



The MASS is resting comfortably, thank you. It's sort of in a state of suspended animation out there on it's new bright red trailer all covered up to hide the extensive cosmetic surgery that will be required before we're out there again, "Tearing up the pea patch" as they say. Let's hope the next patch doesn't also have a rock wall to traverse! As one might imagine, it's been a tough week at Chateau Walrich. Both TH and I have spent hours trying to reconcile exactly what went wrong and have come up short with each plausible explanation. We finally decided that the simple truth is probably found on that two word sign we put on the windshield after taping it back in place for the trip home. You know the phrase I mean it's that metaphysical explanation of Murphy's Law. Right, that one! Anyway, I've felt sorry for us long enough so that automatically makes it time to explore some of the more important mysteries of life, like what to do with myself while TH and the Mass become reacquainted. This little set back is nothing more than a variation on last year's theme. Remember, I told you nothing every breaks twice! So why do we do it? Well, I'll 'splane it to you.

Except for that handful of teams with factory or corporate sponsorship, Pro Rally competitors have one thing in common that makes them all equal, abject poverty! We all work hard at our chosen professions during the week, we all put on our ties and jackets, our hardhats, our professional uniforms and meld into that faceless world of work from Monday to Friday, nine to five. After five days of enduring the flotsam and jetsam of employment, we make a conscious and happy decision to fill our very limited leisure time and spend equally limited resources in the single pursuit of car preparation or competition.

Our friends, the one's who pursue other avenues of relaxation, like knowing what's on the New York Times best sellers list or gearing up for the annual suburban olympic challenge of achieving the greenest and best manicured lawn on the block, consider us strong candidates for the booby hatch. Siblings are sure we were dropped on our heads sometime in infancy and occasionally inquire if we're getting enough complex carbohydrates in our diets. Our parents wonder why those golf lessons they paid for when we were teenagers didn't have a more lasting impact. (They also don't understand how we can invest so much money in a sport that only occasionally returns a few bucks or a wall plaque that requires dusting!) Trust parents to ask logical questions!

Back at the office, co-workers are generally

mystified when we explain what our weekend plans consist of. They just assume that our "professional persona," the one we use to impress whoever appears to need impressing, carries over to our private lives. They really struggle to understand any behavior that seems contrary to the image they have of our "other life." Screaming down a dirt road at Mach whatever in a specially prepared vehicle with all sorts of safety gadgets while wearing a helmet and a suit that is fire proof really tests their limits.

I have this really neat picture of TH and the Mass on the desk in my office and it never fails to prompt a question. My answer never fails to get a blank stare or a bewildered, "You do what?" in response. It didn't take long for me to give up trying to explain the sport or my fascination with it. Now I just smile and pretend I'm engrossed in something terribly vital to the security of the free nations of the earth.

It is only now that we've had this disagreement with a rock wall that I understand that I have been trying to explain the wrong thing. Sure, car prep, especially when it is done right and everything is solid, earns some major ego points. The thrill of the chase, both against the clock and against that team that has a three second lead on you, is a rush. Halfway point re-seeding, especially when you move up in the pack, is an amazing feeling and comes awfully close to justifying all those hours and bucks spent in getting it right. The subtle shifts in strategies, as the event proceeds and the number of cars still in the hunt dwindles, are a part of the communication process between driver and co-driver. But with all of these variables, all of these possibilities, there is only one constant in our sport, one thing that you can always rely on and feel good about - the people who participate. Every last one of them has been infected by an invisible bug, a bug that makes them an event organizer, a steward, an official, a worker, a service crew member, a competitor. The symptoms are easily recognized, all the infected occasionally show up at the same place for the same reason at the same time and speak the same language.

Tiadaghton Trails Divisional Pro was our first event this year and after the "Drought of '88," TH, The Mass and I were ready with a capital "R!" On the plus side, SCCA's Blue Mountain Region currently is blessed with a

substantial crew of bug infected Pro Rallyists who arrived in force to insure that the inaugural run of this event would succeed with a capital "S!" Our difficulties aside, they did that and more.

There is no real way of knowing exactly how Boyd Smith, Event Chairman and Walking Compendium of Rally Lore, was able to finagle, cajole, urge, promise, baffle and otherwise dazzle the local and state bureaucratic structures into approving this event. Thus, I will resolutely allocate all of that to the "Details, Details" Department and simply thank him and them. Connie Foresman, who is truly an "Earth Mother" to confused and misdirected competitors and workers was able to maintain a decorum at registration and throughout the event that never ceases to astonish me. Nothing, I say again, absolutely nothing perturbs this lady, not even answering the same question 42 times.

Dean Fry's course, Diane Houseal's control crews and Ed Brennan's Tech Inspection were all handled with dispatch and a esprit de corps that make everyone feel good. This crew is good. They're no nonsense, they're fair and they know how to evaluate and solve problems on the fly. Lead car honors were bestowed on Bruno Kriebich and Tom Grimshaw while sweep up duties went to the intrepid threesome of Lapham, Ferretti and filly in 5 point harness, if you please. Event Steward, Bob Lyle (otherwise known as "He Who Must Be Obeyed") was non-intrusive, full of good humor and seemed to be helpful everywhere he went. Of course, other than TH, he is the only one physically able to be everywhere at the same time! Kerry Voll may have been wearing her reporter's fedora to cover the event for her spiffy "STAGE TIMES" but she also worked the MTC at service and the restart after the dinner break. This tells me she was probably hard at work computing scores to establish the reseed in record time.

Since the first event for us each year is more or less a shake down cruise (this year, of course, it was a shake-upside down cruise!) the announcement of a central servicing point is always welcome. Our crew, Tim-San and Greg hook up with Mama Dorothy Stone so we can share the burden and help ourselves to the abundance of foods and sweets found in every nook and cranny of the silver van.

The other benefit of a central service is the ease with which borrowing and returning between crews is affected. Without a doubt, Pro Rallyists are among the most generous souls on this earth. They are also the most helpful, the most concerned and the most encouraging. This was never truer than when L. Mark and No L. Marc blew their turbo. They made it back to service only because Dan Thiel stopped and lent them a quart of oil so they could get to the Sunoco station to buy a case. The memorial service

we held for all of the mosquitoes and other tiny flying beasts that met his smoke and their Maker at about the same time was well attended.

Rallyists also have soul! We had our own brief crisis (before the more permanent crisis) with vapor lock (TH tells me that happens in the carburetor, it's good to know these things) that was quickly resolved when Reese Harris pulled over and gave us just enough of a tow to unlock the problem. This generosity of spirit was repeated over and over again during the event. It's an unwritten rule that no one retires from an event until it is absolutely obvious that they must. This process usually entails consultation with other competitors, their service crews and occasionally the manual. The corollary to that unwritten rule is to make sure you have tried your biggest hammer on the problem before announcing retirement. Murphy strikes again!!!!!!!

The unsung hero's of any event, to my mind, are the service crews and the control workers. While their team is their focal point, and rightly so, service crews willingly make themselves available at a moment's notice to help out someone in need. While we are naturally prone to pat our own guys on the back for putting up with our shenanigans, there is a special place in our hearts for Don Hagen and Steve Novatne who crewed for our now almost svelte Editor and

Mr. Schneider. They were always there with a pat on the back or a shoulder to lean on when we needed it.

There is something very reassuring about seeing a control worker that you know, either from previous events or other autosport venues. Seeing Joe Kwiatek, Lesley Suddard and a legion of others out there gave us someone to chit chat with briefly which sure doesn't hurt when you're trying to regroup at a stage.

Having gone by retired vehicles on a stage, I could certainly commiserate with Dan Thiel and Chris Shalvoy back at the hotel when they told us how shook up they were to see us shiny side down on Stage 6. It's ironic - after the dinner break reseed we found ourselves up seven places in the order, just in front of Dan and Chris. That being a new experience for us, we assured them that we would get over when they caught us on a stage. Back at the hotel after the event, Dan assured us we didn't need to take our promises quite so literally in the future!

From the point of arrival at an event until all is said and done, one of my favorite groups of people, other than the event sponsors who we dearly love, are the spectators. These mostly local folks (except for relatives who drive impossible numbers of miles to watch us) are a little bit fascinated and more than a little curious about us and our rides.

At this event I met my absolutely favorite spectators of all time. They were a sweet retired couple who were carefully inspecting each and every car at Parc Ferme. He explained everything that was readily apparent about each car and she evaluated the paint job and decorations. When they came upon The Mass I overheard her exclaim, "Oh look, honey, a Catholic car!" After regaining my composure, I explained to them that while it had not been officially anointed, riding in it was certainly a religious experience! On the off chance that she's right, I think a baptismal ceremony followed by a circumcision (a little off the tail pipe, perhaps) and then some chicken bone rattling is probably indicated!

After that? Well, here's the plan. Straightening, Fiberglassing, Painting, new decals, new windshield, a small bank job, change the oil and filter and we're back in business. Piece of cake! As for me, I'm going to get my column in on time, grow award winning dahlias so I can turn this into a gardening tips column (that will be in on time), pester the DOT so they'll get around to weeding the lane dividing planters they built last year on the Grand Central Parkway and Cross Island Expressway and when all else fails I'll perfect hairpin turns in a golf cart. We'll definitely/maybe see you in North Bay, where Vinnie assures us there will not be a Car Number 13!