

# The Sunriser 400:

## How I learned to Stop Worrying and Love Service

Making the transition from endurance TSD to Pro Rallying is easy only for those who don't have to run the course. I speak of those rally groupies with dirty fingernails who agree to provide the manpower and wherewithal to keep teams running stage after stage at various points on the route. These folks are called service crews, and their stage is the service break. Having just experienced almost a dozen of these at the SCCA Sunriser 400 Forest Rally (Chillicothe, Ohio; Sept 13 and well into the 14th) I speak from some amateurish level of authority.

The make-up of a service crew is inconsistent from team to team. Those fortunate enough to be sponsored - and we all know who they are - have service crews and vehicles in matching colors and an operation that is so well rehearsed as to be more than a little intimidating. For those of us just getting started in this game, the uniform is designer jeans and Reeboks, the service vehicle is our street car and the service equipment is what we can beg, borrow or borrow (rallyists don't steal) from friends, relatives or our friends at the local body shop. Since my husband has announced that he is in love with this leisure time activity I have set about to design outfits that more suitably reflect our enthusiasm for the sport! No pun intended! We may not do any better next time but we are sure going to look the part!

There are some other significant changes I will make. For example, had I known that it would be impossible to see any of the event because we were very busy getting from one service point to the next, I would not have packed the 35 mm with six lenses, eight rolls of 400 speed film and five rolls of 1600. Had I known that the appetite of a pro-rallyist was insatiable I would have shopped far more wisely than I did - I also would have hired a short order cook, packed a hot plate and stuffed three coolers instead of the two that were bulging. Had I known that the waiting between service breaks is interminable I would have hijacked a boom box and packed my Beethoven tapes, brought two books instead of the one I had, been armed with the Genus II edition of Trivial Pursuits, a deck of cards or Challenge Yahtzee at the minimum. Had I been aware that the only place to sit is in the vehicle, I would have insisted on lawn chairs among the extra tires, jack stands, tanks of gasoline, tow ropes (we're real optimists), cans of oil, water and so forth. Had I any idea that the rally proper would run almost six hours late due to various crashes here and there I would have packed thermals, a sleeping

bag, my footies and hot cocoa. Well, now I know and we're gonna do better next time, I swear it!

One of the nicest surprises of working service was the unerring cheerfulness and helpfulness among the various crews. Being less than mechanically inclined, my role was more nurturing than technical. I fed the guys, cleaned the windshield, held the fire extinguisher during fill-ups and gave my team good luck kisses - it gives the word "service" a whole new meaning, doesn't it? My co-crew member, Tim, bore the brunt of the real servile work which is only appropriate because he knows where the dip stick is and I only know how to read it! This fact was sorely tested when, in a fit of helpfulness, I went searching for the stick for the transmission fluid. My sweet husband gently reminded me that it was only possible in an automatic transmissioned car. I washed the windshield again. Quietly.

It was only when we began running out of food that I was aware of how long this event was taking - despite the delays there was a sense of adventure attached to trying to stay awake (we failed), trying to stay warm (thank goodness I brought along an afghan [Ed note: I am trying to figure out if that is a blanket or a hound] ) and trying to stay cheerful when our team arrived for service. They clearly had the harder job but it was tough convincing myself of that at 4:30 in the morning when four stages and two more service breaks remained.

With the event running almost six hours late the finishing party was the most poorly attended affair since one of Nixon's post-Watergate cabinet meetings. Of the 75 cars that started, 16 attempted to perform some amazing feat of automotive acrobatics and failed, 8 more suffered terminal mechanical breakdowns, 3 were time barred at various points along the route and 2 were disqualified for shortcutting a stage named Irish Ridge. Apparently that call was met with mixed emotions and I don't know enough about the body politic within SCCA to comment with any authority but the general concensus was that maybe the punishment did not fit the crime for the second perpetrator.

The mortality rate among the competitors was astounding to me and the delays exhausted me but the mere fact that my team finished exhilarated me. They pulled off a very respectable 4th in seed and a 33rd overall. I just love a plan that works out especially on a shake-down cruise! The Millen-Ward Mazda RX-7 defeated the

Buffum-Grimshaw Audi Quattro 1:54.44 to 1:56.19 thus continuing the ping-pong match. The Shepherd-Reese Dodge Turbo Shelby (PGT Class) with a 2:08.35 bested the Gooch-Gooch Dodge Turbo Shelby with a 2:25.14. Class A went to the DiMarco-Stuetzel Subaru Turbo and Production Class went to the Crawford-Andreini Dodge Omni GLH. While I have no sage commentary about the winners or the also-rans, my interest was peaked by the comments Doug Shepherd felt the need to make at the awards presentation as he accepted the PGT honors. He quite eloquently notified SCCA that a class victory should not, for all practical purposes, be decided because several contending teams within that class were time-barred out of the registration process. With the growing popularity of pro-rallying perhaps the SCCA would be well advised to re-position themselves away from between the rock and hard place they appear to function in.

Be that as it may, the 22 hours in and about Chillicothe are now firmly etched as yet another first in my life. What's really scary is that I could learn to like all of this too much. Under normal circumstances I do not admit to having cocktail franks for brains but this rallying business is fun. So I'm going to go out now and buy \$100 worth of lottery tickets on the off chance that a healthy subsidy is in my future.