



Tribune photo by Dan McGee - Andrew Sutherland and co-driver Amar Sehmi slide through a turn on their way to winning first overall in this weekend's North Nevada Rally held by Purgatory Peak. PURGATORY PEAK, Nev. — After an almost two year absence, rallying returned to the dirt roads of Northern Nevada. Three men, two from the Bay Area and a Reno resident brought their dream to fruition.

And when the dust settled, Lady Luck smiled on a driving team from Southern California as it won the overall victory.

"We did things to the car we shouldn't have but it still worked out. After the first stage we had engine

temperatures that should have melted the motor so we continued on under the assumption the gauge was wrong," Andrew Sutherland said. "We had a couple of flat tires in the first stage, a jack that broke and a lot of little things but we just kind of soldiered on and made it to the finish."

For Sutherland and his co-driver Amar Shemi, it was an eventful day, which included being loaned a jack by a fellow competitor.

The course consisted of a pair of stages with the southern one going east from the highway over a pass while the northern one headed west, over Purgatory Pass heading west to the highway.

In rallying, the teams have to arrive at a starting point at a set time and leave at a set time. Sitting in the right seat a co-driver is reading notes and telling the driver what type of corner they are heading toward.

Combined with dry, slick roads plus altitude changes and each stage was a busy time for the competitors.

In addition to the cars, the event had a Rally Moto class where four motorcycles competed on the same stages. Of course, each rider was on their own as they negotiated the hills and turns.

"It's kind of tough without a co-driver and I didn't have the rally notes in my road book," Michael Gaynor said after winning the moto division. "It was a really smooth track, and well marked with arrows so it was pretty easy. I like the north stage the most with its more twisty turns and elevation changes."

Even though it seemed a motorcycle would be at a disadvantage negotiating the slick or rocky sections, Gaynor felt he had an advantage over the cars.

"With the suspension on a dirt bike and your ability to stand up on the pegs, you can take some of the biggest hits more so than a car," he said.

Each team ran the stages twice in one direction with a slow drive between them then the course was reversed and they went the other way.

An early afternoon rain shower added some slickness to the course but everyone seemed to welcome the break in the heat, especially Sutherland.

"I've run these stages before in a little bit different configuration," he said. "It was a good mix but I'd say they were both about the same but we had more altitude gains on the north stage going over Purgatory Pass. That's where my car kind of shines and dominates because of the high horsepower and all wheel drive."

One interesting scene at a finish was a car that lost a wheel and arrived with the co-driver sitting on the hood to keep it balanced.

While six stages were official for everyone, six cars and a couple of motorcycles competed across two additional runs.

After the dust settled, and at Sunday's awards breakfast, Pete Soper, the Clerk of the Course said, "I thought it went really, really well. We started the event on time, had one minor delay but the rest of the event stayed on schedule."

Then another co-chairman, Michel Hoche-Mong said, "It went absolutely, fantastically well. We had a

couple of little snags but the team we put together solved everything and it just ran really smoothly."

While Soper and Hoche-Mong are from the Bay Area, the third member of the team is Reno resident Seth Dowling, who acted as the promoter and event developer. When the event was first planned it was supposed to happen in 2009 but it was moved to this year.

"Talking to some friends, I got interested in putting on an event so I called Rally America and they put me in touch with two guys (Soper and Hoche-Mong)," Dowling said. "This was a really, really successful rally but it would have been nicer to have had more competitors. I think it went over well enough that it will build itself."

The team plans on returning next year for the second regional California Rally Series event and all hope to have more than 13 cars and motorcycles to face the challenge this event offers competitors.