



EFZ. The brand new Liberty plates that were only bent twice in the car wash are now sitting forlornly in the garage. Once they were proud advertisements of some mysterious identity, now they are meaningless. The mighty black Maxima, veteran of a hundred rally wars and commandant of every Big Apple highway and pot hole has been sold. It's gone into semi-retirement in Queens where it will cart around 2.5 children, lots of groceries, occasionally the puppy to the vet. Goodness knows, it's earned it.

As my TH and I watched it being driven away by it's new owners last Sunday, I was struck by the colorful history this little mechanical wonder had accumulated since I bought it . . . a history we chose not to share with the purchasers. If the truth be known I was equally struck with the amount of cash these new owners were willing to part with to own all that history. Be that as it may, I'm really in a stew. The mighty Maxima is gone and with it a good part of me.

By and large the Maxima's reputation precedes it - it is a dandy little luxury car, absurdly reliable by today's standards, it is well appointed and has just enough buttons, knobs and switches to keep the average dolt happy for hours. However, this one's reputation, if revealed, would probably have terminated a transaction before the bartering got serious. I mean really, would you let a potential buyer know that this very car had negotiated a course check of the 1984 International 1000 AND competed in and finished the 1986 version? How much detail would you have gone into about traversing Hot Water Street trying to maintain a CAS 32 while your navigator is screaming that you are 17 - 22 - 35 down? (What was that factor anyway?) Would you have been willing to disclose details about that sinkhole in the 1985 Rosebush? How about all those mad dashes to checkpoints on Born To Run or the Jersey Bounce? And what would you have said about that new dirt road you found for Shinnecock Showdown? You know, the one you were sure was the perfect punctuation to an otherwise placid section but one the rallymaster declared just too tough? Nothing? Ah ha, I thought so!

One of the mysteries of life is how people become identified by their wheels - cars are an extension of the person and they take on the owner's personality. People name their cars, they talk to them, they decorate them, the relationship becomes almost metaphysical. In the case of rallyists, cars are sometimes easier to identify than those

they cart around. A blue Bronco equals The Humphrey's, a green 280Z means The Sigals, a primer-coated 510 equals Rich Mooers and the chartruse Saab means Leon - oops, McCann. If you think about it, there is something poetic about watching Fred Cochran getting in and out of his RX-7. When I see "The Trout" I know the Friday Afternoon Rally Team and their trusty companion George can't be far away. The black Dodge Conquest means I can have a free consult with my favorite vet. The burgundy Saab EMS means the Keich's have arrived and the supply of Johnny Red is in peril. It's a little trickier with Hagen and Carmean since they have been known to show up in most anything but seeing the bright red MR-2 brings joy to my heart, especially if I'm competing in Class B. 510's really throw the gray matter into overdrive. Along with Mooers, it could be Burt and my TH, Rachner, Frucci and Schnoor, Mark Stone or Neville Nesbitt. There is no doubt about the Sellitto's Mini Cooper, a red BMW means Miner and Kraus and the Dodge Colt means Webb is in town.

Now, you've gotta believe there is some comfort in all this consistency and that is why I'm in such a quandry. How will anyone know it's me if I don't show up in the mighty Black Maxima? How can I possibly get behind the wheel of something that still smells of the assembly line and expect it to run without an impulse unit installed? What kind of dash board is complete without fourteen strips of velcro strategically placed here and there? Can any day be worth the trouble if I don't bang my head on a navigational light or attempt to dislodge an ancient set of route instructions that have mysteriously embedded themselves between the navigator's seat and its springs? The thought that I will never again have to utter the words, "No officer, that's not a radar detector, it's a hundredth-reading clock," leaves me cold. What will I put in the glove compartment if not my multi-colored felt tipped markers; a supply of orange stick-on's for the inevitable time allowance; wadded up gum wrappers and a hand held solar calculator perfect for night events? What self-respecting rallyist goes around without several pounds of sand from the Jersey Pine Barrens forever lodged in their car's undercarriage? What rally vehicle doesn't have at least two skid marks across it's gas tank compliments of misplaced boulders? How can I possibly

feel comfortable in a car that has never traversed a switchback in the Tioga forest?

Well, I'll apologize in advance for whatever brings me to the next event. Whatever it is, it'll be clean, it won't be needing an oil change, the shocks will be tight, the air filter clean. There are only two things for sure I can tell you - it will be red and those EFZ plates will be back in action . . . I can only give definite maybes on the impulse unit and velcro!