-Ockwell, with 7 seconds on SS9 over LeBlanc-Morison; then 24.3 on SS10 over the Trinders; and 9.1 on SS11 over Craig Henderson and Lyne Murphy (2007 WRX STi) — forget about the two-minute "flyer" timing error for one competitor; finally 27.3 on SS12 with Henderson-Murphy again second. Top average speed on the 10.03-km Thynne was 84.86 km/h first time, then 88.58 on the second run. For 11.75-km Brook it was 87.61 first run, 89.86 on the second.

A brief stop in Service, then Active Mountain Raceway for the daylight Spectator Stages, covering 1.86 km and affording great photo-ops for amateurs and professionals. L'Estage's Tiburon and Richard's Subaru traded honors at AMR, with LeBlanc third on SS13 and Henderson third on SS14.

The transit to Nicola Lake stages saw LeBlanc-Morison retire with a hole in the transmission and Trinders retire with a broken rear top mount on their suspension.

Nicola is a gradual rise overlooking the lake, with solid rock roadbed, covered by very packed granular stone. It can be very fast. This year Nicola was a "turn-around" stage; dead-end, with a wait for everyone. Nicola North (uphill) saw L'Estage-Richard with 4:04.00 or 108.295 km/h, over

7.34 km. Nicola South, set at 7.20 km, went to Richard-Ockwell with 4:03:40, for 106.49 km/h.

While the Team Fugawi? course opening cars were split up in Nicola, "00" backtracked Helmer, spoke with the rancher and some of her friends about "her" cows, and met the finish control crew just into the stage, assured everything was set up. "Everything" except some banner tape to block the sideroads, and key marshals and radios. This road closure exercise took the cooperation of several control crews, donating a supply of tape to be distributed further along the route. Several civilians, including hunters in pickup trucks, were asked to exit the stage toward Helmer Gate (reverse course). With the stage set up and workers on the way, Advance, Slow Pace and Pace converged on the start at nearly the same time, from different directions. We love it when a plan comes together...

Helmer, 22.77 km, ran twice. Richard-Ockwell took both runs, with a 13:13.9 and 13:33.3, roughly 7 and 14 seconds ahead of L'Estage. Top average speed was 103.25 in the dark. Cattle were not a problem this year. Spectators refusing to obey the guidelines and drunks trying to drive around the marshals seem to be the norm on Helmer. Road condition was damp but grippy in most spots, with one or two slippery corners. One car suffered mechanical problems near the start, and another went missing between radio positions halfway into the stage while sweep was attending to the first car. Fortunately the problem was a "soft off" — high-centered two-wheel-drive — and was quickly tugged back on course and finished the stage.

Attrition saw one crash on AMR, several mechanical failures, one fire between Thynne and Brook, which was quickly extinguished, and a couple of minor offs contributing to more mechanical failure. Twenty-five PFR starters became 12 finishers.

Overall winning time for L'Estage-Richard was 1:47:22.3, followed by Olsen-Patola with 1:50:45.7, then Richard-Ockwell with 1:52:29.9. Their third place at PFR sealed their Canadian Rally Championship for 2008 (four wins and a third).

Complete results, links, and photos at www.pacificforestrally.com and www.carsrally.ca