

March '98 Open Exhaust



September 12-14, 1997; Alma, Michigan

The biggest rally of the year, the fabled Press On Regardless (POR), was again run out of Alma, Michigan. This would mark the 48<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the rally, and was being used as a possible model for the 50<sup>th</sup> running in 1999. The format for 1997 would still be that of 600 miles of the dirtiest, nastiest roads Michigan's lower peninsula has to offer. The main difference though would be that all driving would be done at night. Each night's (driving) activities would begin about 9:00 PM and go until 7:00 AM the next day.

The competitors, from across the country, congregated in Alma for a leisurely dinner at headquarters on Friday night. During this time, the rally vehicles were on display at the "Parc Expose". This would be the last chance to see the cars and their occupants in their clean and fresh condition.

The list of entrants read like a "Who's Who" of American Rallyists, of recent years. Jim Shaffer (last year's winning navigator) and Rob Moran drew "car" #1 for their Jeep Grand Cherokee. The experienced team of Friedman/Goldfarb made the trip from New Hampshire and would be second on the road in their AWD Talon. Kammer/Adams would be back again this year, also in a Talon; from New York (car #12). Webb and Schneider would draw car #7 for their Galant VR-4 (from Maine). The remainder would be made of crews from Ohio, Illinois, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Kentucky and (of course) Michigan. Conspicuous in his absence, was the well known automotive lunatic from Alaska; one Satch Carlson. (Though he promises to return for 1998).

The vintage contingent was well represented as well. Jones and Potvin were back to defend their class win, in their beautiful '64 MGB. Harvey and Murphy brought the, "strong as a tank", Team Harco Colt. Chuck Fortino and Jim Brandt would bring their trusty '65 Plymouth Valiant, Pierce and Koch were back with Bob's lovely little Mini Cooper. New to the vintage (POR) ranks, were Kevin Clemens and John Deikis in a 1960 Volvo 544 Sport. Kevin has written a very nice article on the '97 POR which appears in the Feb '98 issue of European Car. (Incidentally, his column goes by the title "On The Line").

After a nice meal, the teams headed out of Alma in a westerly direction on the odometer check. The vintage Halda (correctable odometer) in the Harco Colt began to act-up after the odo run. We changed one of the gears to

give us a more correct factor for the tires we were running. After reassembling the Halda, the gears were not meshing properly. Thus we would tear down the road for a few hundred feet only to have to turn around and try again. After about four tries, we finally got the gears to mesh properly and hoped that no further problems would occur.

After about an hour of transit time; the rally began in earnest. A couple days worth of rain did a great job of keeping the dust down and left some nice little puddles to splash through. The moisture in the ground was also evident in the air; in the form of fog. This presented a problem for many teams, but not the Team Harco Colt. With a full complement of auxiliary lighting to choose from, the driver was able to switch on or off any combination of fog, driving, high beam, low beam and cornering lamps. Bryan remarked that we must have looked like a Christmas tree, with all the lights flicking on and off.

Not only did we have the proper lighting for all conditions, but we had also made the correct tire selection. The BFG Mud-Terrain tires were ideal for the muddy and sandy conditions encountered throughout both nights.

A concern that sleepiness could become a factor with the all night, for two nights, format. I am happy to say it was not a problem. The roads, and the very brisk speeds were enough to keep Rip Van Winkle awake all night. In fact, the second night, I only consumed three cans of Coke all night. (And no coffee).

The only thing lost to this format was the party time. After a hard night of rallying, the crews enjoy the time together; telling lies, replenishing bodily fluids and watching rally films. But after a full nights drive and total sleep deprivation, most competitors slept during the off hours to be fresh for that which lay ahead. (Besides, beer just doesn't taste the same at 7:00 AM).

Out on the roads, it was strictly business for the crews and their vehicles. By running late into the night the risk of other, non-rally, traffic is greatly reduced. Any vehicles coming the other way; would usually get enough warning with the oncoming lights. Though I must say, I don't recall seeing more than two vehicles coming the other way, the whole rally!

This was primarily due to the roads selected by the rallymaster. Some of which were the kind that might not see a vehicle for two weeks, at times. Many of these roads, if you can call them that, were narrow, deep sand trails with no more than a foot to spare on either side. They would be lined with little magnetic trees, drawing you closer with each turn of the wheel.

There were times when the surroundings became a surrealistic dreamland. There were trees and ground cover which appeared as though they were covered with snow. The bright driving lights made the landscape appear as a frozen, winter, wonderland. I mentioned the strange aberrations to Bryan. He said that the trees were



aspens. Well I don't know an aspen from a hole in the ground, but it sure was pretty.

With all the nature and beauty to behold, we were still on a mission. Remain on time. We were doing a great job of it early on, too. But, about two thirds of the way into the first night we found ourselves down two minutes. It was hard to imagine how we could be so late, having just come off a transit section. It seems the chairman had intended the STOP signs to be considered advisory. We were unable to determine at what point we should apply for a TA (Time Allowance) and for how long. Our lateness was carried through several closed controls (car is timed but does not stop) and our fate was sealed when we arrived at the next open control. Our early lead had faded to a distant third.

Dozens of other stories exist, for every competitor, in an event of this sort. To touch on just a couple: we came upon the rally leaders (Freidman/Goldfarb) stuck in some deep sand on a hilly clearing. They were being pulled out by their fellow competitors. First Mark Henderson, then Dan Coughnour took turns pulling with their 4WD vehicles until the Talon was free. Coughnour and Folger were 2<sup>nd</sup> at the time, behind "Freidfarb" (as they are affectionately called), when they gave assistance. While they could have benefited greatly from the misfortune of the leaders, the team from Ohio showed the true camaraderie and sportsmanship that exists among rallyists.

On the second night of the rally Steve Novatne, navigator for Fred Cochran, complained of chest pains and was taken to the hospital. Fortunately, all was well for Novatne; but it was quite a scare.



The sun was just coming up when we finished the last couple of legs of "day" 1. What a sorry looking lot we must have been - dragging our dead asses and dirty luggage into the Wolverine Dilworth Inn, in Boyne City. The sun was shining bright off the blue waters of Lake Charlevoix. A bayside condominium would be our shelter for the day. So what shall we do while here at this vacation paradise? Get the key in the door and find the beds!! Zzzzzzzzzzz.

Rising at the crack of 5:00 PM; we checked over the car. Took it for a wash and gassed-up. The folks at the gas station had already had some rallyists stop in. We got a number of questions and we finally all agreed that it was "Cannonball Run" (with Burt Reynolds), that best defined what we were doing. (The movie has nothing in common with the POR except that people and cars are involved. But Granny, at the Boyne City Marathon, had us pegged).



Harvey/Murphy Colt needs a bath, Kovach/Rinkel Escort just got one. Two PRO Rally prepped cars at Boyne City layover.

Another great meal; and the half-way awards were presented back at the Dilworth. Aside from Total Petroleum, the major sponsor of the POR, Mac Sam Specialties supports the rally with a number of awards. The class leaders each received their mid-point awards and all remaining competitors were given pins, clipboards, maps, pens and other valuable mementos.

Regrettably, there were three crews who didn't make it to the mid-point. The Mini of Pierce and Koch suffered from coolant loss after rear-ending the Sonoma pick-up of Prior/Secret. Coulthard/Vey chose POR as their introduction to rallying. They soon realized they were not prepared. The third team was Fisher and Bell, from western Michigan. They had car trouble and were unable to make the start, back in Alma.

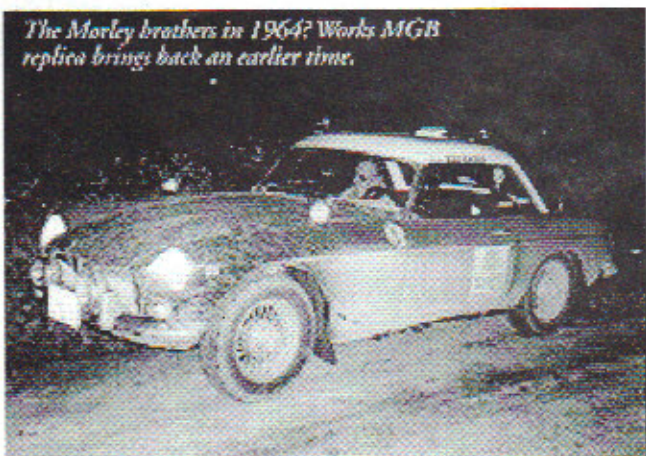
Enough of that! It's time for another 300 miles of mud and guts. We returned toward Alma on more great roads to the east, until a break in Gaylord found us telling lies at Blimpies. 11:00 PM on a Saturday, at the Gaylord Blimpies. It doesn't get any better than this.

A restart from the desolate lot of the Racing Hall of Fame, just past midnight, would send us east again and then south. The night was young and the roads were beckoning. One road in this portion, was as steep and twisty as any I have seen in lower Michigan. Ninety right, followed by a ninety left, followed by another right; for what seemed like three or four miles! It was "deja vu all over again", all the way up the hill. The same turns would be followed by the same short straights. The road was less than two lanes wide and it just kept going UP! At 3:00 AM, in the middle of nowhere, here we are tearing up the side of this hill at speeds that would surely have had us all in jail had anyone been there to see it. Great fun!

Then there was a control at the top of the hill. (Surprised?) We were early. At least we had more fun than the guys who were late. Not long after this we had our last fuel stop. About 4:00 AM at a large Total truck stop, the teams have another 40 minutes to kill.



The Morley brothers in 1964 Works MGB replica brings back an earlier time.



Jones/Potvin Vintage winning MGB. Photo from Feb, '98 European Car

Eric Jones, in the MGB just ahead of us on the road (and even more in the score), tells of the lack of deer on this second night. He says they saw about a dozen deer the first night. I mention that we saw none the first night, but have seen 6 or 8 here on the second night. My theory, at the time, was that the sun set a minute later on the second night and thus the deer were near the road that same minute later; for us. After all, Jones and Potvin were exactly one minute ahead of us on the road. The only problem with this theory, is that the sun sets earlier each night between the summer and winter solstices. So that's probably not it.

More stories, of the roads traveled and the near misses, are traded. But most are too tired to tell the really good lies. By this time I notice the deer whistles mounted on the front bumper of the Coughnour/ Folger Cherokee. I tell the Steven Wright joke; about the fact that if you affix the whistles in the wrong direction, the deer will come running out of the woods and down the road after you. (Somehow it seems funnier when Steven Wright tells it).

One last section of nice, dirty, slippery, sloppy, slimy, beautiful roads are left; before the utterly boring 50 mile highway run into Alma. There is light now. But we are still in a haze. Tired, exhausted, but somehow content. We have faced the challenge, and we have met it. We can be counted among the finishers of the Press On Regardless.

The walking dead find their way into the Alma headquarters for breakfast and awards. The workers and competitors gather together again; but the stories are much more subdued. The drain, on everyone involved, shows in their faces and their actions. The animated gestures, loud voices and general revelry are somehow missing. Food and sleep seem to be first on everyone's mind. There also seemed to be some interest in the scores. First though, there were, apparently, two or three disputes about equipment irregularities in a couple of classes. By the time everyone had finished eating, scores are posted and awards are presented.

Freidman and Goldfarb hold on for the win, but after 62 scored controls, their win is by only 19 points. They edge out Coughnour and Folger by a score of 80 to 99. Third, and more than one hundred points back, are Webb and Schneider. Michigan residents take the next three places. Mark Henderson and John Puffenberger take fourth overall and fourth in class E. Shaffer and Moran are next and take the class win in L. Sixth would go to Wittine and Talcott in the "Police Caprice" (not the best of cars for these kinds of roads - but it is some testament to the skill and fortitude of this crew).

Seventh overall and first in Vintage would be, defending class winners, Jones and Potvin. Eric Jones' 1964 MGB is a replica of the Morley Brother's factory car of the mid '60s. In fact, the vehicle registry is the same - 7 DBL (though it's registered in Ohio, not Great Britain). Another replica of a car which competed in the 1964 Monte Carlo Rallye, in Europe, was the Valiant of Fortino and Brandt. They were not able to hold on to second in class and ended third behind the Colt of Harvey/Murphy. The Team Harco Colt is not a replica of anything, it IS the car which fought the PRO Rally wars of the mid-'70s; when campaigned by Scott Sr.

Winning S were Wernberg and Mahnken, which was also good for 15<sup>th</sup> overall. Novice was won by the Alma team of Clements and Wierich, in their Jeep CJ-5. The "Dead Last But Finished" award went to Camp and Haase in, "Herbie", the love bug ('72 VW Beetle).

Everyone seemed to enjoy the rally and are already talking about next year. Even Kevin Clemens, in the vintage Volvo, had enough fun to claim that he will return. The promise of more party-time and a less intense schedule has the competitors anxiously awaiting the 49<sup>th</sup> running of the POR. Chairman, Gene Henderson, is calling the 1998 running of the POR a "dress rehearsal" for the 50<sup>th</sup> running in 1999. He plans to spread the rally over three days and nights, but with less early morning driving. A kinder, gentler POR?

The POR for 1997 was not the car-breaker or even the performance (PRO) rally it was in other times. It was however, true to the brisk endurance nature of its current format. With the promise of somewhat kinder hours, the same great roads and brisk speeds for the next few years; this would be the ideal time to become involved. (If you're not already so afflicted).

Written by Scott Harvey, Jr. Photos by author, unless otherwise noted.

Results of:	Total POR 1997	Alma - Boyne City - Alma	September
12-14	62 controls scored		
1/1E	Mike Friedman/ Marc Goldfarb - NH/NH '90 Eagle Talon	#2	80
2/2E	Dan Coughnour/ Mike Folger - OH/OH '96 Jeep Cherokee	#5	99
3/3E	GARY WEBB/PETE SCHNEIDER ME/NJ '91 MITSUBISHI GALANT VR4	#7	204