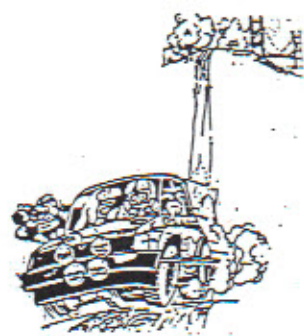


# Press on Regardless Rally



## WELCOME TO THE 49TH TOTAL PRESS ON REGARDLESS

This 49th running of the TOTAL Press on Regardless rally is brought to you by the Detroit Region of the Sports Car Club of America and organized by the Friends of the POR. This event, like so many of its predecessors, would be impossible without the generous financial and logistic support of TOTAL Petroleum, of Alma. Associate sponsors include MAC SAM Specialties, Bank of Alma, Bear Truss and Components Co., and Commercial Bank. Local promotion and organization have been coordinated by the Gratiot Area Chamber of Commerce.

Late on Sunday afternoon on October 23, 1949, a small group of cold, tired and wet enthusiasts straggled into Flint to mark the finish of the first Press On Regardless Rally. Their 370 mile trek, spread over two days, hardly seems to compare to the challenges the POR would later exact, until one realizes that many competed in open cars in miserable October weather. The winner was R.D. Maurer driving a 1930 (yep, 1930) M.G. Also listed among the finishers were the second place 1939 BMW 327 convertible, a '37 Cord convertible, a horde of M.G. TCs, and even a 1936 Duesenberg convertible.

Through 1952, the POR maintained a similar format. It must have been popular, as by 1952 it was necessary to limit the field to fifty entries. Nearly everyone associated with the POR, myself included, assumed that special stages weren't introduced until the late 1960's. Technically that may be correct, but by 1953 teams were required to complete timed sections on closed courses, beginning in that year at the Grayling airport. In 1954, competitors actually raced around the houses in Saugatuck.

As the 1950's wore on, POR organizers reacted to the perception that too many teams were finishing by adopting the "endurance" format that would later earn the POR the reputation as the oldest, longest, toughest rally in North America. During this period, the POR bounced around from communities in southeastern Michigan to Grayling in the north, a pattern which continued into the 1960's.

By the mid 1960's, the POR was a 24 hour thrash from Saginaw to Boyne City and back, with pauses long enough for gas and potty breaks. In 1967 the POR finally found a home when, with the financial support of TOTAL Petroleum's predecessor, Leonard Refineries, the rally settled in Alma. The POR finished in Alma in every following year through 1973, and started here through 1971. By that time, of course, the rally had adopted a true European "stage" format, and competitors came to know roads whose

reputations, and ruts, are carved into the memories of rallyists from coast to coast.

Sterling Truck Trail, Bentley Marsh, Mosquito Alley, Hayes Tower, Mack Lake Tower, Connor's Flats, all former (and potentially current!) POR roads. And what about Black Louie Bayou? Ever wonder how that road got its name? Ask me sometime. The TOTAL POR traverses these historic venues and their ilk, as the only motorsport event of its kind in North America. Sure, one could find other historic routes or tracks, perhaps even drive on them. But do you think anyone will ever permit the old public road course at Watkins Glen to be used again in anger? Is the Mille Miglia Storica, in Italy, really a race? Only on the TOTAL POR can vintage and contemporary cars actually compete on the same roads used thirty and more years ago.

At the same time, we should never forget the personalities intertwined with the TOTAL POR. It's difficult to imagine a more colorful group of reprobates, and most of them have tales to tell which will, alternatively, stand one's hair on end or reduce one to convulsive laughter.

Take for instance the 1972 TOTAL POR, the year of the Jeeps. Erhard Dahm and Jim Callon piloted Moby Dick 2, the second team Jeep Wagoneer, to third place, although not without difficulty. Laboring under the mistaken impression that the drum brakes would actually stop the 5000 pound machine, Erhard used them to the extent that the return springs would anneal and lose their tension, thus requiring replacement at every service stop. Perhaps as a direct consequence of this misunderstanding, Erhard used up the navigator's side of the Jeep on one stage thus rendering the door locks and handles inoperative. Callon's solution was to remove his belt and lash the doors to the B pillar. This approach worked fine til they got to the end of the stage and it became necessary for Callon to bail out through the window and run back to the finish control, whereupon his pants fell around his ankles. The experience was more inconvenient than embarrassing for Jim, until he realized that the control was being operated by a crew of women.

The Friends of the POR claim, among their goals, the aim of preserving the ambience of PORs of old not only by retracing their routes, but also by encouraging the use of "vintage" equipment. No doubt the TOTAL POR is a challenge in a contemporary all-wheel drive sport sedan, but try maintaining a 41mph cast on a mud-slicked forest track in a 33 year old rear wheel drive sedan. While the windscreen mists up. Incidentally, is there anyone under 35 who knows what a Curta is, much less how to use it? Have you ever seen a Halda Speedpilot work? The great joy of the TOTAL POR is the reward of success in the face of adversity, and what could be more adverse than searching the floor of the car at night for a Halda Z gear?

Next year's TOTAL POR will be the 50th. Everyone associated with the rally, everyone who ever wished they were associated with the rally, should plan now to compete, work, or just be here in Alma in September, 1999. Maybe the concept will become contagious and we'll see vintage rallies spring up around the country. How many old crocks are moldering away in garages; rally cars that could be reclaimed and brought out into the light of day for such an historic occasion?

If you're involved, stay involved. If you're not, get involved. Whatever you do, don't miss the fun.

Chuck Fortino  
Alma, Michigan, August 25, 1998