

Sports & Leisure

Wednesday, Nov. 1, 2000

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Captures Canadian championship

McGeer returns to winner's circle

After a long battle to get back to the top, Tom McGeer's climb is finally over.

McGeer wrapped up his fourth Canadian Rally Championship—and first since 1993—on Sunday by winning Rallye International de Charlevoix. It was McGeer's fourth victory in six starts this year.

"It feels good. It's been a long time coming. We had so many years of disappointment," McGeer said as he and wife Trish drove home from La Malbaie, Quebec.

The Quebec town that hosted the rally had some weird weather which made for interesting racing. After 20-degree temperatures on Friday, the course was covered with more than 10 inches of snow on Sunday.

"Luckily we took the ice tires," McGeer said. "The roads are no different than what we run in January but the car is set up for dry conditions so it doesn't handle nearly as well. That's what rally's about though. You go as fast as you can on what you've got."

McGeer and co-driver Mark Williams, who took Trish's place this year after she took the year off to have the couple's second child, took things easy in the early going. But after their two main competitors, Frank Sprongl and Sylvain Vincent were both knocked out of the race, there was nothing to lose.

"With those two gone there was no pressure

and we said, 'Let's go have some fun,' and I put my foot down," McGeer said.

They took the lead at the beginning of the second stage on the final day and went on to victory over an international field that included drivers from Belgium and the United States. The race will be broadcast on TSN this Saturday at 11 a.m.

"It's a good feeling," McGeer said. "Winning the event is the icing on the cake."

With four wins and two second-place finishes in six starts, the Canadian title is wrapped up even though there is one race remaining—The Rally of the Tall Pines in Bancroft, Ont. on November 25. But McGeer is still looking forward to the race.

Frank and Dan Sprongl won the last six Canadian titles. Their Audi has been considered the dominant car on the circuit but this year McGeer said improvements to his Subaru Impreza put him on an even keel. However, the Sprongls have been besieged by mechanical problems this year and the two have had few opportunities to go head-to-head.

McGeer said the Sprongls are expected to have their car ready for Tall Pines.

"Frank says he's going to have the Audi there so it's going to be a shootout," McGeer said. "It should be quite an exciting race."

—By Herb Garbutt, staff writer

Tom McGeer, right, and co-driver Mark Williams won the Rallye International de Charlevoix to wrap up the overall Canadian Rally Championship. The win was the fourth of the year in six races for McGeer. It was also McGeer's fourth national rally title, and his first since 1993, ending a six-year reign by Frank and Dan Sprongl. The race will air on TSN on Saturday at 11 a.m.



Photo TNT Racing

Trevor Ritchie is all smiles as he celebrates his third Breeders Crown victory on Friday night at Mohawk Racetrack. His wins tied a Breeders Crown record.

Photo by Graham Paine



Ritchie rides into record book with career night

Acton's Trevor Ritchie enhanced his reputation as a money driver with a record-setting performance on Friday.

With the richest program in Canadian harness racing history on the line in the Breeders Crown Championships at Mohawk Racetrack, Ritchie had a career night with three victories. That tied John Campbell's record, set in 1991.

"As far as money wins go (Campbell) is the greatest driver to ever get behind a horse," said Ritchie, who earlier this year won the Hambletonian at Meadowlands Racetrack in East Rutherford, N.J. "To have my name alongside his is quite an honor."

Ritchie wasted little time getting started. In the opening race he drove Syrinx Hanover to an impressive victory in the two-year-old filly trot final. Syrinx Hanover led wire-to-wire and finished in a Canadian record time of 1:55.3. Second was Spellbound Hanover, driven by Campbell who by the end of the night would be sharing his nine-year-old record with Ritchie.

It was Ritchie's first career Breeders Crown victory in seven starts. But there would be more to come.

In the fourth race, for two-year-old colt trotters, Ritchie brought Banker Hall from the back of the pack to pass CJs Secret in the stretch for a half-length victory.

"I was considerably further back than I wanted to be," Ritchie said. "That's the worst start ever since I've been driving that horse but there's nothing you can do about it. You just hope to get in the lane and get a good kick."

Ritchie completed the hat-trick with Aviano in the sixth of the eight Breeders Crown races. As he did with Banker Hall, Ritchie

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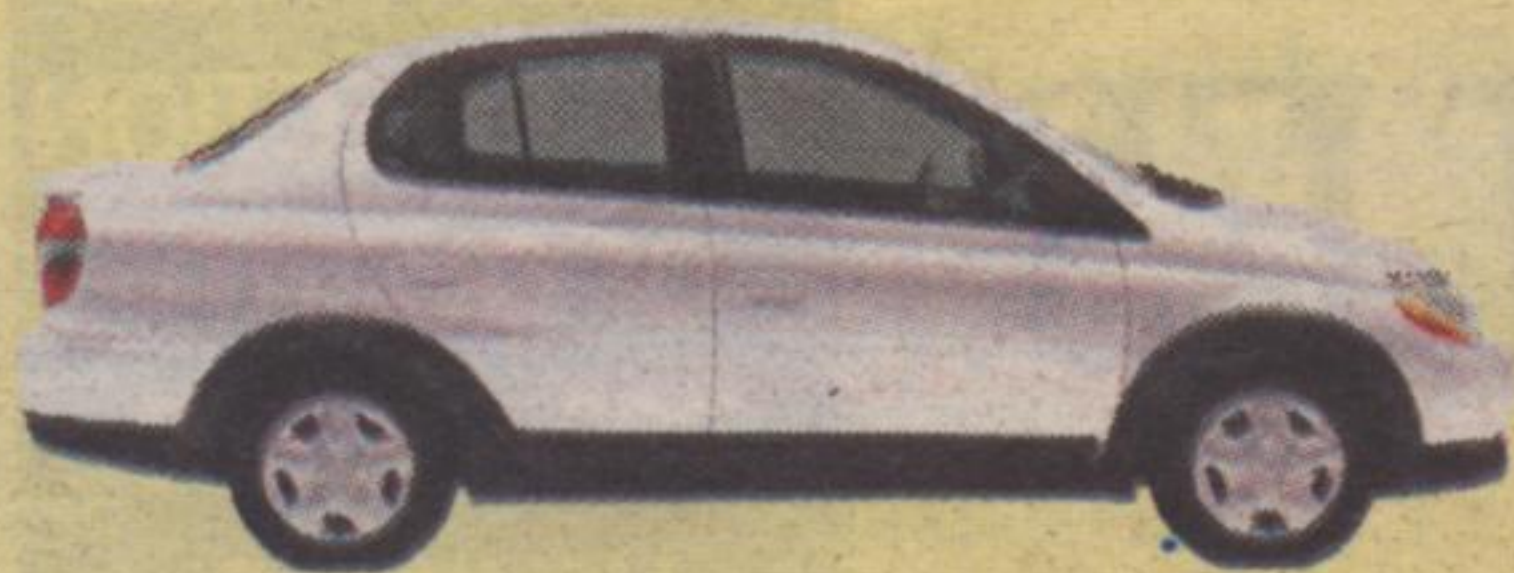
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