



Photos by Dave Harvey

behind him in the WCRC there is still much to be decided with an exciting battle for the top position Novice taking shape.

The rain had been falling for a few days in Merritt and when temperatures dropped on Thursday many wondered if it would be a slushy weekend. As it turned out the weather was perfect for October rallying; roads were damp, a little light rain and low cloud at the top of the higher stages but most places received glorious sunshine by mid-day on day 2. One or two stages even improved as the rally ran on.

Friday evening's stages were called "Merritt by Night" as the rally ran twice through the Railyard Mall shopping complex in front of spectators and then out into the hills for Comstock and Princeton Cutoff, the stage with the big exposures where the rally lights shine against the night time clouds. An exceptional turn out of rally fans crowded around the in town stage to watch the action up close. Many people learning the hard way where to stand if



you want to avoid gravel spray. The local video store window succumbed to this but there's no hard feeling and the event is welcome to return. After 60 seconds of battle there was little decided with the 28-car entry spread across 18 seconds on the time sheets. The proper stages soon started to make an impact with most competitors reporting minor dramas on Princeton Cutoff. Aaron Neumann lost brake fluid mid-way through and resorted to the handbrake for slowing the car. Pat Harris underestimated a double caution corner, until her front wheels were hanging over the edge... "Oh, I understand." Colin Armstrong's transmission was beginning to smoke. Comstock also claimed a few victims especially the flying finish,



which concealed a slippery medium right that kept the marshals entertained. The VW Golf of Christopher Galecki took a big hit on the A-pillar when it came to rest against a tree there. They were able to make it to end of Leg 1 and would attempt overnight repairs. With very little drama, the Comstock stage also saw the retirement of Pat Richard with electrical problems leading to turbo failure. The hoped for show between he and Antoine L'Estage was short lived.

With the first part of the rally completed, drivers and navigators headed off to bed while service teams began overhauling cars. Except for the Max Etak Rally Team, whose trusty Justy requires such little attention that the pit crew had long since decided to retire to the hot tub, leaving John and Richard alone when they arrived to top up fluids and dust things off for the next day. Or in the case of the Armstrongs who spent the whole night manhandling a spare transmission into their Golf. Colin and Teresa would wage war the next day on one hour of sleep!



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