

# DawnBuster V

July 20-21, 1998

Brighton-to-Manchester, Michigan

*by Richard Worden*

DawnBuster was back again for the fifth running of this, the '90s incarnation of Detroit's historic all-night enduro TSD rally series. The rally was advertised as a "brisk" dusk-to-dawn affair to be held on 300 miles of the area's most interesting roads, most of which happen to be unpaved. Depending on the moods of the weather gods and the whims of the local road commissioners, conditions were expected to vary from mud to dust, to hard-packed washboards. Speeds would be set to challenge the drivers as well as the navigators.

At 4:30 pm on Saturday registration and tech opened at the Lil' Chef restaurant in Brighton. There, the organizers, Rich Worden and Bryan Murphy, held a one-hour long control school to familiarize the several rookie control crews with their equipment, instruction sets, paperwork, cell phone directories, and duties for the night. The cell phones were provided for each control car, courtesy of Bryan Murphy. Meanwhile the competitors gathered. The usual suspects showed up early clamoring for the cherished lower car numbers....

Eric Jones (OVR) and Harry Ward (NWOR) by virtue of their early pre-registration were assigned Car #1, and competed in the Limited class. Most rallyists in the area are familiar with Eric's vintage MGB, and several are known to marvel at its mechanical reliability. The car has a long history of finishing endurance events no matter the depth of the water over the road, the frequency of the accordion-like washboards, and the viscosity of the quagmire traversed.

Driver Scott Harvey Jr. and navigator Mark Henderson brought the Team Harco/Dragon Lady Eagle Talon and were assigned Car #2 for competition in the Equipped class. Mark usually drives as one of Scott's arch-competitors, but as each was without his regular partner, they declared a truce long enough to run the 12 hours of DawnBuster V. Mark and his regular partner, John Puffenberger, won DawnBuster IV last year after a very tightly contested event and Mark was loath to miss the defense of his crown. DawnBuster is a tradition in his family. His father, local rallyist of note Gene Henderson, has served as rally organizer in the past and at one time teamed with Scott's father, Scott Harvey Sr., running rallies together in the early '60s. This then would be the second generation of Harvey/Henderson teams.

Oddly enough, several of the Midwest's other top competitors showed up without their regular partners as well. Among these were Herb Spencer and Rob Moran running Herb's beautiful BMW 325iX as Car #3 in Equipped, and Lynn Dillon driving her 1988 Pontiac Sunbird Pro Rally racer as Car #6 (also Equipped) with veteran navigator Greg Lester from

Northeast Ohio Region in the right chair. As it turned out, the entire Equipped field consisted of first-time pairings -- tough sledding in a classification where close teamwork usually separates the also-rans, just one or two points behind, from the winners.

Arriving in a Jeep Grand Cherokee and assigned Car #4 running Limited class was the elite team of driver Jim Shaffer and navigator Jim Fekete, last year's season champions. Other teams expected to vie for class wins included Steve Baumbach and Brian Scott in their Stock Geo 'Power' Prizm, Colin Botha and Mark Kleckner in the Stock Team Bulletproof Acura Integra, and Brian Mahnken and Brian Pospeck in their Stock Dodge Omni. All in all, the organizers were very pleased to see a full field of 15 cars with a minimum of three entries in each class, for a difficult all-night event.

At 6:40 pm the first cars rolled out of Lil' Chef to start what for most teams was an uneventful odometer check. Not so for the fearless Yooper rally team of James Bialas and Alex Georgiev running Stock class in their specially modified (with hi-tech Black and Decker Snake Light interior lighting system) 1990 Ford "Coupe d' Scott". Their extensive preparation was proved inadequate by the first mile of unpaved road. An illuminated "Check Engine" light indicated that it might be a short rally for the two Michigan Tech rookies. Luckily, driver and chief mechanic James checked the engine, noted that it was still in place and skillfully applied duct tape in sufficient quantity so as to conceal the offending portion of the I/P. Problem solved. They rallied on.

Section I began at 7:10 pm along Muir Road, an access way for a gravel pit near the General Motors Milford Proving Ground. Checkpoint #1 followed only one mile down the road around the third corner. None of the experienced Equipped and Limited competitors scored worse than 3 pt., and the Stock and Novice contingent fared no worse than 22 pt. The long night was under way!

With navigator Georgiev carefully tracking time and driver Bialas sliding around open corners Pro Rally style, the rally was off to a good start for the #5 Ford Escort. Bialas noted that optimism prevailed for these first 6.45 miles through Checkpoint #2. Thereafter, "the team (descended) to the usual levels of pessimism, anger, and paranoia. Georgiev concerned himself with screaming educated guesses on whether to slow down or speed up while Bialas muttering something about keeping the car in one piece so he could get to work on Monday." Nonetheless, the team considered this the pinnacle of motorsports excitement, and claimed unmistakably to having had the time of its two young lives.

The first break occurred at the McDonald's in Leslie. The remaining seven checkpoints in the 100 mile long Section 1 had proven more problematic than the first and many teams were late arriving. Scores were unexpectedly high in all classes, perhaps because the low speeds had allowed enough time for self-doubt to creep into the minds of many. Obviously this wasn't a problem for the Team Harco/Dragon Lady Eagle Talon. Harvey/Henderson dominated Section 1 scoring only 5 pt. vs. 16 pt. for their nearest competitor, the Equipped entry of Dillon/Lester. Surprisingly, Bruce Fisher and Tom Bell were leading Limited with 26 pt. in their Datsun 510 wagon. They used the allotted rest time to perform effective

cosmetic surgery on the rear of the car. Meanwhile, straggling in were the Stock leaders Baumbach/Scott with 908 pt. (!), and the Novice leaders Steve Ray and Dennis DeSmet with 789 pt. in a Chevrolet police car.

The rallymaster had intended this early twilight section to be a relatively simple warmer-upper at speeds generally in the 30-40 mph range. That way the rallyists would have an opportunity to grow accustomed to his preferred choices of roads and instructions with the benefit of partial daylight. All of our region's rallymasters seem to have their own distinct styles. This one enjoys challenging rallies with few instructions that occur at Stop signs, many intersections going without mention, twisty and hilly roads specifically sought out, no traps used, no parallel road signs referenced (unless specifically milaged), few speed changes, and speeds generally commensurate with the road conditions.

Section 2, the real meat of the rally, began at 11:00 pm. The course ran southeast into the remote access roads of the Waterloo and Pinckney State Recreation Areas. Speeds were set at a somewhat more aggressive pace. Team Yooper (Bialas/Georgiev) noted that, "As night time set in, the whole rally melted into one big blur of twisty gravel roads, lots of dust, steep hills, hidden checkpoints, some more dust, and that red Eagle Talon zipping back and forth." It became evident to all that even the Equipped class wouldn't be populated with the legions of "Zero Heroes" seen recently in many Detroit Region rallies.

In Car #3, the BMW 325iX, driver Herb Spencer found a great deal of respect for his new teammate Rob Moran. "In (pre-rally) negotiations, I asked if (Rob) would mind if the driver would be able to try to make up for (in)experience with the desire to learn and possibly ask questions as the event progressed. I promised not to blame him for any mistakes if he would reciprocate and not blame me! OK?" No yelling, screaming, gnashing of teeth, or biting was allowed in the 325iX. Herb continued, "I learned much about patience. I was also amazed at the speed of Rob's fingers on the Timewise 'A' box. We did well, in fact very well by my standards, OK by his, and we had a wonderful time. We were running as Car #3, but kept ending up as the lead car in each of the legs.... I thought we were wrong and lost, but Rob had faith in our combined talents, and thank goodness, he prevailed. It was a special experience for me to run with such talent and I hope it rubs off on our team in the future. POR for example." Team Spencer/Moran finished the section with a fine score of 25 pt., and 54 pt. cumulatively through Sections 1 and 2.

For the #4 Jeep Grand Cherokee, Section 2 went a little less smoothly. Driver Shaffer reported, "So here we were (The Jims), on the tight, twisty, hilly, blind corners in the middle of the night section -- sliding left, sliding right standing on the brake following full V8 acceleration -- all within about one mile. Jim Fekete, the navie, is being tossed, jerked, and banged by the shoulder straps. He yells (above the roar of the engine) '...Why are you going so fast and driving so rough? We are only supposed to be going 35 mph!!!'. I calmly (but whiningly) said at the top of my voice, '...I AM only going 35 mph.' Well, to make a long short story, at the next control, ~0.25 miles, we got a zero. Just goes to show you that the navie seat is always going about 20 mph faster than the driver's seat!" Arguably, the two Jims lost the rally at Checkpoint #14 on Peach Mountain where they took a score of 78 pt.

(including a 25 pt. time allowance penalty). More importantly they had a good time running a consistent rally overall with 13 of the 25 controls scored at 2 pt. or less.

Section 2 ended with a lengthy break at the Park-and-Ride lot in Chelsea. Many tall tales were swapped, and the competitors' skills grew as the stories were re-told. Late in the break the #14 Plymouth Horizon of Martinchick/Sanford staggered into the lot having completed the second half of the section solely in second gear. Sadly, their rally ended at 3:00 am with a DNF due to a broken shift linkage.

Each of the class leaders maintained their overall leads from Section 1. Scoring reported six perfect zero leg scores during Section 2, no more than one per team. Two hundred miles into the event, Harvey/Henderson continued their mastery of the rally thus far (having accumulated only 27 pt. in Equipped). Second overall was the consistently hard-charging Pro Rally Sunbird of Dillon/Lester with 34 pt. in Equipped. Fisher/Bell totaled 54 pt. in Limited, Baumbach/Scott had 1262 pt. in Stock, and Ray/Desmet had accumulated 1753 pt. in Novice.

After the rally Mark Henderson recalled that as the Team Harco/Dragon Lady Talon left Chelsea at 3:10 am to start Section 3, he was thinking, "All we have to do is stay on course and keep level heads and we'll take this event." Unfortunately, it wasn't to be. All-night enduros are often decided in the wee hours of the morning as fatigue sets in, and so it was in this case. Shortly into the first leg of the section, the overall leaders faltered, missing a critical turn that occurred only yards past the previous rally instruction. They were off course for approximately ten minutes and despite a liberal dosage of time allowances, did not recover their equilibrium until several controls later. Excluding Checkpoints #18-21, they ran a near-perfect, dominant rally. Including them, the team scored an additional 569 pt. (including time allowance penalties) and finished last in class.

A similar fate awaited the Bulletproof Acura Botha/Kleckner "I am the Ultimate Durability Test" Team. After 21 of 25 controls, they trailed the Baumbach/Scott Geo 'Power' Prizm by only 9 pt. (1633 vs 1624 pt. overall). With the roads by now totally bereft of civilian traffic, CASTs increased to their most aggressive. Kleckner reported, "The speeds were challenging enough to be fun (really fun with the donut spare mounted)!"

As the eastern sky warmed to a glorious sunrise, the Acura staggered through the last four controls, max-ing each, and letting the Prizm get away. To their credit, the rallymaster personally observed their excellent sportsmanship and firm grasp on decorum at Checkpoint #24. Through what was described as an appalling error in their instruction set, the intrepid rookie control crew of Diane Worden and JoAnne McGlockin wouldn't come close to their assigned spot deep in the Sharonville State Game Area. Checkpoint #24 was therefore manned at the last possible moment by the course opening vehicle. There, a flock of ravenous mosquitoes devoured anyone and anything foolish enough to venture out of enclosed space, thus, in some minds, more than justifying Worden/McGlockin's decision to abandon their volunteer duties. While the rallymaster fumbled around trying his best to record the scores, teams were forced to stand in the open reading the one available copy of

the critique slip (which had to be posted for the remainder of the field) and fighting off the descending hordes. Minus several ounces of blood and the taste of imminent victory, Botha/Kleckner pressed on. Despite getting "hopelessly lost" (near Fishville) for almost an hour while battling fatigue and poor night vision, Team Bulletproof hung in there for the finish and valuable 2<sup>nd</sup> place points in the season championship series.

The rally finished just north of Manchester at a working livestock agribusiness with a small restaurant, Kim's Kountry Kitchen. There the Bialas/Georgiev team attended "quite possibly the most mundane and sleepy post-rally meal they had ever witnessed. Most of the teams had enough adrenalin to order their meals, but a few minutes later a scan around the room showed some pretty tired teams (at least by rally standards)." They had surpassed their goal of "Dead Last, but Finished", placing 4<sup>th</sup> in Stock and 12<sup>th</sup> overall. What's more, they learned some things:

- Brake warning light repair tape works really well to get rid of needless annoyance!
- Snake lights are cool, if you can keep the batteries from popping out.
- Caffeine is good, COLD caffeine is heaven.
- A spotlight for reading road signs is good.
- Placing route instructions between driver and navigator saves potential hassle of navigator strangling said driver who would otherwise ask for repeat instructions every ten seconds.
- Bagels make great road snacks. They're easy to dust off.
- Driving gloves don't have that same *je ne sais quoi* when the weather is hot and sticky.

Dillon/Lester scored no worse than 9 pt. on any single leg. In the end, their Pro Rally-prepared Pontiac Sunbird (59 pt.) bested the Spencer/Moran BMW (64 pt.) for the hard-fought Equipped and Overall victories. First in Limited and third overall was the Fisher/Bell Nissan 510 wagon (151 pt.). They managed to stay comfortably ahead of the fast finishing Shaffer/Fekete duo which finished fourth (242 pt.). Stock was won by the seventh place overall Botha/Scott 'Power' Prizm, and the Novice victory went to Chris Hopeman and Gautam Bakshi running their inaugural TSD (by recommendation of fellow Ford guy, Scott Radabaugh) in the black #9 Ford Escort.

Another rally was in the books, and a good time was reported by all -- most notably the rookie control crews. After their near flawless performances throughout the night, the crews were furnished complimentary breakfasts at Kim's by SCCA/Detroit. Five of the volunteer officials took time to compliment many rallyists on their friendly, helpful, and sportsmanlike behavior, even the teams that were scored for balks. Apparently, not a few of the competitors ran up to the control cars in the middle of nowhere and thanked them for doing the grunge work during a nighttime rally. Citing such positive feedback from the rallyists, several of the volunteers have already offered to re-up for next year. Thanks to everyone involved for a night of driving very well spent!