

International Rally New York 2009 Flagged Off

Author: Rally New York Media
For Immediate Release, Oct. 22, 2009

Led by the Finnish team of Jani Paasonen/Mika Rajasalo (in a Subaru Impreza), the competitors of International Rally New York took the starter's flag this evening in the town of Callicoon, New York. The entrants now face 300 miles of competition, including 100 miles of high-speed "special stages," over the next two days. The weather in New York State's Catskill Mountains, where the rally is being held, promises to range from cool to cold, and from sunny to rain. Skill in all kinds of weather, and wise choices of tires, will be vital.

The Finns can expect competition from Tom Lawless/Brian Sharkey and Seamus Burke/John Buffum, the second and third cars in the starting order (both Mitsubishi Lancers). Irish drivers Lawless and Burke are both former winners of this event and the spring Rally New York USA.

International Rally New York is the final event in the 2009 U.S. Rally Championship -- the All-Wheel-Drive and Two-Wheel-Drive category champions will be crowned at the conclusion of the rally. It is also the final event in the local New York Rally Championship.

Paasonen/Rajasalo Take Early Lead in International Rally New York

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Finnish rally competitors Jani Paasonen and Mika Rajasalo have not rallied in the United States before. But they have taken quickly to the roads of New York State's Catskill Mountains. With one quarter of the 300 miles completed, the duo and their Subaru Impreza lead International Rally New York by about half a minute.

Former winner Tom Lawless, with Brian Sharkey co-driving, is running second. This is despite the fact that the turbocharger of the Irishmen's Mitsubishi Lancer Evo is malfunctioning. The team's mechanics are attempting to resolve the problem.

Ireland's Seamus Burke, another former winner, is holding third in his Mitsubishi Lancer Evo. Burke has America's retired rally champion John Buffum (un-retired for the weekend) handling the task of co-driving (navigating). The two are currently sitting about one minute out of second place.

Reilly/Benthien Head 2WD Category of International Rally New York

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As the temperature in the Catskill Mountains chills down, the race for the Two-Wheel-Drive category of International Rally New York is heating up. The team of Michael Reilly/Josh Benthien (Ford Focus SVT) is currently in the lead, by about three minutes from Polish rally veterans Wojtek "Al" Kulpa/Adam Pelc (Volkswagen Golf), with Michael Hall/Dave Stockdill (Mitsubishi pickup) third. But the course and mechanical gremlins have already struck several of the faster runners.

The favorites for the 2WD win at the start may have been former winners Josh and Jeremy Wimpey (Volkswagen Golf), or another former winning duo, Dan Brosnan/Shane McCann (Nissan Sentra). But both of those entries succumbed to suspension trouble before one-quarter distance. Likewise Ken Block/Alex Gelsomino, twice overall winners who are competing in 2WD in this weekend (in a Ford Escort), have gone out when the car's differential broke.

The forecast for the remainder of the rally's first day is cold and cloudy but dry. The second and final day is expected to be wet and windy, which could shake up the standings further.

Notes #1 –

Information reported by the crews through lunch time Friday:

5, Enda McCormack/Tommy Doyle (Mitsubishi Lancer) – lost wheel on special stage 6.

6, Daniel O’Brien/Brendan McCabe (Subaru Impreza) – flat tire on special stage 6, limped on flat to finish.

43, Ken Block/Alex Gelsomino (Ford Escort) – broken differential.

12, Michael O’Leary/John O’Leary (Mitsubishi Lancer) – broken driveshaft.

20, Justin Carven/Robert Baker (Volkswagen Rabbit) – off, but got back on.

21, Dan Brosnan/Shane McCann (Nissan Sentra) – broken tie rod on special stage 6.

23, Michael Hall/Dave Stockdill (Mitsubishi Mighty Max) – bent wheel on special stage 6.

33, Tom Barton/Brian Barton (Mazda 323) – lost 2nd, 3rd, 4th gears.

30, Wojtek “Al” Kulpa/Adam Pelc (Volkswagen Golf) – hit rocks on special stages 2 and 4.

Notes #2 –

Information reported by the crews through conclusion of the Friday leg:

2 – Tom Lawless/Brian Sharkey (Mitsubishi Lancer) – turbo was losing oil on special stage 2, crew changed it at subsequent service; went off from special stage 11, but no significant time lost; fuel pump failure on special stage 12, Lawless switched to backup pump.

3 – Seamus Burke/John Buffum (Mitsubishi Lancer) – crew appears to have solved a problem with the engine’s turbocharger controls which was causing the car to be “down on power” early in the day.

6 – Daniel O’Brien/Brendan McCabe (Subaru Impreza) – engine overheating on Friday evening; then gear linkage broke on special stage 12, leaving the car in second gear for the remainder of the stage.

9 – Maciej Przybysz/Kristin Przybysz (Subaru Impreza) – blown axle on special stage 2, repaired; broken wheel bearing on special stage 6; broken trunk lock (held down by bungee cord).

11 – William Petrow/Jeremy Neyhart (Subaru Impreza) – went off from special stage 6 – running too fast in 4th gear (3rd had failed), went into a corner too fast (80-90 mph), went into a ditch and rolled.

12 – Michael O’Leary/John O’Leary (Mitsubishi Lancer) – broken driveshaft on Friday morning.

15 – James McKiernan/Damien Treanor (Subaru Impreza) – brakes going away on Friday evening, crew changed pads at service.

International Rally New York: Rain Arrives, Paasonen/Rajasalo Still in Command

Author: Rally New York Media

For Immediate Release, August 23, 2009

On Friday evening, as expected, the skies opened on International Rally New York, turning a number of the event's Catskill Mountain dirt roads into mud roads. Competitors, however, took it in stride, although most have probably reduced their pace to compensate.

Jani Paasonen/Mika Rajasalo (in a Subaru Impreza) continue to lead the rally, driving smoothly and apparently experiencing no car problems. Tom Lawless/Brian Sharkey (Mitsubishi Lancer Evo) are holding second and Seamus Burke/John Buffum (Mitsubishi Lancer Evo) third.

The teams have returned to the rally's base in Callicoon, New York, where the crews have time for mechanical service. The cars will then be impounded by the officials overnight while drivers and co-drivers rest.

On Saturday, entrants are facing the final 138 miles of competition, including 51 miles of competitive "special stages" against the clock. The weather forecast calls for more rain, possibly heavy at times.

Lawless/Sharkey Pull Ahead in International Rally New York

Author: Rally New York Media

For Immediate Release: morning of October 24, 2009

Tom Lawless and Brian Sharkey (Mitsubishi Lancer Evo) have taken the lead on the final morning of International Rally New York. Under conditions of rain, puddles and mud, the Irish team nosed ahead of first day leaders Jani Paasonen/Mika Rajasalo (from Finland, Subaru Impreza) who lost a driveshaft on stage 15. With 16 of the scheduled 23 special stages completed, the gap is unofficially 13 seconds.

In the race for the All-Wheel-Drive Production trophy, the husband/wife team of Shawn and Jennifer Hudspeth (Eagle Talon) is currently in front of Matt Gottlieb/Austin Gager (Subaru Impreza).

The lead in the Two-Wheel-Drive category also changed this morning. Michael Reilly/Josh Benthien (Ford Focus) were comfortably ahead until they went off the road, and rejoined the rally at the end of the field. This handed the top place in the group to Wojtek "Al" Kulpa/Adam Pelc (Volkswagen Golf), with Michael Hall/Dave Stockdill (Mitsubishi Mighty Max pickup) about half a minute behind.

International Rally New York is the final round of the U.S. Rally Championship and the regional New York Rally Championship. It is being held in the Catskill Mountains, about 90 miles from New York City. The rally will wrap up this evening.

Lawless/Sharkey Win International Rally New York

Author: Rally New York Media

For Immediate Release, October 24, 2009

Tom Lawless and Brian Sharkey (Mitsubishi Lancer Evo) emerged as the winners of International Rally New York, a two-day test where the result was in doubt until almost the final mile.

Going into the second day, Jani Paasonen/Mika Rajasalo (Subaru Impreza) had a lead of 43 seconds. With a competitive car and more experience than their rivals, U.S. Rally Championship regulars assumed that the visiting Finnish team would be able to cruise to a victory. At the time, Lawless/Sharkey were second, 43 seconds behind, despite a bit of turbocharger and fuel pump trouble on the first day. Seamus Burke/John Buffum were third, but would soon withdraw from the rally due to a head gasket failure.

And then the momentum of the event went the other way: Paasonen's car broke an axle during the final morning, which slowed him enough to allow Lawless a 13-second lead. Paasonen responded by taking back seconds on each special stage – despite heavy rain, mud, and deep puddles which limited his and everyone else's speed. The margin was down to about three seconds at lunch time. But as Paasonen should have surged ahead on the final two or three stages, the Subaru broke a differential. Paasonen/Rajasalo decided to pace themselves and finish, falling to 17 seconds behind the winners.

Martin Donnelly/Stephen Duffy (Mitsubishi Lancer Evo) placed third. They were far enough behind the leaders, 6-3/4 minutes, that Donnelly joked afterward that they became spectators in the rally. Keith Jackson/Marra Estep (Subaru Impreza) took fourth, garnering enough points to wrap up the U.S. Rally Championship in the All-Wheel-Drive category.

Like the overall victory, the Two-Wheel-Drive win was not settled until late in the rally. U.S. Rally Championship contenders Josh & Jeremy Wimpey (Volkswagen Golf Mark 2) and Dan Brosnan/Shane McCannn (Nissan Sentra) both suffered mechanical breakages on the first day, broken suspension and steering, respectively. Likewise, the very rapid Ken Block/Alex Gelsomino (Ford Escort Mark 2) were stopped by a broken differential. It might have been a golden opportunity for the up-and-coming team of Michael Reilly/Josh Benthien (Ford Focus SVT), but they were delayed by an off-course excursion while in the 2WD lead. And so, in the heavy rains of the final afternoon, Wojtek "Al" Kulpa/Adam Pelc (Volkswagen Golf Mark 3) raced with the father-son team of Simon & Kieran Wright (Ford Focus ZX3). Kulpa/Pelc reached the final control with an advantage of approximately 30 seconds for the trophy.