

A GormanTale: The Raptor and the Rabbit

Written by Erik Christiansen
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Los Angeles – The Gorman Ridge Rally has been a mainstay on the California Rally Series (CRS) championship calendar for over the past decade. Run in the Hungry Valley Off-Highway Vehicle Park approximately one hour north of Los Angeles, CA, the event this year consisted of two separately scored rallies, one in the afternoon and the second going well into the night. The rally covered a combined total of sixty stage miles, with the course ranging from tight and twisty switchbacks to fast straights with huge jumps, a combination which kept drivers and co-drivers on their toes.

Bill Holmes and co-driver Sean Gallagher are no strangers to the overall podium at Gorman, and won the event overall in 2007. This year they managed to sweep both the day and night events, but not without a close fight that was settled by just a few seconds on the last stage. Typically their big V-8 powered Ford Raptor is battling with the turbo-charged all-wheel drive cars for the overall win, but this year in a true David versus Goliath battle it was Michel Hoche-Mong and co-driver Marie Boyd who were taking the fight to them in their four-cylinder VW Golf. Hoche-Mong/Boyd threw down the gauntlet when they won the very first stage of the event by just two seconds over Holmes/Gallagher. Holmes/Gallagher responded by picking up the pace on the next few stages, and a moment on stage 3 where Hoche-Mong/Boyd nearly got stuck in some soft sand cost them valuable seconds, locking up the overall win of the day event for Holmes/Gallagher.

Hoche-Mong/Boyd did not back down, and were back in the fight for the overall win as the sun set for the night event. Despite running in Holmes's dust, the two teams traded stage wins back and forth into the night. Going into the last stage, Holmes/Gallagher had a slim five second lead over Hoche-Mong/Boyd. Hoche-Mong/Boyd pushed their little Golf as fast as possible and claimed the stage win, but only by one second over Holmes/Gallagher, which was not enough to knock them out of the top spot.

By taking the win in the CRS-5 (large displacement two-wheel drive) class, Holmes/Gallagher have clinched the class championship despite two more events remaining on the schedule (the two days of the Prescott Rally). Similarly, Hoche-Mong's victory in the CRS-2 (small displacement two-wheel drive) class also means he clinched the driver championship in that class. Claiming second in CRS-2 in the day event were Chuck Wilson and Brent Ellzey, however their Ford Escort broke an axle which prevented them from finishing the night event. Capitalizing on their problems was co-driver turned driver John Dillon, who claimed second place points in CRS-2 for the night event despite intercom problems that left his co-driver resorting to hand signals.

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The other battle to watch was in the production-based two-wheel drive P-Stock class, where the Acura Integra of father/son team Sarkis and Michael Mazmanian fought with John Black and Lori Stone in their Ford Ranger. The competition between these two teams has been extremely close all season, and Gorman was no exception. Black/Stone were slowed by engine issues during the daytime stages, but managed to finish just two minutes behind the Mazmanians. After getting the engine problem sorted out at the mid-rally service, Black/Stone picked up the pace going into the night stages. They won the first two stages, but then the Mazmanians answered back with a win on stage 3, narrowing the gap between the two teams. Black/Stone turned up the heat and won the next two stages, even setting the third fastest stage time on stage 5. With just one stage left, misfortune befell Black/Stone, and they were unable to get their truck started to run the last stage. The team was forced to withdraw, allowing the Mazmanians to take the class win in the night event as well. The double victory gives Sarkis Mazmanian a slim 36 point lead over John Black in the driver's championship going into the final two points events at Prescott.

Paul Willemsen and Zachary Dickinson were the lone entrants in the production-based four-wheel drive CRS-GT class, but that didn't prevent them from having some good competition from others outside their class. The team peddled their Subaru Impreza to a respectable fifth overall in the day event and sixth overall in the night event. The finish moves Willemsen into fourth in the class year end standings, with hopes to continue moving up the standings with a strong finish at Prescott.

The 2012 Gorman Ridge Rally is based in Lebec, CA, located just one hour north of the Los Angeles metropolitan area. The rally features 60 miles of hard-packed dirt stages located within the Hungry Valley Off-Road Vehicle park. For more information on the Gorman Ridge Rally visit <http://gormanridgerally.com/>.

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