

Reminiscing About My Sports Car Days

By Doug Worthy

Recalling the sports car days in the 1950's and 60's conjures up pleasant memories about fun and friendships not to be forgotten by my wife, Pennie, and I.

Buying the first sports car in 1957 was prompted somewhat by my boss at ITT Gilfillan, who owned an MG TD. While shopping for a car, I spotted this little all white 1955 MG TF 1500 in a lot. It really made an impression on me and the price was right (around \$2600.00). Mileage on this used car was around 25,000 and the condition was excellent. Just looking at this car shouted...FUN, FUN and more FUN. It was the ONLY sports car on the lot. The time was March or April in 1957.

The first day that I drove this car to work attracted a club member (Gene Haskell) of the Santa Monica Four Cylinder Club of America, who encouraged me to attend a meeting, which my wife and I did. This meeting was in Santa Monica not far from where we had an apartment.



**HERE, I TAKE A BREAK FROM A 1958 RALLY.
MY 1955 MG-TF TAKES A BREAK TOO!**

We were immediately impressed entering the parking area by all the great looking sports cars and we joined with little encouragement from anyone. It was a bit strange that NO other 1955 model MG TF 1500 cars were seen...only one 1954 model.

This club was sponsoring various events and we soon learned about events a sports car owner could enter by many clubs that had already started to spring up in Southern California. We chose a Poker Rally to run, soon followed by a Hare & Hounds Rally. The Navigational type rallies intimidated us because we weren't equipped and figured any math required would put us at a disadvantage. Many enthusiasts WERE engineers and certainly proficient in calculations. Some of these types actually designed and built some very clever devices. As we learned more and started to buy equipment needed, the navigational rallies just begged our participation and soon these were the only rallies we ran, but almost always at a disadvantage. That may be why our trophy shelf at home was rather bare! In 1957, 1958 and 1959 more and more of my co-workers were buying sports cars and it was an opportunity for me to entice them to join the SMFCCA. Many did.

Pennie was enjoying the drives through the countryside that we might never have "discovered" if not for rallies. The new restaurants (to us) where the rallies ended were also something Pennie liked. She did her best at navigating and learned how to use the basic circular slide rule and read the new watch which read in hundredths of a minute. She also helped find the signs along a route when not busy computing times and distances.

The SMFCCA had a very attractive newsletter and the editors were Bob and Betty Sweet. We were asked to take this job and did since we felt that we should contribute in some way besides working on the check points. As the new editor I did a few cartoons and designed the covers for our newsletters. Unfortunately the interior of the newsletter wasn't very good because we printed this on a mimeograph machine, but the covers were printed professionally. Since my profession was in art, this led to me getting more active designing brochures,

rally entry forms, membership application forms and dash plaques. Not many artists were navigational type rallyists since they seemed less proficient in the math department.



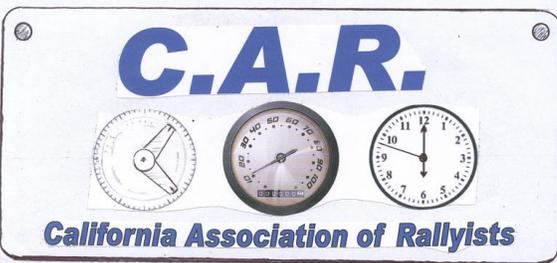
MY WIFE, PENNIE, WAITS IN THE ALFA DURING A 1959 RALLY.

Sometime in 1959 we traded in our MG TF which we had put over 50,000 miles on for an Alfa Romeo. Surprisingly we got almost the exact amount for the MG that we paid for it on the trade in. We put many miles on that Alfa and traded that in for another in 1961.

Like many clubs and/or organizations, there were always disagreements as to what events should be planned and soon, a “splinter club” started up near the end of 1959 or early 1960 which was known as The Santa Monica Sports Car Club...not affiliated with the Four Cylinder Club of America. Pennie and I joined this and it ended our association with SMFCCA since most all of our friends gravitated to this new club. The new club was very active

and only had navigational type rallies, as I recall. In 1960 I designed a car badge and logo which was used on all the dash plaques. Here’s a picture of the original in black and white. The colors were Green and blue to represent the ocean near Santa Monica.

The newsletter was called “Road and Tach” an idea that came from Joyce Peterzell. I did the cover design which is still being used as I write this. Even more surprising is the fact that this club is STILL active in 2011. Some time in 1961 I decided it was about time that I planned a rally so I enlisted the aid of Joe Walmsley. We laid out the “Forever Amble Rally” which ran on October 29, 1961. It was a success with somewhere around 40 cars entered and no protests.



Sometime in early 1961 another club was formed with many of the SMSCC members joining. This one was called C.A.R. (California Association of Rallyists) and it was Bob Piercy who primarily initiated this one. As I recall, you could belong only by invitation. Bob asked me to design a car badge for this club and I did. Here’s an approximate drawing of what that looked like. The club also had blue and white jackets worn by the teams we entered for rallies.

This club was to be composed of VERY dedicated navigational type rallyists and Pennie and I were asked to join. Very flattering since we weren’t “championship types”. The first rally of this club was called “The Californian” and run on July 9, 1961. The second one by the same name was run May 20, 1962.

Three events we were involved with stand out as the fondest when thinking about memories. 1. The rally to Palm Springs where we had motel rooms at the conclusion and did lots of socializing around the pool, followed by a great evening dinner. 2. There was a Gaggle to the Camelback Inn which took us through some magnificent scenery in Arizona. 3. Perhaps the most significant was the huge rally, Rally d’Oro, put on for muscular dystrophy...a charity event. Over 550 cars entered! This number has never been equaled to this day for a navigational rally.

Along about 1958 my interest gravitated to raising a family, getting my pilots license, moving and getting involved with historical aviation collectibles from my archives, even designing and selling wooden craft items at gift stores and craft fairs. Lloyd and Pat Dunham had also informed us of a possible adoption opportunity, which we were very interested in doing. Although we still rallied for a few more years, our concern for safety intensified with the upcoming adoption. This took place in March of 1963. We named our new adopted baby daughter Monica since we had such good memories of our first club in Santa Monica AND she was born in the Santa Monica Hospital.



MY 1960 RALLY D'ORO DASH PLAQUE DESIGN

Sports Car Camaraderie in the 1950s into the 1960s

By Doug Worthy

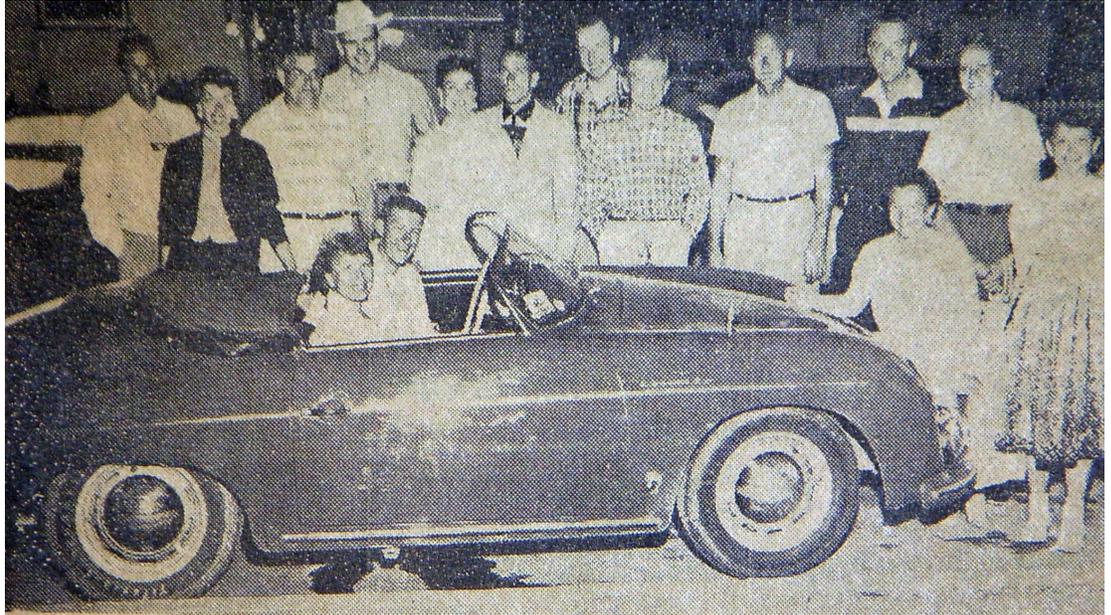
A very pleasant surprise for my wife and I after we purchased our first sports car was the camaraderie experienced while on the road. Other owners whether it was the same make and model would wave, blink their lights or honk whenever we passed one another....sort of a salute if you will.

I like to call this CARmaraderie and it extended beyond travels on the roads in California and other states. When a SMFCCA member visited another city or town where another chapter existed, sooner or later you could be approached and invited to their meeting or even their house for some extended chatter about your club and theirs. It was instant friendship and you sure felt welcomed.

On many rallies you could expect other rallyists to stop and help if you had a problem and it wasn't necessarily your own club members. The

SMFCCA rallies often had what were called "follow-up cars" to assist if needed and even "round up" some of the "lost" individuals. When one club initiated a new idea or rally procedure, it wasn't long before this was copied by other clubs. Many rally general instructions, abbreviations and acronyms were copied or made standard to aid rallyists in understanding just how to run a rally.

Often another rallyist would take the time to explain things...like RIP. If you thought that meant Rest in Peace, you were soon told "NOT on a rally"



The spirit of sports car camaraderie of the 1950s and into the 1960s is nicely illustrated by a photo and caption that appeared in the July 8, 1957 edition of the *ALBERTAN*, a Calgary Canada newspaper of the time. The article records the arrival in Calgary of 16 members of the Whittier Chapter of the Four Cylinder Club of America. According to the caption, Chapter members drove their Austin Healeys, Triumphs, MGs, and Porsches to witness the famous Calgary Stampede. The photo shows Whittier member Ralph Taylor at the wheel of his Porsche Speedster being greeted by members of the Calgary Sports Car Club. CSCC members reportedly "...promptly invited the visitors to the CSCC clubhouse...and helped them get accommodations in the city."

Amusing Thoughts on Rallys

By Doug Worthy

During the very active rally days in the 1950's and 1960' there were quite often as many as four or five rallies on the SAME day, but not all were the navigational type.

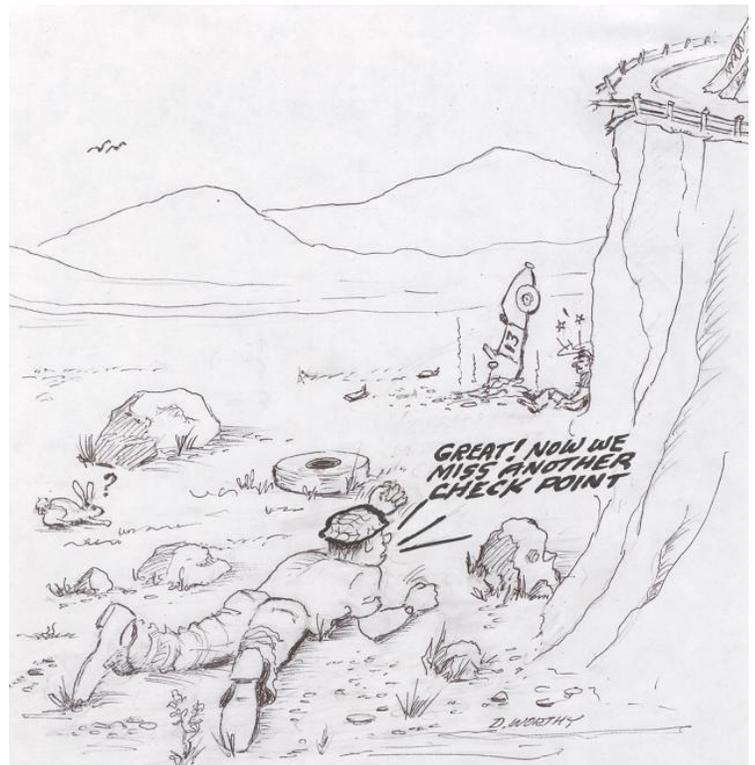
Most all contestants received a car number placed on the passenger's side windshield. This number was also on the rallyists "Control Card" turned in at the check points and at the finish.

Imagine a scenario where various clubs used the SAME roads on the SAME day or even parts of the same route. This would certainly cause confusion and apprehension to see cars going in the opposite direction with a number on the windshield. If that car had the SAME number as yours, it would get even more worrisome. You might be inclined to think you have really goofed and should turn around which of course would give you a nice big error on a navigational rally.

Sometimes you would be stopped by a police car to make inquiries as to what the heck is going on! This happened to me and after a "nice chat" with the officer, he said "Well I suppose you're going to be late now" and with an evil grin!

Many funny events took place on rallies which is why there were so many vigorous conversations at the conclusion. Comparing notes and getting tips from others often provided clues as to what NOT to do on the next rally you entered.

Perhaps these were some of the things that made rallies fun.



Challenges of a Night Rally

By Doug Worthy

Surprisingly, a large number of rallyists actually liked night rallies but you sure needed to have the right equipment to run these...meaning interior panel lights, good flashlight, spotlight and lights for your clipboard to see the rally instructions and read your watch which indicated time in hundredths of a minute.

Sometimes a hand held spotlight worked best, particularly if you were driving a convertible. It would be best for the navigator AND the driver to have some kind of light to find signs and/or landmarks. My hand held spotlight plugged into the cigarette lighter and had a little bracket to hold it when not needed. This worked very well. Many night rallyists conceived some very clever, innovative devices to gain any advantage they could. Some of the clipboards that I saw were lit up, a marvel of ingenuity.



MY WIFE PENNIE AND I LEARN WE'VE MADE A MISTAKE IN THE 1959 TARGA FLORIO II NIGHT RALLY

Planning a night rally provided advantages, since some signs were lit and there was less traffic, which often impeded the progress of a rallyist in day rallies. The rallymaster took much of this into consideration but often used the night to trick people. Here's an example of a sign that just begged to be used and the instruction could read something like this. "Make a right turn at the next crossroad" You could easily goof on this one! It's no surprise that some instructions provided directions to the finish, which some rallyists sure needed.

RIP was a very common acronym for a sign Reading in Part although we know it has another meaning. I often wondered who dreamed THAT one up. As an example, the way it was used was an instruction like this "Turn left at first opportunity after sign RIP Wrong". Obviously only PART of the above sign is to be used.



Another way to mislead or confuse a driver was to have a series of instructions come in rapid succession and THEN a loooong time until the next instruction was to be executed. This led many rallyists to THINK they missed something and they turned around to go back. Of course they lost valuable time.

Although there would be hundreds of signs to use when a rallymaster planned the rally, it wasn't uncommon for the rallymaster to locate and choose faded signs, off the road signs, overhead signs, and the like in the general instructions. Many times there were protests which eventually forced rallymasters to write and use "special instructions" for explanations. It was getting complicated for many of the new rallyists in particular, so the entries slowly dropped.

How a Rallyist Missed Winning a Trophy

By Doug Worthy

When rally cars in the 1950s and 1960s traveled hundreds of miles, often over rough, rocky and dirt roads, many things could happen that would spoil their chances of winning and these problems were not exclusively for the novices. Here are some of the excuses I knew about.

1. We got lost and discouraged, so went home.
2. We miscalculated our gasoline needs
3. We missed a check point(s) & knew we couldn't win
4. We had mechanical difficulties
5. We stopped to assist a friend...couldn't make up the time lost
6. We were involved in an accident
7. We were very angry and disappointed in the rally itself, so quit
8. We felt the instructions were really bad and quit
9. The rally required too much math so we gave up
10. My navigator (or driver) got sick (usually the navigator by looking down while computing)
11. Our instructions got blown out of the car

One of my favorite rallies was the Harbor Sports Car Club annual to Las Vegas. On one of these we "lost" our front bumper on a very rough, muddy road on a very dark night. This was "fixed" by using my wife's belt to hold the bumper in place. Of course this made us late to the next check point. If you had just ONE bad "leg" you were usually "out of the running".

Those rallyists that owned Austin Healeys had to be very careful on rocky roads since more than one owner torn up the muffler. The Austin Healeys were very "low slung" if you didn't know that. That would fall into category number 4 above.

All in all, it was important to "keep your cool". More than one driver/navigator combo had arguments about the meaning of an instruction. It WAS possible to interpret an instruction in more than one way.



Planning the 1961 Forever Amble Rally II

By Doug Worthy

Every Rallymaster had very specific ideas on how a rally should be laid out or run and the Forever Amble Rally II was no exception. My plan was to help restore confidence that rallies needn't be overly tricky with many traps and could easily be navigated by those who were not championship rally advocates or expert mathematicians.

It was hoped that the contestants would be pleased and inspired to run additional rallies, particularly the ones put on by the Santa Monica Sports Car Club which consisted of many former members of the Santa Monica Four Cylinder Club of America. That club had slowly gravitated to many difficult navigational rallies as well as the gimmicky type. It was getting difficult to attract good turnouts without VERY convincing advertising of the type of rally it would be.

Joe Walmsley was my choice for a co-rallymaster and we worked well together. Some of the club members may have been a bit apprehensive since Joe and I were planning our very first rally but knew that Bob Piercy (one of the best rallyists) would check it out.



JOEWALMSLEY WITH WIFE MARGARET AND THEIR MGA COUPE

The rally in October of 1961 saw a turnout of between 40 and 50 cars for a beautiful day in Southern California. Advertising this rally was somewhat lacking or the turnout might have been higher. Many people had already given up on rallying.

The course took the contestants through some mountains and eventually into some fruit groves where the real fun began. The rallyists were able to SEE some of the check points but were not always supposed to enter them until a later time. We didn't consider this a trap...you just had to follow the very clear instructions. Six check points were on the rally and three of them were in the groves. This was the "amble" part of the rally.

There were no complaints or protests and that is a goal for many Rallymasters. Some Rallymasters took great delight in deception, traps, math computations and difficult instructions, which turned off many...even some of the "experts".

Here is the dash plaque the workers AND the contestants received. Hope you were one of them.



Rally Incident in the 1960's That I Recall

By Doug Worthy

During the 1950s and 1960s, dozens of clubs sprang up all over California, most of which started in Southern California. Other clubs started up in other states too, but driving conditions were definitely very suitable in California most of the year for the events planned.

The Sports Car Clubs always preached safety and good driving habits but this didn't mean there were no accidents and this article will deal with one incident which I considered a warning to other rallyists as the sports cars gradually improved the horsepower and the competitors became more anxious to win.

This particular rally started during the day but ran into the night hours and Al Nesbitt (an excellent SMFCCA navigator) teamed up with Bob Tarlton (a very good driver and rallyist). They were in a Triumph on a mountain road in Southern California not far from the finish point of this particular navigational rally. Because of a slight distraction, Bob took his eyes off the road and tried to correct his direction only to hit an embankment which caused the car to flip and tumble down an incline about 15 to 20 degrees. Both occupants were thrown clear onto rocky terrain but Al unfortunately had the car land on top of him, while on his back. Bad enough certainly but the hot muffler was lying across his stomach. Bob Tarlton, although cut and bruised managed to crawl back up the slope and hail a couple of other rally cars. Several of the rallyists went down the slope and pushed the car off of Al. Of course his stay in the operating room was lengthy (I heard 4 hours) but he managed to survive.

You might be asking, "Did Al stop rallying". Not to my knowledge. Al would navigate for various drivers and was positively good with the numbers. He and his wife, Charlotte ran some rallies together and I believe he also ran with Bob Piercy, who just about every rallyist would remember.

Southland: SPORTS CAR KILLS FIRM'S PRESIDENT Frederick A. Hadden Dies at Fallbrook
Los Angeles Times (1923-Current File); Jul 17, 1960;
ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Los Angeles Times (1881-1987)
pg. D8

Southland

SPORTS CAR KILLS FIRM'S PRESIDENT

**Frederick A. Hadden Dies at Fallbrook
as Vehicle, Driven by Wife, Overturns**

FALLBROOK, July 16 — The president of an engineering research company at Encino was killed today when the car in which he was a passenger overturned in a field three miles southeast of here during a sports

car rally.

He was Frederick Allen Hadden, 35, head of Hadden Byrne & Co.

His wife Helen, 35, who was driving, escaped injury.

Both Mr. and Mrs. Hadden were wearing safety belts as the southbound auto failed to make a curve, went off the county road and overturned.

Mrs. Hadden told Dep. Coroner William Souza that she "ducked" her head and rode while the car made a complete loop and landed right side up.

Souza said the Haddens were participating in a sports car rally sponsored by an aircraft company car club. The rally began at Corona del Mar.

**July 17, 1960 Los Angeles Times Article on the
Accident**

Wheel Losses

By Doug Worthy

Odd and sometimes funny experiences were had by rallyists. Fortunately the tragic ones were far and few between. These two incidents probably have a moral for any motorist, be it a rallyist or just driving to and from work or on a vacation.

Two rallists driving a MG TD on a mountain road during a rally were horrified to see their left front wheel pass them and dive over the edge of the road. I can't recall the names but I was told the guy who was driving had to climb down this not too steep grade to retrieve his wheel, which he did to the admiration (and humor) of those who stopped to watch. The wheel bounced and rolled a good distance. Not sure what he did after retrieving the wheel and struggling back up, but perhaps someone had tools to get the wheel back on well enough to continue the rally or perhaps just go home.

My own experience was less dramatic but perhaps just as humorous. My wife and I had a long wonderful day driving our MGTF through the winding mountainous roads in Southern California but not on a rally. The next morning as I backed the car out of our car port my left front wheel just collapsed outwards! I couldn't help thinking..."My God, it's a good thing that didn't happen in the mountains yesterday".

Not being a mechanic, I cannot explain just how these incidents could happen, but I suspected poor maintenance was the culprit.



MY MG-TF WITH ALL FOUR WHEELS INTACT

Why Some People Stopped Rallying

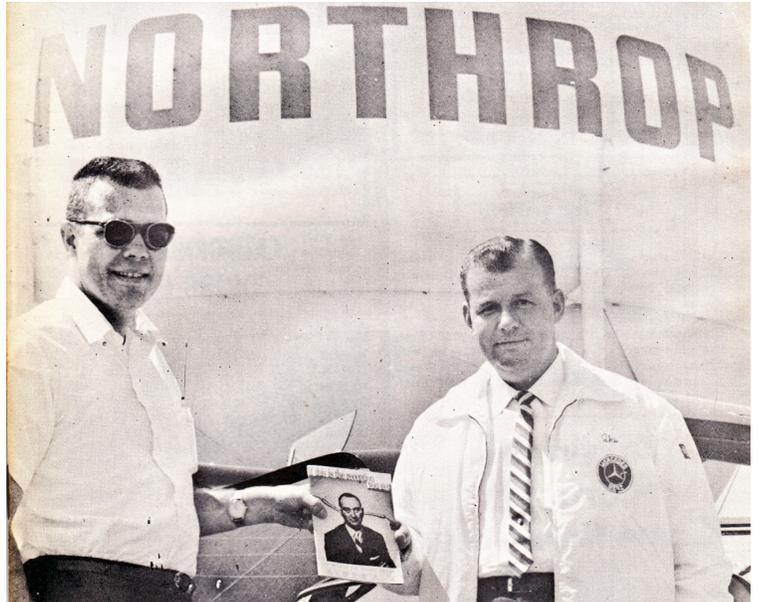
By Doug Worthy

The 1950's through the 1960's saw a large number of sports car clubs spring up all over California and many in other states. With great mountain roads, terrific weather and beautiful scenery in California it seemed natural for a boom of sports cars and clubs. Bob Henry in his book "Time and Distance" has written a fine description of many important events covering 20 years. Now Bill Wilkman has created a website and has written about the Four Cylinder Club of America which you may now be reading.

Dozens of clubs with many events crowded the weekly schedule and it demanded some creative planning to decide which event you would enter and loyalty to your own club was definitely a factor. Many rallyists entered two events on a weekend covering hundreds of miles.

Many aerospace companies in California who had thousands of employees formed clubs, such as Hughes Aircraft, Space Technology Labs, Rohr Corp., Douglas Aircraft Co., Northrop, Lockheed, TRW and others. They all sponsored events and had to juggle their dates. If you owned a sports car you were soon invited to join their club.

So what happened to all these clubs? It actually was due to numerous reasons, many which will be covered in this article. The original intent of most clubs was to provide an entertaining outlet for these "little cars" as many domestic car owners called them. There were Navigational rallies, Gaggles, Poker rallies, Scavenger hunt rallies, Gymkhanas, Time Trials and Gimmick rallies to choose from. Your only reward, besides the fun, was a trophy (usually for the best three in an event) and a dash plaque for being a participant, which you probably displayed on your car dashboard. There were also awards for "Best Team" when 3 cars of the same make were entered in some events.



**NORTHRUP SPORTS CAR CLUB "POWER RALLIESTS"
JOHN CHAMBERLAIN AND BILL ERCHELKRAUT
DISCUSS SIERRA X, A CHALLENGING NAVIGATIONAL
RALLY HELD IN 1963**

The demise of all these clubs was rather slow, as some contestants became much more competitive to the point where they tried to cheat in various ways. Some clubs started to allow "protest filing" at the conclusion of an event and even had a \$5 fee for each protest. If the protest was allowed (after a committee review) the fee was returned. This got rather nasty at times. Quite often "someone" on that committee had to go out on the rally course to determine exactly what the problem was...like a missing sign or wrong instruction. The "hard core professional-type" rallyist made things VERY uncomfortable for the volunteer hard working Rallymaster and contestants just trying to have some week-end fun. Even some husband and wife teams had stressful situations that threatened their marriage!

The Navigational type rally attracted the most competitive types and gradually many not overly competitive rallyists running these events became disenchanted with the arguing, the protests and the complexity. Some clubs had “two rallies in one” so the less experienced & competitive types could choose which route to run. Many of the experts were using more and more sophisticated equipment which many people didn’t wish to buy. The computations became just too much for many. More and more rallyists were getting lost and did not finish a rally because of intentional traps and devious instructions. There were reports of rallyists removing signs or altering them to foil other contestants. The “fun” part was certainly disappearing.



Many of the aerospace companies were going through mergers, moving, acquisitions and suffering from slowed defense spending, so the ranks of the membership decreased. A club needed a certain number of members in order to plan some events. A Navigational Rally for example required 4 or 5 people at each check point, along with some members at the starting point to handle registration. There were sometimes follow-up cars and observers for a rally.

As with many clubs or organizations, there are disagreements and this caused “splinter groups” to form so they could have events to THEIR liking. Some people just quit. Some members were growing older, had begun to raise families or perhaps moved to find another job. Those with families of course gravitated to sedans or bigger vehicles. There was also a certain amount of fear because of accidents which were happening more often due to the large number of contestants, crowded roads and the fierce competition.

Gradually the roads became more crowded; some rally routes were used over and over since many rallymasters didn’t wish to stray too far from the start point unless it was a championship type rally. This no doubt bothered or bored some people. The growing traffic was a problem since congestion often foiled a rallyist if they were on a timed event.

The cost of entering a rally was also going up, which must have been cause for some rallyists to look for other forms of entertainment, although gasoline was still reasonably priced.

Another factor which caused many people to think twice about entering a rally was the angry citizens, angry farmers and even the police in some small towns that objected to all those “little cars” running all over the place. There was one incident where a farmer threatened the rallyists with a shotgun if they didn’t stay away from his property. A Rallymaster had to be very careful when planning a route, but quite often to get from point A to point B you almost HAD to pass through small towns.

It’s nice to know that some sports car clubs still exist and smaller car popularity is a factor. There are still rallies of most types to be found...just not as many.