

View From the Right

CHAPTER 5, RALLY OF THE TALL PINES

The first year ends

by Barry S. Berg

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This was going to be a first for me. Actually co-driving with the same driver twice. I was actually looking forward to this rally. Paul Henshall, my driver, is not on the internet, and so we don't communicate as often as I would like. Peter Watt is the person responsible for turning me loose on the PRO Rallye Circuit. While we correspond electronically, I was looking forward to actually visiting with him eye to eye. Also work was getting to be work, with more than the usual amount of emergencies and crisis. I was really looking forward to a nice calm week-end roaring down some gravel roads at break-neck speed, you know something relaxing.

Then I get this note from Peter, its minus 6(C) and we just got 12 cm of snow. Outside here its 38(F) and the ground is still green. Well the prairie grasses of the Great Plains are hardy. On receipt of the news the first thought that breaks through my consciousness is "Now is the winter of our discontent, made glorious summer" Since I plan to travel on the day after Thanksgiving getting from Minneapolis to Toronto presents no major problem. So at 5:30 AM CST (ugh!) I leave the house, and drive to the airport. By Noon EST I am in Toronto and on the phone to Paul. He has to work for a couple of hours more, so I catch a cab over to his place.

Paul is a Vice Principal at a primary school. I have to admit, several memories I thought I had forgotten re-appeared while sitting on that little bench in the school office waiting for the Vice Principal to return. Paul still had a busy day left, mostly handling disciplinary problems. The memories were a little too vivid for my comfort level, so I went to watch the kids do gym class. Soon enough we were on our way. The temperature was not to bad, and the terrain was devoid of snow as we began our drive to Peterborough. It was supposed to take about an hour and a half. Evidently everyone in Toronto wanted to leave at the same time. There must be a city someplace on this planet where people drive in the left lane only to pass. Use their signals when they change lanes, follow at a reasonable distance, and don't gawk at accidents or construction workers.

I used to think this driving behavior was peculiar and exclusive to Minnesota, but I now know its everywhere. We finally got to a place where the traffic thinned out. By now we were two and a half hours out of Toronto, and stopped for dinner at a nice restaurant about three quarters of the way to Peterborough. After dinner we were at registration in almost no time it seemed. The Rally of the Tall Pines is sponsored by the Maple Leaf Club of Toronto, even though it is held in Peterborough Motor Sports Club territory, of which I am a member. It was however, staffed by both clubs, and more. Registration was efficient, and run so efficiently that it seemed more of a formality. Even though all the details had to be taken care of, it happened almost casually. This was the first point of contact with the Rally Staff, and just the preface of what we could expect. To the rallye organizers, and their staff, congratulations on a very well run event. Next was tech. It was held in the Morrow Building, a very large and enclosed HEATED Garage. It was nice to renew friendships, wander around and look at the iron comfy and warm, while outside it was windy, cold, and there was this white slippery stuff on the ground. After tech, Paul and I ran the odometer check, and returned the car to the hotel parking lot. Paul went in search of his wife Paula, and their room. I left with Peter, who was putting me up for the next couple of nights. Well, as usual we didn't get to sleep until about two or three that morning. I have yet to figure out why this happens.

Next morning up at seven, Peter prepares a large breakfast. Large that is for us bachelor types, meaning toast with our coffee. Back to the Holiday Inn, and get ready to go. One last check at the notice board, confirm the time on the official clock, and out to the parking lot.

At the appointed time, our car #50 rolled up onto the ramp that was provided by Lada Motorcars. 5...4...3...2...1... and we were off. This year they dropped the courthouse run through the streets of Peterborough. We proceeded on the first transit of about 80 Kilometres to the first stage. This stage was relatively short about 7 Kilometers, and pretty fast. There were only two notations in the route book for the entire stage. We finished that stage in a dead tie with Peter and Owen Cule his co-driver. We are in almost identical cars, very friendly, and run fairly close to each other. Of course there is a bit of rivalry. I make it a point to dish out as much verbal abuse as I can to Owen. Unfortunately, it doesn't phase him much, as he informs me that what I give him is light weight compared to his other "friends." He then doles out a sufficient ration to me. We do this for most of the week-end and call it fun.

After a short transit we get to North Eels. I was warned about this stage, as what we mostly stayed up doing was me watching Peter's in-car video tapes of last year's Tall Pines. Noting a cabin, and a small jump on the first part of the stage that wasn't in the route book. The first thing of note, and what characterizes the stage is a turn named Casteldine's Corner. *Of course it is a spectator area, they would not let you do something stupid in private you know.* Casteldines is a decreasing radius off camber down hill right turn, that at the end turns into an immediate acute left uphill turn. Of course there is water all over the place there, as it lies in a marshy area. The roads were hard and smooth right up to this turn, where they changed to muddy and slick. Most of stage A2 was pretty wide open roads, but by the time we got there, the snow had been dusted off, and the straights were icy. Still all in all the stages were very fast this year. On North Eels was an ess bend that was marked "Site of Latreill's Rollover '93 Tall Pines." Unfortunately it was to be prophetic, but my thoughts were more like please don't name one after me!

At the first service at Bancroft we started comparing times. We were 20 seconds faster than Watt/Cule on the first stage, but Peter had us by 25 seconds on stage A2. I should note, that Peter was trying hard this event, as Owen was competing with Jenny Mckenzie for the regional championship. The McKenzies are also part of the "group" its almost like a team down in Production 1750. While we compete *against* each other, for the most part we compete *for* each other as well. There is a lot of camaraderie in that class.

After the service at Bancroft we transited to stage A3 “Sleeper Lake.” This stage was to be 36 Kilometres long, and was the longest stage of my four event “career.” It was fast, twisty, and challenging. The roads were in excellent condition by the time we got to them, having about 21 cars in front of us. The straights were pretty well swept clean of snow, which made us run slower on them. Paul said the Nokia HK-10’s we were using were holding fine. Still we averaged about 65 KPH on the stage. It was on this stage that Peter and Owen decided to take a bit of a rest break. Peter stuffed it into the end of a curve, did a little clear cutting of the forest, and managed to re-arrange the configuration of a steel culvert, as well as the Suzuki Suspension, drive train, and some coachwork. At this point Owen’s chance at the Co-Driver’s Championship evaporated. Still good sports as they are, we saw them at the next service, and they helped crew for the remaining four cars that were being supported out of their van, and service crew. Peter even offered us the use of his new Blizzak’s which we declined. A mistake on our part, however.

Another mistake on my part was using my bi-focal sunglasses. About 10 clicks into the stage I got sicker than a dog because of all the bouncing around we were doing had me looking through two different lenses at the same thing. The constantly changing focus made me car sick. After the stage I changed to my regular sunglasses. Now I was off my color (*or colour if you prefer*) till we got to the service at Denbigh, but managed to keep it all inside (*me, not the car*). It was a real challenge trying to co-drive when all you wanted to do was get you head out of your helmet, and hang it out the window.

We transited the 27 Kilometres to stage A4, “Trout Lake” to begin the approx. 20 Kilometres of this stage. The stage was pretty wide open, except for a downhill side road left intersection, with a rather large bolder in the middle of the intersection. It was a little icy at the intersection, but Paul managed the 90 left with room to spare. We then transited into Denbigh. The Boy Scouts had set up a small “aid” station with cookies and hot drinks. Feeling more human, now I climbed in and strapped in.

Stages A5 and A6 started out the same but ran on opposite shores of what I believe was a lake (Hard to tell, I was a little too busy there to sight see). It started out with the spectator area, and climbed incessantly up. Over the approximately 20 Kilometre length, I would guess that 75% of the stage climbed, and the last 25% descended. It was during stage A5 that we discovered the Latreille’s Eagle on its roof Talons in the air you might say. Both Barry and Sandy were okay, and the car only suffered body panel damage to the roof, hood and fenders, according to Barry.

It was also on this stage that the Golf GTI of Oliveira/Coelho went out. We saw the crew sitting on the hillside, I never saw the car. I was told that it was lying on its side between a rock and a tree well off the road, but that is unsubstantiated rumor. Stage A6 started in the darkening blue grey of a winter evening. I thought it was a little easier than A5.

Now the driving lights were beginning to get necessary. One thing rather surprised me running the Tall Pines. Maybe it was the falling evening of winter in the forest. Especially when we were waiting for the stage to start, maybe it was the quiet, or the soft snow white blanket covering the deep green foliage of the Pine and Spruce. Whatever it was, this rally was very calming, or rather had a feel of calm. The other events I had run, had a rather hectic pace to them. This event seemed to be peaceful. As the light fell, and we relied on our driving lights to see, the effect seemed to amplify itself. Here we were bashing about at a fairly respectable speed down crummy roads, yet it seemed almost ballet like in a calm and serene way.

The 20 Kilometre transit to A7 allowed me to catch a quick nap. This last stage which was the same as A4 but run backwards. Stage A7 was very quick and very challenging. We started out crossing a narrow bridge with real water on both sides. The road was highly crowned, with sharp drop offs on both sides. Next we had a decreasing radius acute turn just over the crest of a hill. Then we encountered a Tee intersection right, with the boulder I mentioned earlier that sat in the middle of the intersection. The difference of course was we were approaching it on a downhill run, so our speed was higher. The rest of the stage was plagued with sharp turns just over the crests, mostly changing elevations. It seemed to be harder than I remembered A4 to be.

The stage ended and so did the Regional (Divisional for the SCCA Types) Event. Jenny had won the Co-Driver Championship. During the 43 Kilometre Transit back to Bancroft, the stars came out. It was a picture perfect winter evening, with more stars sweeping across an obsidian sky than I have seen in a long time. Paul being a science teacher, and my interests including astronomy led us to darken the interior and discuss the phenomenon displayed before us. At Bancroft the scouts served a dinner.

The restart out of the Bancroft Main Time Control (MTC) transited us to stage B1 "Hartsmere Road." This was Stage A3, except that it took an acute left about halfway through, and became new roads. The stage was a very quick 30 Kilometres, and was a challenge. The straights were really wiped clean of all snow, and were surfaced with polished ice. Some point on this stage we both commented we should have taken Peter up on his offer of the Blizzaks. Paul did an excellent job, and we made a respectable time. I know that he backed off. You see, Paul had decided that this was to be his last PRO-Rallye as a competitor. He plans to sell the car, and switch to road rallye. I know what was going on in his head, and did not urge him to push it. Obviously, he did not want to damage a car that has been run without damage since new. Paul has not been afraid to catch a little air, in our last two ralliees. About 2 KM from the finish, he backed off a jump and we coasted over the crest.

Stage B2 included running Castledine's Corner backwards. On this stage Paul was pushing again. It was a good run, and we both enjoyed it. That was good, because for Paul at least it was his last PRO-Rallye Stage -- for a while at least. At the end of the stage I was surprised by the Milton Venturers. A club that helped staff the rallye. Well they also had an aid station. They provided coffee/hot chocolate to the competitors on our final transit back to Peterborough.

On the way home the stars blasted out of the sky they were so bright. It was very calm and peaceful, and the crew of car # 50 was very satisfied. How did we do, well we took 11th overall, and 2nd in class. I am not sure, but I think Paul and myself placed very well on the TSN Canadian National Championship Points as well.

So to Paul, Mark, and Peter, Harry Pressy, Sandy Latreille, Terry and Linda Epp, Jenny McKenzie, Owen Cule, Shirley Normadin, Mike Nichols to name but a few who taught me what to do, and help make it possible. To the new friends I made and don't have space to mention, and the workers whose names I don't even know, Thank You. Very special thanks to good friends Peter Watt and Dave Erickson, this year of adventure would not have been possible but for you. This certainly has been a year for me to remember, and I hope to see you all next year. To all of you may 1995 be a successful, challenging, fun, and most of all a very safe year. Rallye On!

Epilogue: The last surprise of all was that Paul and I got trophies. The first trophy I ever received in PRO Rallye. It was a pretty spectacular end to a spectacular year. But not as spectacular as that obsidian night sky in the Forests of Ontario.