



## 2026 Sno\*Drift Rally Car 35 Protest Decision

Date:	22 February 2026	Time:	21:00EST
Subject:	Car 35 Protest of Car 199 Decision		
From:	The Panel of Stewards for the Protest	# of pages:	9
To:	Car 35 Piatkowski/Mantopoulos, Car 199 Pastrana/ Gelsomino, ARA Technical Director	Attachments:	2

A Protest in compliance with GCR 9.2 was accepted by the Stewards (submitted in writing, signed by the competitor, within the required time frame and with the stipulated protest fee).

The Chief Steward J.B. Niday formed a Panel of Stewards per GCR 9.10 comprised of:

- Sno\*Drift Senior Steward and Protest Hearing Chair Alan Perry
- Sno\*Drift Event Steward Michel Hoche-Mong
- ARA Scrutineer Robert Wright

This Protest Decision documents the findings and the decision of the Panel of Stewards following an online Protest Hearing held on Wednesday 18 February 2026 at 19:00EST in compliance with GCR 9.5.

Present at this meeting prior to its closing for Steward-only deliberations were:

- The Panel of Stewards listed above
- The Protesters Mark Piatkowski, Aris Mantopoulos (the crew of Car 35)
- Representative for Car 199/Vermont Sports Car (VSC) Dylan Edmiston
- Additional VSC Witnesses Andrew "AJ" Johnson, Jon Fogg, Shaun Jacobs, Yannis Loiston
- Witnesses Doug Nagy (Technical Director), Greg Lahlum (Acting Technical Director), Jeff Harty (Chief Scrutineer), Bob Martin (Sno\*Drift Clerk of the Course)
- Observers J.B. Niday (Competition Director), Preston Osborn (Series Manager)

### **The Basis of the Protest**

The Crew of Car 35, Mark Piatkowski and Aris Mantopoulos made a presentation (attached but photos removed to reduce size of this document) in which they listed specific items that they believed were not in compliance with the rules (unibody, wheel tubs, and control arms), described their rationale in detail, provided evidence in support, and indicated actions that should be taken. Those actions were:

- ARA to transparently share all requests by VSC for specific exceptions to RTRs.
  - Include any approval communications, explanations for approvals, dates, etc.
- ARA to make all allowances and exceptions to any RTRs public.
- ARA to conduct a technical inspection of Car #199, specifically:

- Inspection of the unibody in the area of the rear upper control arm to confirm that the unibody has not remained intact as manufactured.
- Inspection of the rear wheel tubs in the area of the rear upper control arm to confirm that the wheel tubs have been modified.
- Inspection and measurement of altered front ball joints to confirm mounting dimensions and geometry have been altered and do not maintain OEM mounting dimensions and geometry.
- ARA to apply the appropriate penalties to car 199 for Sno\*Drift
- Reclassify Car 199 into the Open Class for all future sessions. Alternatively, the vehicle must be returned to OEM 2025+ WRX specifications to remain in the L4WD class, ensuring strict adherence to established regulations without exception.

The requested technical inspection was conducted immediately after the event by Acting ARA Technical Director Greg Lahlum and Sno\*Drift Chief Scrutineer Jeff Harty. The inspection was observed by Event Steward Michel Hoche-Mong. Lack of precise measurement equipment limited that part of the inspection.

### **The Response From Car 199**

Dylan Edmiston of VSC represented Car 199 and responded to the Protest. VSC also submitted a written response (attached). He noted that all of the items included in this Protest had been reviewed by Mr. Nagy, who found them to be allowed under the rules. This was done via e-mail and these exchanges were shared with the Panel of Stewards in confidence. The requested technical inspection confirmed that the areas noted by the Protestor were consistent with what was indicated as allowed in e-mail exchanges between VSC and the ARA Technical Director Doug Nagy.

Mr. Nagy described how he handles queries from competitors concerning application of the Technical Rules. He indicated that too many queries come in to allow all to be made generally available and the inability to make confidential inquiries would deter their submission. The discussion turned to queries that required “clarifications” (ones that involve valid interpretations that are compatible with the rules and that are kept in confidence) and “exceptions” (limited additional allowances beyond the rules as written) that are approved by the Technical Director.

Mr. Nagy said that he found the queries from VSC concerning Car 199 to be allowed under the rules and thus clarifications. After the car was entered in an event, he inspected it and found the areas covered by those queries to have been implemented as described in the e-mail exchanges.

The discussion then turned to how competitors can find out what exceptions to the Technical Rules have been granted. In some cases, this seemed to require that a competitor needed to observe it on a competition vehicle who team had previously submitted a query and was granted the exception and then query the Technical Director about it.

Current ARA Series Manager and former Competition Director Preston Osborn stated that some exceptions granted had been made public and described how to access them through the ARA web site and Sportity. During the Panel of Stewards' deliberation, we attempted to access that information ourselves using the steps described but were unable to.

Chief of Scrutineering Jeff Harty pointed out that each rulebook starts with "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."

### **The Findings of the Panel of Stewards**

The Panel of Stewards determined that the protest comes down to two questions. 1. During the competition, was Car 199 compliant with the rules with regards to the items noted by Car 35 in their presentation? 2. When ARA grants exceptions to the Technical Rules, is it done in a manner that is fair to all competitors?

As a preface for the remainder of these findings, the Panel of Stewards find that one of the items that VSC submitted to Mr. Nagy for review and which he characterized his response as a "clarification" was not allowed under the rules as written and was effectively an exception. It was an allowance to notch a frame rail so an OE control arm designed with a bend in it could be replaced with a straight control arm. The Panel of Stewards disagree with Mr. Nagy and find notching the frame rail to be in violation of RTR 4.4.5 by not leaving the unibody intact as manufactured. In our view, an allowance for this would be an exception to the rules.

Under GCR 6.4, the Technical Director (the role served by Mr. Nagy) "has the authority to make a final decision regarding eligibility of a vehicle or vehicle component or system" but that authority is subject to protest and appeal in some circumstances. Under RTR 4.4.32, the Technical Director receives requests for exceptions to the L4WD Technical Rules. However, these rules are, aside from the timeline, silent on the approval process for these exceptions nor do they describe under what circumstances they may be questioned. GCR 9 does not describe what powers the Panel of Stewards has to fill these gaps, so, aside from make recommendations to ARA, we take no action.

**During the competition, was Car 199 compliant with the rules with regards to the items noted by Car 35 in their presentation?** As indicated above, the Panel of Stewards find one of the changes made to be a violation of the rules. However, because the e-mail exchanges between VSC and Mr. Nagy show that VSC asked ARA to review this change and, in Mr. Nagy's view, it was compatible with the rules (and confirmed this at the first event where it competed) and, given the Technical Director's authority under GCR 6.4 described.

**When ARA grants exceptions to the Technical Rules, is it done in a manner that is fair to all competitors?** If granted exceptions to the Technical Rules are available through

the ARA web site and Sportity, it is not done in a manner that makes them easy to find. Instead, it appears that one must ask ARA to find out an exception has been granted.

The rules must be applied equally to all competitors. Exceptions to the Technical Rules that have been granted to some competitors but not communicated to other competitors (or the scrutineers that enforce them) is unequal application of the rules. The Panel of Stewards find that this is unfair and strongly recommend that ARA take action to correct this.

Note that regarding Mr. Harty's comment on the rulebook opening clause, we find that it is intended to apply to sanction exceptions and not exceptions granted to the Technical Rules.

The actions requested by the Protesters are responded to as follows:

- **ARA to transparently share all requests by VSC for specific exceptions to RTRs.** The Panel of Stewards find that all competitors should be able to send queries and requests to the Technical Director confidentially.
- **ARA to make all allowances and exceptions to any RTRs public.** The Panel of Stewards find that any exceptions to the RTRs granted are changes to the rules and need to be available to all competitors. We recommend that ARA change the way it makes these exceptions available now so competitors and scrutineers can access all approved exceptions.
- **ARA to conduct a technical inspection of Car 199.** As described above, that inspection was performed at the event after Car 199 had completed it.
- **ARA to apply the appropriate penalties to Car 199 for Sno\*Drift.** As indicated above, the Panel of Stewards find that Car 199 was running within with the rules at the event, but only because the Technical Director authorized the changes made (under authority granted in GCR 6.4).
- **Reclassify Car 199 into the Open Class for all future sessions.** The Panel of Stewards refer this matter to the Technical Director. The authority of this panel is limited to this Protest and event.

**Decision:** No additional penalties to be assessed against Car 199.  
This decision was unanimous.  
The protest fee is to be returned.



**Rationale:** The Panel of Stewards were in a bind on this Protest. While we could see arguments that the wheel tubs and control arms being compatible with the Technical Rules, we could not say the same for the notch modifications to frame rails (thus the unibody). However, the Mr. Nagy had a different interpretation, and it is unclear how the rules are to be applied in the case of decision made by the Technical Director well before the event.

As far as making public what changes VSC was allowed to make, the Panel of Stewards believe that competitors are allowed to keep what they are doing with

their competition vehicles to themselves as long as they are following the rules. This includes anything that Technical Director tells them is in within the rules.

On the granting of exceptions to the Technical Rules, the Panel of Stewards are surprised that, at a minimum, a list of current, allowed exceptions is not maintained for scrutineers, if not all competitors. A compiled list of current exceptions also provides information for possible future rule changes, if similar exceptions are granted to many teams.

The right to appeal this decision is stipulated in General Competition Rules Article 10.

		
Alan Perry	Michel Hoche-Mong	Robert Wright

# Formal Protest – Technical Non-Compliance

Submitted to ARA Rally Stewards

**Event:** Snodrift Rally 2026

**Date:** February 18, 2026

**Competitor Protested:** Car 199 / Subaru Motorsports USA

**Protesting Competitor:** Car 35 / Mark Piatkowski

**Time of Submission:** 7pm ET

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## 1. Basis of Protest

Car 199 is not in compliance with the ARA Rally Technical Rules, specifically:

- **Rule 4.4.5 – Unibody**
  - **Rule 4.4.10 – Wheel Tubs**
  - **Rule 4.4.14 – Control Arms**
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## 2. Violations

### A. Violation of Rule 4.4.5 – *Unibody*

**Unibody chassis must remain intact as manufactured** without weight reductions. Mounting tabs and unnecessary brackets may be removed, but the major unibody structure must remain.

**Observed condition:**

- Car 199 has a **clearance notch cut into the unibody structure that is clearly visible from both rear wheel tubs.**
- This notch provides **additional clearance for the upper control arm**, allowing **increased suspension travel beyond OEM constraints.**
- This modification is **not incidental**; it is a **deliberate structural removal** to accommodate suspension movement that would otherwise be restricted by the OEM unibody

**Why this constitutes a violation:**

- The removal of unibody material has not remained “intact as manufactured”.
  - This modification **directly enables a performance advantage** by allowing suspension articulation that would otherwise be restricted.
  - There is no allowance that exists to permit the removal of unibody material, especially not for suspension clearance.
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**B. Violation of Rule 4.4.10 – *Wheel Tubs***

**No modifications of the wheel tubs.** Rolling the wheel arches is allowed, no flaring.

**Observed condition:**

- The modified clearance notch is also a part of the wheel tub.

**Why this constitutes a violation:**

- The rule is clear. “No modification of the wheel tubs.”
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**C. Violation of Rule 4.4.14 – *Control Arms***

Control arms must maintain OEM mounting dimensions and geometry. Replacement arms must not add additional track width to the vehicle.

**Observed condition:**

**C.1 Front Control Arms**

- The front control arm ball joint mounting location is not in its factory location, thus the control arm does not maintain OEM mounting dimensions and geometry.
- The ball joint type has been replaced with a spherical heim joint, which alters the control arm’s OEM mounting dimensions and geometry.
- In addition, the observed ball joint has an altered height, which alters OEM mounting dimensions and geometry.

## C.2 Rear Control Arms

- The rear control arm configuration is clearly operating outside the spatial envelope defined by the original unibody structure and does not maintain OEM mounting dimensions and geometry.
  - OEM geometry includes **physical interference limits**, not just the hole locations.
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## 3. Competitive Advantage

These modifications provide a **clear and material performance advantage**, including but not limited to:

- Increased suspension travel
- The altered front ball joint location and height improves roll center and bump steer characteristics.

Such advantages undermine **competitive parity** and violate the ARA Rally Technical Rules. The premise of Limited 4WD is a restrictive ruleset, not permissive. If a modification is not expressly allowed, it should not be permitted.

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## 4. Requested Actions

1. ARA to transparently share all requests by VSC for specific exceptions to RTRs.
  - Including any approval communications, explanations for approvals, dates, etc.
2. ARA to make all allowances and exceptions to any RTRs public.
3. **ARA to conduct a technical inspection** of Car #199, specifically:
  - Inspection of the unibody in the area of the rear upper control arm to confirm that the unibody has not remained intact as manufactured.
  - Inspection of the rear wheel tubs in the area of the rear upper control arm to confirm that the wheel tubs have been modified.
  - Inspection and measurement of altered front ball joints to confirm mounting dimensions and geometry have been altered and do not maintain OEM mounting dimensions and geometry.
4. ARA to apply the appropriate penalties to car 199 for Snodrift
5. Reclassify Car 199 into the Open Class for all future sessions. Alternatively, the vehicle must be returned to OEM 2025+ WRX specifications to remain in the L4WD class, ensuring strict adherence to established regulations without exception.

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## **5. Good-Faith Statement**

This protest is submitted in good faith to ensure:

- Fair competition
  - Consistent application of ARA Rally Technical Rules
  - Protection of competitors who have maintained compliance at significant cost and constraint
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## 2026 SNO\*DRIFT PROTEST (CAR 199)

The purpose of this document is to summarize (as viewed by VSC) the protest lodged against Car 199 at the 2026 Sno\*Drift event, outlining our perspective of what occurred and any relevant technical information.

### INQUIRY, PROTEST, AND MEASUREMENTS

- Feb 6, 2026: Car 35 (Piatkowski) filed an inquiry about modifications made to Car 199, specifically citing RTR 4.4.5, 4.4.10, and 4.4.14. The inquiry requested guidance, a bulletin, or documentation showing that the modifications in question were approved and how competitors could view this approval.
  - 4.4.5 Unibody  
*Unibody chassis must remain intact as manufactured without weight reductions. Mounting tabs and unnecessary brackets may be removed, but the major unibody structure must remain.*
  - 4.4.10 Wheel Tubs  
*No modifications of the wheel tubs. Rolling the wheel arches is allowed, no flaring.*
  - 4.4.14 Control Arms  
*Control arms must maintain OEM mounting dimensions and geometry. Replacement arms must not add additional track width to the vehicle.*
- Feb 7, 2026: Sno\*Drift CoC, Bob Martin, responded to the inquiry, stating that “The rules are enforced as written per RCR, RTR, and GCR as amended by bulletins published in Sportity.”
- Following the CoC’s response to their initial inquiry, Car 35 submitted a second inquiry stating their intent to protest Car 199 and then submitted their protest on the same day.
- Following the rally, Car 199 was removed from Parc Ferme to be inspected by ARA officials.
  - Front control arm lengths were measured
  - Vertical height of the caster arm pickup was measured
  - Rear upper A-arm lengths were measured at the request of Doug Nagy (not in attendance at Sno\*Drift)
  - All measurements were done with a measuring tape on the car, with both parties accepting that there would be a high tolerance with the measurements (5 mm min). Measurements and recordings were taken by ARA and VSC, with results shared between the parties.
  - ARA took pictures of the unibody modifications and additional pictures of the wheel tubs

### CAR 199 MODIFICATIONS

- All modifications made to Car 199 (25L) that fall under the purview of RTR 4.4.5, 4.4.10, 4.4.15 have been approved by ARA prior to 2026 Sno\*Drift.
  - Documentation of such approvals can be made available to ARA Stewards upon request.
- We request that the technical information of Car 199 (i.e. specific measurements) provided to, or gathered by, the Stewards/ARA Technical Team, is not distributed to fellow competitors without the approval of VSC.

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**Date:** February 17, 2026