

# Everyone's in a hurry on the Oregon Trail

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PORTLAND, Ore. — The Oregon Rally Group presented the Oregon Trail Rally as Round 4 of the Rally-America National Championship, May 15-17. Concurrent with the national were three regional rallies: Wagons Ho, Shunpiker Stages and Trail's End.

Forty-one teams competed at Portland International Raceway's night stages in front of a good crowd of spectators. Thursday afternoon's Press Stage at PIR saw one DNF — confirming that the rally cannot be won at the press stage, but it certainly can be lost there. The night stages saw one crash, with terminal steering loss, and one motor failure. PIR's coyote statuery kept most of the big Canada geese off the race-track, but the course opening cars herded the rest. No animals were injured in the running of this event.

In years past, Oregon Trail moved west for the forest stages of the weekend — this year, with road scarcity and a bit of politics in the way, Oregon Trail moved east to the Mount Hood array of roads, in Hood River and Wasco counties and within the Mount Hood National Forest. Saturday and Sunday parc expose and service were in the Hood River County Fairgrounds, in Odell, just up the hill from the headquarters hotel in Hood River.

Saturday stages began under clear skies with spectacular views of four snow-capped peaks. Gilhouley Road has become a very popular route for Mount Hood rallies. Gilhouley South saw very fast times this year with the national level cars. I'm trying to recall if there is a straightaway — if there is, it is very short — to separate the nearly continuous kinks, sweepers, dips and jumps, and a couple of long hairpins. Gilhouley was reconfigured to 4.77 miles, with fast time by Ken Block and Alex Gel-

somino's Subaru Rally Team USA 2008 Impreza WRX STi, in 5:48.2 or just over 49-mph average on these technical roads.

Teams regrouped in service before a 19-mile transit into the woods, skirting Fir Mountain, to near Ketchum Reservoir, and the start of Stage 6. Dust became a problem, and for driver safety an additional minute was added to the start intervals, allowing the dust to settle a bit between cars. With some instances of dead calm, a few teams still encountered visibility problems.

The new stage ran northbound as "Ketchum" and southbound as "Loos'um. This stage loosely followed a ridge that roughly divides west and east in Oregon, and as such featured a transition of open grazing land, oak forest and tall conifers. The road character ran from wide-open smooth to easy curves to a bit rough, with a few twisties and exposures. "Ketchum If U Can" ran as 7.78 miles, with Andrew Comrie-Picard and Robbie Durant's Mitsubishi EVO 9rs setting top time, in 6:41.2 or just under 70 mph. This average hints at near triple-digit straightaway speeds. Block-Gelsomino found a rock just a bit too big and lost a control arm on the stage. They retired for the day.

"Fir Mountain South" was shortened a few miles from the Mount Hood Rally, with a reconfigured start-finish at the north end, still providing two easily accessible and well-attended spectator areas and countless excellent action points for the media (from across the U.S., Canada and a crew following the Polish team). As a 10-mile stage, two cars tied at 9:49.4, just over 61 mph. Tanner Foust and Chrissie Beavis shared top time with Andi Mancin and Maciej Wislawski. SS10 saw Paul Eklund and Jeff Price take a serious off due to a late call. The team retired with damaged suspension.

"Gilhouley North" ran 2 seconds faster than the previous direction, with Travis Pastrana and Christian Edstrom's Subaru Rally Team USA 2008 Impreza WRX STi taking top time at 5:48.1, followed closely at 5:55.4 by both Tanner and Comrie-Picard. Mancin's 5:57 closed out the sub-6-minute field.

Service in Odell; then a repeat of "Ketchum," "Fir Mountain" and "Gilhouley North." Pastrana set top times on the long stages and Mancin took the technical "Gilhouley." Saturday saw 31 finishers.

Sunday brought 36 starters after service crews worked well into the night.

"Fir Mountain North" opened the day, followed by "Loos'um" and service. Stage times were quicker compared to Saturday, and Block took top honors. There was one retirement on SS13.

"Gilhouley South," with its spectacular backdrop of Mount Hood, opened the final loop, with Block again at the top. Two "offs" reduced the field to 31.

"Fir Mountain North II" went to Comrie-Picard-Durant's EVO.

"Loos'um II" closed the day. Andi Mancin took top time of 6:19.4 with Comrie-Picard following at 6:19.5. Block lost a tire coming into a corner; a snap decision is said to have saved the car when Block chose steering into a straight off versus a certain rollover. Two cars re-entered for the final stages, but two cars DNF'd with mechanicals, and Block's off reduced the field back to 31.

In a fitting tableau, the oldest car in the rally took top Group 2: Garth Ankeny and Russ Kraushaar's 1969 Saab 96!

*Complete results and individual stage times at [www.rally-america.com](http://www.rally-america.com).*

*For more info on the Oregon Rally Group see [www.oregonrally.com](http://www.oregonrally.com).*