

AMERICAN RALLY ASSOCIATION NATIONAL APPEALS PANEL

DECISION OF THE APPEALS PANEL

Appeal Reference: ARA-AP-2026-035

Date of Decision: 6 March 2026

Decision Appealed: Decision of the ARA Stewards of the Meeting dated 22 February 2026

Event: 2026 ARA National Championship — Sno*Drift Rally

Appellant: Competitor No. 35 — Mark Piatkowski (Driver) / Aris Mantopoulos (Co-Driver)

Respondent: ARA Stewards of the Meeting, 2026 Sno*Drift Rally

Subject Vehicle: Competitor No. 199

Subject Matter: Appeal against the decision of the Stewards of the Meeting to impose no additional penalties upon Competitor No. 199 following a protest regarding compliance with RTR Article 4.4.5

Regulations: ARA General Competition Regulations (GCR), 2026 Edition; ARA Rally Technical Rules (RTR), 2026 Edition through Bulletin 2026-8

I. COMPOSITION OF THE PANEL

The Appeals Panel (hereinafter, “the Panel”) was duly constituted in accordance with the provisions of the ARA General Competition Regulations. The Panel convened to hear and determine the above-referenced appeal. The Panel has considered the written notice of appeal submitted by the Appellant, the decision and findings of the Stewards of the Meeting, the documentary evidence placed before it, and the relevant provisions of the applicable regulations.

II. BACKGROUND AND PROCEDURAL HISTORY

During or following the 2026 Sno*Drift Rally, a protest was lodged by Competitor No. 35 concerning the technical compliance of Competitor No. 199, specifically with respect to the structural integrity of that vehicle’s unibody as required by RTR Article 4.4.5. The protest alleged that the frame rail of Competitor No. 199 had been notched, rendering the unibody no longer “intact as manufactured” within the meaning of the applicable technical regulations.

On 22 February 2026, the Panel of Stewards of the Meeting issued its decision. The Stewards acknowledged that the frame rail notch constituted what they characterized as “effectively an exception” to the technical regulations and further acknowledged that the modification was inconsistent with a strict reading of RTR Article 4.4.5. However, the Stewards declined to impose additional penalties upon Competitor No. 199 on the basis that prior authorization for the modification had been granted by the ARA Technical Director in advance of the event.

By notice of appeal submitted within the prescribed period, Competitor No. 35 challenged the Stewards’ decision on three grounds. The Panel has jurisdiction to hear and determine this matter in accordance with the ARA General Competition Regulations.

III. GROUNDS OF APPEAL AND FINDINGS OF THE PANEL

The Appellant advances three grounds of appeal, each of which the Panel addresses in turn below.

Ground 1 — Misapplication of RTR Article 4.4.5: Unibody Integrity Requirement

The Appellant contends that the Stewards misapplied RTR Article 4.4.5 by declining to penalize Competitor No. 199. The Appellant submits that the Stewards themselves confirmed that the unibody of Competitor No. 199 was not “intact as manufactured,” as required by the technical regulations, and that no informal “clarification” or pre-event communication can lawfully override the plain terms of a written rule.

The Panel accepts that RTR Article 4.4.5, on its face, requires that the unibody of a competing vehicle be intact as manufactured, and further accepts — consistently with the Stewards’ own characterization — that the frame rail notch applied to Competitor No. 199 constitutes an exception to that requirement rather than a matter falling within the ordinary meaning of the rule.

However, the Panel finds that the ARA Technical Director is vested, pursuant to GCR Article 6.4, with the authority to make final decisions regarding the eligibility of a vehicle or vehicle component or system. That authority encompasses the power to grant pre-event exceptions to technical requirements. The relevant provision states, in material part:

“The ARA Technical Director has the authority to make a final decision regarding eligibility of a vehicle or vehicle component or system. Any decision made by the Technical Director while at an event under the control of a Steward(s), shall be subject to the protest and appeal processes set out in these regulations for that event, but shall be final upon conclusion of the event unless successfully protested or appealed.”

The Panel finds that the Technical Director's authorization of the frame rail notch was granted well in advance of the 2026 Sno*Drift Rally and did not constitute a decision made "while at an event" within the meaning of GCR Article 6.4. That pre-event determination carries binding force. The Stewards of the Meeting are not empowered to override or set aside interpretations and exceptions made by the Technical Director prior to an event, and they did not err in declining to do so.

The Panel further disagrees with the Appellant's submission that the term "eligibility" within the meaning of GCR Article 6.4 is limited to the ability to enter a particular competition class. The provision is not so narrowly construed; the Technical Director's authority extends to final determinations regarding the eligibility of a vehicle or any component or system thereof, as the text of the regulation makes plain.

The Panel acknowledges the Appellant's broader concern regarding the relationship between written rules and pre-event exceptions and addresses the systemic and prospective remedy for this regulatory gap under Ground 3 below.

Ground 1 is dismissed.

Ground 2 — Unequal Application of the Rules

The Appellant contends that the grant of an exception to Competitor No. 199 — communicated solely through private correspondence between that competitor and the Technical Director, without notification to other competitors or to the Stewards — constitutes an unequal application of the rules and undermines the principle of fair and open competition.

The Panel regards this ground as raising a matter of significant principle. The integrity of motorsport competition depends upon the consistent and transparent application of the technical regulations to all competitors. Where an exception is granted to a single competitor that materially affects the permissible configuration of that competitor's vehicle relative to the written requirements imposed on all others, the failure to communicate that exception through appropriate official channels creates an inherent inequality. Competitors who were unaware of the exception were deprived of the opportunity to assess whether equivalent modifications might be available to them, or to make informed decisions in the preparation of their own vehicles.

The Panel finds that an exception of this nature — one that the Stewards themselves characterized as significant — ought to have been communicated to the competitor community at large by means of a published bulletin or equivalent official notice. The failure to do so is contrary to the principles of transparency and equal treatment that are foundational to fair competition.

Notwithstanding the foregoing, the Panel does not find that this failure provides a proper basis upon which to exclude or penalize Competitor No. 199 retrospectively. The fault in the

communication process lies within the administrative framework, not with Competitor No. 199, who acted in reliance upon a valid authorization duly granted by the Technical Director within the scope of that official's authority. Retrospective exclusion in these circumstances would be disproportionate and inconsistent with the interests of sporting fairness as between the competitors directly involved. The appropriate remedy is prospective, as directed under Ground 3 and the Panel's decision below.

Ground 2 is upheld in principle but does not result in a change to the Stewards' penalty decision.

Ground 3 — Procedural Inconsistency: Absence of a Published Exception Procedure and Reliance upon Confidential Correspondence

The Appellant submits that the current regulations are silent as to the procedure by which the Technical Director may grant pre-event exceptions to the technical rules, and that the reliance upon confidential email exchanges between a single competitor and the Technical Director — correspondence to which neither the Stewards nor other competitors were privy — is procedurally improper and incompatible with the requirements of a fair and transparent competition framework.

The Panel finds considerable merit in this ground. While GCR Article 6.4 unambiguously vests the Technical Director with broad authority over vehicle eligibility determinations, the regulations do not, in their current form, prescribe any formal procedure by which pre-event exceptions are to be requested, evaluated, documented, or communicated to the relevant parties. This represents a material regulatory gap which the present case has brought into clear relief. The Panel notes that it is possible that the significance of any given exception may be clearer in hindsight than at the time the original determination was made; however, this does not diminish the need for a transparent and documented process going forward.

The Panel further notes that the ARA Rally Technical Rules contain the following provision addressing the grant of exemptions from the technical regulations:

“ARA reserves the right, upon written application, to grant specific, limited exemptions to these regulations where it can be shown that the exemption is in the best interests of the sport or in the interest of safe conduct of the sport. Granted exemptions shall be communicated in writing by the ARA President or, in the case of an ARA National Championship event, the ARA President or the Competition Director and be included in the event's Supplementary Regulations or posted on the event's Official Notice Board.”

On its proper construction, this provision as it appears in the Rally Technical Rules, applies to exemptions from the technical regulations and does not govern sanction exemptions. The Panel observes that the frame rail notch authorization in the present case was not processed pursuant to this formal procedure, was not communicated through the event's Supplementary Regulations, and was not posted on the Official Notice Board, as this provision would appear to require. The Panel further notes that the Stewards of the Meeting were themselves unaware of the pre-event authorization, which further illustrates the inadequacy of the current procedural framework.

The Panel is satisfied that the existing framework is insufficient to safeguard the principles of transparency and equal treatment that underpin fair competition and that prospective regulatory reform is both necessary and urgent. The Panel directs the ARA to undertake a review of the procedures governing pre-event Technical Director determinations, with the objective of establishing clear, published requirements for the documentation, communication, and official notification of any exception or interpretation that materially affects the permissible configuration of competing vehicles. Appropriate amendments to the GCR and/or RTR should be adopted in advance of the 2027 competition season.

Ground 3 is upheld. No retrospective penalty is imposed, but prospective regulatory reform is directed.

IV. REQUEST FOR PRODUCTION OF EVIDENCE

The Panel has considered the Appellant's request for production of the email communications exchanged between the Technical Director and Competitor No. 199 prior to the 2026 Sno*Drift Rally, and the request for additional dimensional measurements of the frame rail modification.

With respect to the email correspondence: the Panel notes that it is not in dispute that the Technical Director granted authorization for the frame rail notch modification, nor is it in dispute that such authorization was given in advance of the event — a fact confirmed by the Panel's own findings above. The existence and general character of the authorization having been acknowledged, production of the underlying correspondence would not be determinative of any matter properly before the Panel and would not alter the Panel's findings on the grounds of appeal. The request is denied on grounds of relevance.

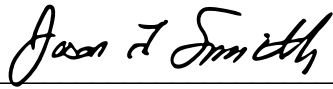
With respect to additional dimensional measurements: the physical fact of the unibody modification is likewise not in dispute. Further technical analysis falls outside the scope of the questions to be determined on this appeal, which only mentions the notch. This request is also denied.

V. DECISION OF THE PANEL

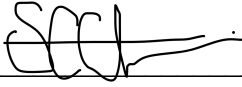
Having considered all grounds of appeal, the evidence placed before it, and the submissions of the parties, the Panel decides as follows:

1. The Panel does not overturn the decision of the Stewards of the Meeting dated 22 February 2026. The determination of the Stewards not to impose additional penalties upon Competitor No. 199 at the 2026 Sno*Drift Rally stands.
2. The Panel does not exclude or reclassify Competitor No. 199 from the official results of the 2026 Sno*Drift Rally.
3. The Panel upholds Ground 2 in principle. The failure to communicate the Technical Director's pre-event exception to all competitors through official channels was contrary to the principles of transparency and equal treatment. However, retrospective exclusion of Competitor No. 199 is not warranted, as that competitor acted in reliance upon a valid authorization granted by the Technical Director within the scope of that official's authority under GCR Article 6.4.
4. The Panel upholds Ground 3 and directs the ARA Technical Director, in consultation with the ARA President and Competition Director, to issue a formal published bulletin at the earliest practicable opportunity, either confirming the permissibility of the frame rail notch modification or prohibiting it going forward. This bulletin shall be communicated to all registered competitors through official ARA channels.
5. The Panel further directs the ARA to undertake a comprehensive review of the procedural framework governing pre-event Technical Director exceptions and interpretations, with a view to implementing clear, published requirements for the formal documentation, communication, and official notification of any such determinations that affect vehicle eligibility or configuration requirements. Appropriate regulatory amendments shall be adopted and published in advance of the 2027 competition season.
6. The Panel's jurisdiction in this matter is limited to a review of the validity of the Stewards' decision. The Panel makes no determination regarding the future competition classification of any vehicle, nor regarding any requirement for original equipment manufacturer (OEM) components where such a requirement is not expressly imposed by the applicable regulations.

This Decision is issued by the Panel on the date first written above and shall be binding upon all parties in accordance with the ARA General Competition Regulations.



Jason Smith, Presiding Panelist — ARA National Appeals Panel



Scot Elkins, Panelist



Mike Hurst, Panelist