

RADICALLY RAINY RALLYCROSS

STORY AND PHOTOS
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Sometimes we luck into our once-in-a-lifetime events. They are even sweeter when we expect them to be routine and predictable—but then they are not. Such was the case on Wednesday, November 4, in Las Vegas.

We were in town for the SEMA Show—an enormous automotive trade event showcasing aftermarket products and services, many of them combined on countless customized vehicles. The major auto manufacturers also feature their latest and greatest high performance models and modifications.

It's worth a trip to SEMA solely to cover the show itself, but eventually it's hard to resist the lure of various off-site major motor-sports events that take place the same week.

This year we also attended Robby Gordon's Off-Road Stadium SUPER Trucks, the Optima Batteries Ultimate Street Car Challenge, Formula Drift at SEMA Ignited and, last but certainly not least, the season finale of the Red Bull Global Rallycross (GRC) series.

Two classes of cars compete in GRC: Supercars and Lites. Each class runs heat races and a main event, guaranteeing plenty of exciting action for the fans, lap after lap.

On a beautiful Southern California weekend in September, we had attended both Los

Angeles rounds of the Red Bull GRC. Located by the water, the course consisted of the usual—mostly pavement, and a dirt section with a jump. Seeing high-powered compact rally cars launch—sometimes side-by-side—and then soar through the air until they came crashing down on their front tires was thrilling. Could it get more exciting than that?

Las Vegas provided the answer, in the form of unusually stormy weather. Heading into this season finale, held on a large, purpose-built course across the street from the Luxor, only two drivers—Scott Speed and Tanner Foust—had a mathematical chance to win the championship. Scott was the odds-on favorite.

First it began to rain—hard. Then I started to feel something more solid than raindrops pelting my sun hat (which I'd kept on for warmth). I opened my palm and held it skyward. It quickly filled with hail. Without rain gear, I was getting soaked, as were my cameras. A plastic bag sort of protected one. Thank goodness they are weather-sealed professional Nikons. Then lightning came, and the on-track action was abruptly halted.

An urgent announcement was broadcast over the loudspeakers: everyone had to immediately evacuate the facility. The grandstands and chalets were made of metal, so a

lightning strike could have been disastrous. We were told that we could return if and when the lightning stopped. It was suggested that we go to our cars or to a nearby hotel, to wait out the bad weather.

Mud streamed over the course. Drenched fans streamed out of the gates. Spectators huddled together in the few covered spaces they could find. In various tents, mechanics were working on mud-covered rally cars, repairing damage and fitting rain tires.

After less than an hour, not only did the lightning stop, but so did the rain. People returned to the track and the racing resumed.

Soon, however, the rain began again—in earnest. The dirt had long since turned to mud and spread to the paved areas. Cars were slipping and sliding all over the track. Rooster tails of water trailed on the straights, as the cars became almost unrecognizable.

The action was spectacular. Scott Speed (photo lower right) finished third in the main event, beating VW teammate Tanner Foust and winning the season championship—the first Red Bull GRC title for Volkswagen Andretti Rallycross. ■

For a racing recap—and more photos—go to redbullglobalrallycross.com, click on News, then scroll to "Red Bull GRC Race Recap: Las Vegas."



Tanner Foust takes a wild ride in his yellow VW Beetle.

