

View From the Right

Chapter 2, Paul Bunyan's Ride

by Barry S. Berg

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Production problems kept me at work about three hours later than I had planned to leave for Bemidji Minnesota. Excepting an attempt at a new land speed record, I arrived at rally headquarters at about 6:30 PM. Late enough to miss my worker assignment and map. The first night, which was the first six stages of the Ojibwe Forests National Rally, I was working as a radio operator and Co-driving the second night in the Paul Bunyan's Ride Divisional Rally. The two events would use the same roads with the divisional cars running five minutes after the last national car. With some help from the sweep crew, we figured out where my stage was. A few brief hellos to some of the new acquaintances I had met at the Baie Des Chaluer, including the Latreille's and Selcuk Karamanoglu and off I went into the woods. My Fiero settled down, to some serious driving, and by 7 PM I had checked into the stage. I was stationed at a marshal point approximately 8 tenths down from the start of stage three, which was also to be the finish of stage four. I was going to be there for the night, so I picked a CD, and settled in.

Stage three started without incident. The action going on was at stage two. It seemed that a civilian had decided to watch the event from his vehicle on the stage road. I could only hear Net Control's transmissions, but evidently this fellow figured out that this was not the place to watch the event after a couple of cars thundered by. He then went cross country, and was not heard from again. My conjecture was that he probably headed for the nearest laundry to rinse out his BVD's. Meanwhile back on stage 3 Car number 5 packed it in, and the driver transported to the hospital for a check. Fortunately, this was merely a precaution, as he was OK. The stage then reversed, to become stage 4. On the way back, a little noticed washboard, which was harmless on stage 3, decided to be a car killer, and single handedly wiped out most of the Class A cars for the event. This was disappointing as I was hoping to see a continuation of the battle between the Latreille's Eagle Talon, and Selcuk's Mitsubishi Eclipse. During the Baie Des Chaluer they were fighting it out for second place. Selcuk was third behind the Latreille's Talon until the last two stages in the rally when he beat them and finished in second place. Stage 4 took the Latreille's out. I passed their empty car pulled over by the side of Route 113, and felt empathy for Barry and Sandra. I know the somewhat bittersweet feeling of a long tow after a DNF. You know you did your best, and that is alright, but a part of you is sad for not having finished. This week you DNF, next week you finish. Its all in the life of competition, and I look forward to seeing them again in Ontario.

About the same time a local was in the process of trying to close 4 finish because he did not want these cars in HIS Wood's. The stage captain was trying to explain that the DNR who owned them thought it was okay. The discussion finished just as the stage was ending. With

Shakespeare's Falstaff in mind (i.e. discretion vs. valor) we left the stage as quietly as possible. Car 21, a BMW, had a blown tire and broken shock. With no one in sight we were trying to limp away from the area before we dealt with the car (see Falstaff above). The car had other ideas and decided to peel its tire mostly off the rim about a half a mile down from local's house. So I sat with the Fiero idling and the headlights on so we had working light. Needless to say, it was not the most comfortable time in the middle of nowhere. Finally about 10 police cars arrived, and the crew for 21. We got them back on the road to limp home about 2 hours after the stage ended, and I finally got to sleep about 4:30 AM.

At 9 AM the alarm went off, it seems that the Ojibwe was as tough on the worker's cars as it was on the competitors. My roommates blew two tires and warped the rims getting to and from the stages they were working that evening. The good folk at the local Goodyear dealership came through, and they were back in operation by that afternoon. Meanwhile, I went in search for my driver, whom I had never met. Quick Watson, the games afoot....

After technical inspection, we had about 10 minutes to get to the Parc Expose' which was a benefit for charity. The rally evidently raised a significant contribution to the local United Way. Hat's off to the organizers for finding another way to promote the sport of rallying to the general public.

I spent most of the time at the Parc, figuring out how to use the computer, and letting kids sit in the car and buckling them into the 6 point harness. At three we left the Parc enmasse, and returned to the start at the Holiday Inn.

Final updates were made to the route book, we strapped in and began the first transit. We did not have time to do an odometer calibration, so we spent most of the 30 miles of the transit trying to get the factor into the computer. After a few [...expletives deleted...], we had a factor that was close, (using hand grenades and nukes for a definition of close...) but if I used interval miles we were close enough. The first stage set the pace for the evening. This rally was going to be as they say "Real Cars, Real Roads, REAL FAST...".

I should have been wary of the night's festivities, since we started with two Omens staring us in the face. First we were car number 54, but no one made Toody and Muldoon jokes, and we never got lost. Second, we were the last car of the pack, or as I preferred to think of it as Pre-Fast Sweep.

We ran the first three stages in daylight. Low clouds threatened rain, but the intermittent sun, made for scenic viewing of some rather pretty forest trails. By stage 3, Mark and I had set up a rhythm, and found our groove. I was leading him into the route book turns by about 2 tenths, and actively calling the road for him on the unmarked. This formula worked well for the rest of the following 9 stages. At the service, we started comparing times with others in our class, and our race was going to be with car number 55.

A Toyota Supra had blown a tire, and by stage three was behind us, but still in the rally that put us 1 car up. Car 55 was 20 hundredths behind us. Now there were two behind us. Mark and I held a war council during the transit, and reset our objectives. Originally we were just trying to finish. Now we are going to try to finish ahead of 55. At the Service a number of women, were all lined up to see Jason Priesley (of TV Fame). I mentioned to the two teens who were crewing for us, they might have a more interesting wait at the service if they set up next to Jason's car. It was kind of fun watching them considering the possibilities.

Stage four was very twisty, and pretty much very loose sand by the time we got there. This made for some interesting slides, as the rear wheels started tracking the ruts instead of following the front wheels, as they were supposed to. Stage 5 was changed to a transit, because the organizers didn't have enough marshals to staff it. It would have been incredibly quick with the lead cars pushing maximum Rpm's in top gear in several places. Stage 6 was rough with what we thought were quite a few rocks. It was relatively twisty, and the Nissan was down in second a lot. The best part was that we caught a car in the stage, and passed them (Three Down). By now it was getting dark. While no rain was to be seen, the low clouds hid whatever extraterrestrial lighting would be available. The only light available was what we brought with us. We brought enough to light up the night! We thought we had seen it all until we got to stage 7.

By the time we got to stage 7 it looked as if the organizers had decided to run Formula Road Construction in front of us. What wasn't washboard was either loosely churned up sand, and/or car busting rocks strategically placed about the surface. One of them reached up and grabbed the steel brake line shield. It made quite a racket in the stage, but we figured it was more like a rudder, and helped stabilize the car in the twisty parts. By the time we got to our next service in Akeley, we had reversed our position with car 55 and were now 20 hundredths behind them. I don't remember much of Stages 8, 9, or 10. We had been there before one way or another, and the stages were pretty well torn up. However, I had managed to turn the boost up on my driver, and our times were going down.

After our second service stop in Akeley, we proceeded onto Stage 11. The course was getting rougher and the road surface was degrading after the rally cars ran them twice. Still nothing would prepare us for the challenge of Stage 11. The first half of Stage 11 was the exact stage we ran for Stage 7. Where we would have exited 7 we turned right at Tee, and continued for about 10 more miles. The second time through the Sports Dump Truck vehicles were either dropping their ballast, or the rocks were breeding. One hit the floor pan on my side so hard it hurt my feet. Fortunately the Nissan was equipped with a steel plate for a bash shield. I might have preferred to be in an M1 Tank for this stage. It was rough, tough, and twisty. Somehow we ran stage 12, though I don't remember the transit to 12. Stage 12 felt pretty simple after 11, and we then proceeded back to the after race festivities.

I have worked the Ojib for many years, going back to the first one. This was the first time I ever ran it though. My experience as a worker has taught me something. During the first stop in Akeley we bought two packs of lollipops. We distributed them to the workers as much as we could. If there would have been a popularity contest with the workers, it would have been car 54, I am sure. A word to all you competitors. A few sweets, can light up a dark, maybe wet and gloomy, and bug infested evening to the crew who makes it all possible. Maybe candy dispenser's should be standard equipment with belts and roll cages on the cars...

After a brief snack, provided by the organizers, we waited for the scores to be posted. Well, the bad news is we finished about a minute down from the guys in car 55. The good news is we FINISHED, and had a lot of fun. As my Canadian friends say "Well two out of three isn't so bad, eh"? I now look forward to writing Chapters 3 (Sunriser) and 4 (RAC) of my little saga. To answer my friend J.B.'s question is Pro Rally fast? No matter how fast you go, it's never fast enough! It is more fun than you can imagine, and the thrill of just finishing is more than I ever felt in winning either an auto cross or a road rally. How did we do, well the results were still unofficial when I went to bed about 3 AM, but we finished in front of at

least two other cars, and 1 DNF I think. I am not sure where we finished in class but I think our overall was 8th in the divisional. Where we finished isn't important, it was the journey not the destination.

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