

(This is part one of a however-many-it-takes feature on an activity that is endured by all rallyists unless they go by the name Buffum, Woodner or Millen.)

For the past few weeks the driveway at Chateau Walrich has taken on the appearance of a service area in Chillicothe. Let's see if I can capture the scene for you. There is this beige MASS that I am told is the 1987 version of the Walrich pro rally vehicle. It sits cooperatively and quietly on jack stands or blocks preparing to be assaulted. There is an impressive array of power tools and equipment strategically placed in an odd pattern around the MASS. Each one is designed to violate the integrity of the MASS all under the guise of making it better. And then there are a variety of voices that seem to emanate from several pairs of feet that are sticking out from under the MASS. I know little about these voices and feet save their voracious appetite, their insatiable thirst and their ability to make my kitchen sink look like a toxic waste dump.

Anthropologically speaking, all this behavior can be categorized under the general heading of man versus machine. My TH, to his credit, is one of many who insist on taking the concept of DIY literally. After careful observation and note taking I have come to believe that he and his counterparts have an aberrant (and dominant) gene floating around that prompts this behavior. There is no magic elixir to stifle the compulsion to tear out and inspect the guts of said, MASS, replace 90% of it's body with homemade fibreglass sections and put it all back together again. What is truly fascinating is that each poor soul afflicted with this gene is also absolutely positive that the MASS will operate correctly after they have "fixed" it. That's a rare and delightful level of hopefulness - a radical departure from these days of cynicism in which we live. Since I am not gifted with this gene I must find other ways to maintain my equanimity.

Let's look at the process of MASS acquisition and metamorphosis in it's entirety. Please keep in mind that I personally do not actively participate in much of this because I suffer from massophobia - an unexplained fear of anything that shows up in my driveway not under it's own power. The methodology described here and in future columns is but one of several possible permutations of the same basic behaviors and activities that occur in similar driveways nationwide.

The selection of the MASS is all important and requires subscribing to no less than 14



automotive periodicals. Under no circumstances can any of this research material be thrown out. Ever. Once the make and model have been identified, traveling to anywhere on the eastern seaboard for the purposes of selection is possible and likely. This year there was a coy suggestion that we weekend in some place just east of the Mississippi noted for it's fine selection of MASSES. Calmer minds prevailed.

The next step teeters dangerously on fantasyland. It is the actual acquisition of the MASS. My TH calls me breathlessly at work on a Thursday - late morning - to report that he thinks he has found THE ONE. I, of course, am thrilled with this news because now I can reclaim my living room that has been inundated with a year's worth of 14 periodicals that cannot be thrown out. Ever. The best part of this phone call is the asking price for the MASS. It doesn't really hit me until I remember that I pay more for groceries but I stifle myself from repeating this observation. Maybe this time we got lucky.

The MASS in question is visited, some good natured bartering commences and the sale is consummated. The air is electric with excitement until I hear those fateful words, "by the way... ." I am told that we have managed another coup. It appears we have also just invested three times the cost of the MASS for a trailer to haul it from it's resting place to our driveway and all events we enter for the rest of our natural lives. This information tests my humor but not my resolve. Afterall, everyone needs a hobby. My TH's hobby is reincarnating MASSES, mine is maintaining my humor. It is equally hard work.

Well the big day arrives. The beige MASS has been deposited in the driveway and I am given the fifty cent tour. I marvel at the lack of acoutrements that I consider basic; things like door handles (interior and exterior), a visor mirror, for that matter a rear view mirror, an exhaust system, fenders. Each time I point out these minor deficiencies I am told not to worry, "it's been ordered." I am instructed in how the roll cage is going to be manufactured and installed, in how that gaping hole in the floor is going to be repaired, what variety of seating has been selected. This model did come with a back seat but that was going to

be removed. Guess it's tough to run a stage from the back seat. The more I am told not to worry, the deeper the lines in my forehead become. The one thing that keeps me going is the look of genuine excitement and anticipation that I see staring me in the face. It's tough not to get caught up in reincarnation - it's heady stuff.

Soon after the arrival of the beige MASS hoards of interested folks arrive and each is patiently given a more technical version of the fifty cent tour. This makes perfect sense since they will all play a vital role in the reincarnation. I beam proudly as my TH explains the process step by step and inquire what I can do to help. The response comes with a sweet smile, "how about making us some lunch?" Peter's Principal rears it's ugly head. In the scheme of things I think I made out like a bandit. I may not know anything about MASS reincarnation but I sure know where the bologna is kept!