

Detroit Region SCCA



Sports Car Club of America

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News

POR, they call it that for a reason...

I had the pleasure of navigating this past weekend for Scott Harvey Jr. on the Press On Regardless rally run out of Gaylord Michigan. The POR is the "oldest, toughest, meanest rally" in the US and this year was the 54th annual.

POR returned to its roots a few years ago as a TSD after spending the 70's and 80's and early 90's as a stage rally. But don't for a moment confuse this event with the garden variety TSD's that get run on Sundays out of Burger King. POR is a driver's event and drive we did, 550 miles worth over two eleven-hour-plus days. The rally has the chance to utilize some of the choicest of the unpaved roads of the northern Lower Peninsula and eastern UP. of Michigan and takes full advantage of that opportunity. Included are many memorable old stage roads from the POR's of yore. Average speeds are set to be barely attainable and downright difficult. Combined with the event taking place on open roads and the need to be aware of civilian traffic, you have two long days of high intensity flying through the woods and having fun. Entries have remained mostly in the manageable size at around 20 cars although the 50th anniversary did much better and attracted lots of old faithfuls.

Before I go any farther let me express my thanks and appreciation to the rallymaster Bruce Fisher and all the workers and others involved with putting on this year's event and all the previous ones and keeping the tradition of the rally alive. Without all of your dedication, we wouldn't be able to have this fun!

Scott and I ran this year in Scott's 1975 Dodge Colt that was originally built when it was new by his father (Scott Harvey Sr., the first Pro Rally Champion and many time winner of POR) for the Pro Series and has run many Pro and TSD's over the years. Scott had spent the previous week sorting out the car, which now sees only occasional annual duty and found things to be in order except for an occasional fuel pickup problem that seemed to be possibly related to some rust in the tank. After some work the problem appeared to have been at least minimized if not eliminated and Scott pronounced the car fit to go. Scott likes to use the Colt for this event because it's a "tank" and soaks up the rough roads with style. It's always fun to ride in a rear wheel drive purpose built machine on the unpaved stuff at speed and Scott handled the car like a master.

We were one of (unfortunately only) two entries in the Vintage class along with Eric Jones and Bill Potvin in Eric's well-prepared MGB. Vintage for POR requires a pre-1980 car with period equipment

(mechanical counters and calculating devices, no electronics). We need to work on encouraging more of the potential vintage cars to compete next year. There were half a dozen computer Equipped cars and another half dozen in Limited (hundredth counters and electronic clocks but no rally computer), a few Stock class and about four Novice class cars. This was the first rally for a couple of the novices, what a way to break in to the game! The entry list included names from the absolute top of the game nationally for TSD tour events.

The rally was blessed with great weather this year although being dry; dust did cause some visibility problems at times, particularly after dark on day one. In a vintage car with no climate control, dust was a problem all the time. We were covered with it from the start to the finish!

Vintage class set up as a good contest with both cars utilizing Haldas, Curtas and Heuer stopwatches. My Heuer had been sitting on my dresser for about 20 years without being used but I wound it up and after twelve hours it was only off by about 3 hundredths. Not too bad for 30 year old technology! In the first section of controls we held a slight lead over Jones and Potvin and they proceeded to take it back from us by a few by the mid-afternoon break on day one. The roads were great and after the first few legs with marginally civil average speeds, the organizers upped the ante for the remainder of the event. Unfortunately for the Vintage class competition, the MGB suffered a terminal engine problem early in section three and Eric and Bill had to fetch the trailer to retrieve it. Eric thought that possibly the crank had broken or the flywheel came adrift but wouldn't know until he got it apart. This meant Vintage class honors for us if we made the distance but did leave us with the balance of the field to compete with for overall positions. We were doing decently and were in sixth OA by the end of day one and probably should have been a little better if not for the brain farts that occasionally rose up in the navigator's head.

Leading Limited class and also overall after day one were John Smiskol and Harry Ward in John's box stock 1992 Nissan Stanza with about 40 points after about 25 or so controls. Harry, a two time overall winner of the POR (once as a TSD and once during the stage era) was using a Halda and Curta and performing miracles while John who ran Pro Rallies for years is absolutely no slouch behind the wheel. Nipping close at their heels (after somehow overlooking one pause) were Ron Johnstonbaugh and Jack vonKaenel in a Mitsubishi Eclipse GSX, the current reigning Equipped Class gurus. They've won just about every tour type event nationally for the last couple years.

Sprinkled through the rest of the field were some great scores as the competitors were taking to the driving challenge of the event likes ducks to water. Speaking of ducks to water, there were some adventures through the field like Dave Parps and Rob Moran (former overall winners) who put their Outback in a wet ditch avoiding an oncoming pickup truck that was using all of the road. At least the pickem'up driver was nice enough to stop and yank Dave and Rob

back out and no real harm was done. Four guys were sharing a ride in a well used 1987 VW Synchron and doing respectably well until a slight off road excursion added to the pre-existing dent in the right rear quarter and unfortunately flattened the tire. Their only spare was the donut, which wasn't the best choice for the roads we were using (especially with four guys in the car) so they missed a couple of controls while sorting out locating a spare in the middle of no-whereville Michigan. Most everyone in the field had an adventure of one sort or another to lie about back at rally headquarters.

On day two we were headed for the Upper Peninsula and some more wide open roads than those typically used in the lower. Accordingly, the speeds were significantly higher and a lot of fun. We were soldiering along and my brain farts were becoming less frequent with resulting respectable scores until on about leg twenty of the second day we went around a corner and Scott announced he had a box full of neutrals and no forward drive. We coasted to the side of the road and popped the hood to see whether the squirrels had died or if there was some other problem that could be diagnosed. After scoping it out Scott discovered that a bolt holding the clutch cable bracket had loosened and fallen out. A spare was found that held on a driving light, the repair effected and we were on our way with a fourteen and a half minute delay. Unlike what I was used to from years ago, you can "buy time" now on events to eliminate the need to speed to try to make up time when you are down.

Well, maybe it's because I just wasn't used to the concept or maybe a brain fart occurred just at that point but somehow I didn't calculate it correctly and we ended up with a two-minute max anyway at the next control. While trying to sort out in my mind where I went wrong on that leg, I consequently got us off on the wrong foot on the following leg and soon realized I was screwed up in my timing for leg twenty-one. A few miles into that leg I decided I needed to reconstruct the leg on the Curta but must have made a mistake on the second attempt. Anyway while Scott was hustling along on the roads it eventually became evident that I wasn't going to be able to get us back on time for the leg and pronounced myself hopelessly lost timewise and suggested we just take our lumps at the next control and get back in the game.

Unfortunately a few corners later a sharp left with a lot of loose gravel on the outside of the corner jumped up and bit us and we ended up twenty five feet off the road, down about ten feet and laying on the right side after having mowed down a few small trees. We both scrambled out Scott's side, realized we weren't hurt, and got a triangle out on the road. The next competitor along in an Audi Quattro took our tow line and was able to pull us back on our wheels but there was no way he was going to get us back up the embankment. By that time about three or four cars had stopped but assessing the situation we sent them on their way. While we waited Scott winched the rear of the car over to the right a couple of feet to avoid a tree that was in our path back to reality.

The benefit of having the clutch problem on the previous leg was

that we were now near the end of the field and so it wasn't long until first one of the rallymasters, Tom Bell with his son Tyler, and then sweep showed up. Sweep was a big nuts four-by-four Dodge pickup driven by Rich Line and his son, David, and they hooked up and easy as you please had us back on the road. We had wrinkled up the right side sheet metal from laying the car over and the left front fender was pretty mangled from some impact (a tree no doubt). There were softball sized cracks in the lower right corner of the windshield from impacting something but we weren't dripping any fluids from the car. It looked possible to continue. Both front suspensions had been moved back in the wheel wells and there looked to be a clearance problem with the left front when turning left but we hooked the tow strap to that and had sweep jerk on it a few times. Not sure if it got much better but it did seem to be driveable. The Colt didn't want to refire on its own but Scott bump started the car while being towed. We got to the next control (only a few corners away) and it was still open. Got our timing slip and decided we had a POR to finish.

There were about five more legs and the car basically drove fairly well on gravel but was a pretty big handful on the pavement as it wanted to skate around due to the misalignment. The biggest problem we faced was the forty-mile ride down I-75 and across the Big Mac Bridge but Scott managed it well. We had lost our odo drive (right front wheel external cable driven) and so didn't have a working Halda or good mileages but made do with the stock odo that read about 20 percent high and not resettable (no big deal). A stop for gas on the transit back down I-75 when the fuel pickup problem reappeared solved the hesitation problems that probably resulted from stirring up the crud in the tank when we laid the car over. We got to the remaining controls and even got a couple of scores of less than max even though the issue was no longer trying to stay on time. We completed the rally and it felt great to have done so. After all it's not for no reason that the rally is named PRESS ON REGARDLESS !!

The Car will need some massaging before it competes again and a new left front fender but it looks to be fixable. Anybody know where you can get a windshield for a 1975 Colt?

On to Magnum Opus.

Kent Gardam

Photos by Mary Shiloff