

Life in the other

LANE

I got to wondering recently what other Pro-Rally teams do when their season is over. I mean, do they endorse water filtration systems on local TV to earn a few bucks? Do their wives stand stoically by their side during the taping looking like the camera is a water pistol aimed right at their \$30 hairdo? Do they write a brief note of thanks to their sponsors and attach a list of their various accomplishments during the past season to justify upping the ante for next season? Do they have real jobs? Come to think of it, does the Pro-Rally season ever really end?

Well, the 1988 season ended for us over Columbus Day weekend up at Defi Sainte Agathe, Quebec (CASC) when, after nine magnificent special stages, the old differential decided it didn't want to play with the new engine and turbo anymore. Actually, I believe what really happened was that the MASS overheard my TH and our service crew planning the agenda for the next service break after a grueling 54K stage that was coming up immediately after a 43K stage.

Since we have already established in previous columns that the MASS has a mind and a soul all its own, we could have predicted that some form of recalcitrant behavior would follow. What we have only recently figured out is that someplace in one of those computers that operate parts of the MASS, the little devil has written a program of its own. It's a simple program with a short menu of possible mechanical failures to choose from. Once a failure is selected and implemented and we are forced to retire from competition, that possibility is erased from the program. This explains why nothing breaks down twice.

But, I'm getting away from myself here. What I really want to tell you about is what our rally team is doing now that we are in our "off season." We have lofty plans to build a new trailer, replace the Jeep with a tow vehicle that has some muscle, look for that errant program and replace it with one that simply says, "I think I can, I think, I can; I know I can!" Obviously, all of this takes self generated working capital or the identification of a well heeled sponsor with a terrific sense of humor. While we are hot on the trail of a water filtration company looking for cheap spokespersons, we have just completed Phase I of the WOLF CREEK RACING DO IT YOURSELF CASH FLOW IMPROVEMENT SCHEME. We had a garage sale!

George Carlin calls the things we accumulate over the course of years "stuff."

He goes on to explain that we are so into our "stuff" that we take it with us wherever we go. Purses and briefcases are literally overflowing with "stuff," basements and attics are crammed full of "stuff" we forgot we had. Unfortunately, because we forgot we had this "stuff" we go out and buy more "stuff" that is nothing more than a cleaner version of the "stuff" we already have. Chateau Walrich was loaded with "stuff," TH's "stuff," my "stuff," our "stuff" and some other "stuff" that neither of us could identify or would admit was ours.

You will note that the garage "stuff" is not included in this list. That is simply because garage "stuff" is related to the MASS and therefore is irreplaceable. From my vantage point, garage "stuff" are unidentifiable objects that cannot function without being attached to other unidentifiable objects. This therefore renders them useless to the average garage sale aficionado. In addition, garage "stuff" is just plain dirty and would not sell on appearance alone. I toyed with the idea of cleaning up a few items for the sale until I remembered that I would then have to clean myself up with that pumice goo that feels like solidified bacon fat. This is where I drew the line.

Selecting "stuff" for a garage sale is not a difficult process as long as one refrains from taking mental walks down memory lane. This, unfortunately, is an unavoidable event whenever some long forgotten, useless gem has been relieved of the newspaper wrapped tightly around it, ostensible to hold those memories in suspended animation. Spending a few hours in a basement or in an attic with boxes loaded with the past conjures up irresistible memories of totally forgettable events. I was amazed and slightly bewildered by the "stuff" I had stashed away. There was the evidence that I actually did have a date for the Senior Prom, there was the yellowed and fragile copy of the first article I wrote for publication that was actually published (nope, didn't get paid for that one either!), there was the cork from my first ever bottle of champagne, an Alfred E. Newman, "What Me Worry?" button (definitely not for sale), a copy of the New York Times for the day I was born, pages of poetry written during those days when I thought Ferlinghetti was the ultimate, an autographed picture of Carol Burnett. In all, an incredible array of "stuff" that was almost bewitching until I began

behaving like that wit on the commercial dancing around the attic with the prom dress that still fits and drinking Swill Mocha Almond somethingorother. I immediately made tracks for the fridge, cracked open a beer (a Bud Light for you potential sponsors out there) and reminded myself that my prom dress had been cut down to a scandalously short mini much to my father's delight. He's a leg man, long standing!

Having been brought back to reality by a jolt of hops, the process of selecting items for sale quickened and after a few hours of work, uncluttered with the silliness of "remember when," I had unearthed an impressive assortment of "stuff" that I was willing to let go at give away prices all in the name of an improved cash flow for the 1989 rally season. Family and friends were contacted and invited to join in the fun with "stuff" of their own; calendars were reconnoitered, a date was set, ad's were written for various Pennysavers, poster were made and the fateful weekend arrived.

There is some point in the process of staging a garage sale when the seller loses control of the flow of events. In retrospect, I'm not quite sure I can pinpoint the exact moment it happened to us but I'm leaning toward the minute our first customer arrived. You see, there are no rules of conduct at a garage sale like there are at say, Bergdorfs or Tiffany's. A garage sale is more like John's Bargain Store (remember them?) with natural air flow or maybe the Chicago Mercantile Exchange during a run on soybean futures. The conflict is simple, sellers are attempting to make as much money as possible, buyers trying to spend as little as possible.

My attitude at the start of the sale was very simple, "One doesn't dicker for the Hope Diamond, therefore, one doesn't dicker for my 1968 vintage Waring Blender." I can now admit that this was a self-defeating attitude. You see, nobody else cares that this very blender makes the perfect Whiskey Sour. All they know is that you have made a decision that perfect Whiskey Sours are no longer an important part of you life, that the blender is expendable (aka "stuff") and they are willing to take it off your hands, under such conditions that they define. Needless to say, as the sale progressed, my psychological need to explain the lineage of each item diminished with the failure to unload it for a few lousy shekels. By Day Two of the sale I found myself trying new marketing ploys, stuff like, "Buy one, get six free; items starting with the letter A, (A wine carafe, A mixing bowl, A lamp) 50% off. It was at this point that I realized I would never make it in retail sales!

This two day event also revealed a dark side to my psychological makeup that is almost embarrassing to report. This, however, has never stopped me before so why make an exception now? I have come to realize that I

have a deep seated prejudice against people who look like they have just been released from the primordial ooze. I am equally uncomfortable with members of the lowest level of the food chain, but we only had one of them and he didn't stay long. The ooze people, however, came in droves; all shapes, sizes, odors and Salvation Army haute couture. Now that didn't bother me so much but each had the audacity to criticize the quality of our "stuff." Just as I was starting to work myself into a lather over one such miscreant's behavior, TH came to the rescue by reminding me why we were allowing all these strangers to poke fun at our treasures. I immediately relaxed, got a very serene look on my face, walked over to the MASS and kicked the tires. HARD. Upon my return it appeared that the ooze people now considered me a kindred spirit and were instantly less critical of our "stuff."

There is another sociological phenomenon occurring here on Long Island that warrants some mention. Of all the visitors to our little sale, less than half spoke English, and two of them were visiting from Toronto! While this lent an international flavor to the event which does have some merit, there is something disconcerting about how the demographics on our "tight little island" are changing. There is also something frustrating about not being a linguist. I do have a working fluency with street Spanish but that vocabulary is filled with adjectives not often used by gentlefolk. My French gets me through a menu, if it's a one pager and my German, well, that can be summed up with "ausfhart" and "achtung," never got to the "b's." While this speaks to my own educational deficiencies in a world that is

rapidly changing around me, it also had a negative impact on the amount of salesmanship that could be employed in the process of dickering. It's downright impossible to nail down a sale when your fingers are busy indicting amounts! It's also downright frustrating to find yourself apologizing for being unable to communicate in Bantu!

Please do not misunderstand. I think that by and large a mixing of cultures, mores, folkways and all that stuff we learned in Anthropology 101 is a dandy concept, when done tastefully... preferably over cocktails... at Sardi's. I tend to get put off when a Mr. T clone shows up in my driveway and wants to, "Ax me a question," or when all 16 members of a family arrive in a pinto to bargain for the couch, the oldest male swinging rope in his hand perilously close to the glassware table while the three youngest are pulling on the same stuffed animal and screaming, "MINE, MINE, MINE!" Things really start to get interesting when Mr. T's "wife" (if you had been there you would clearly understand why the quotes were added) decided that this was a proper forum to stage a "marital" spat! Not only did they manage to scare away all our customers, they also stopped traffic on Hempstead Turnpike! In both directions!

Speaking of same, I'm a little worried about the general intelligence of the average garage sale shopper. Now stay with me here. Chateau Walrich is located directly on one of the busiest thoroughfares on Long Island. Hempstead Turnpike is a four lane divided highway that starts on the Queens-Nassau border in Elmont and ends

at the intersection of Route 110 in Farmingdale. Chateau Walrich is the last bastion of residential living on this highway and is completely surrounded by commercial concerns. It's a unique place to live in much the same way that Mars would be a unique place to live. Be that as it may, one doesn't need to be a rocket scientist to understand that parking on Hempstead Turnpike probably isn't a good idea. In the two days we staged this sale no fewer than 20 cars pulled up to the house on Hempstead Turnpike, drivers totally oblivious to the world around them, turned off the ignition and started to get out of the car. I'm relieved to report that we had no crashes, only three near misses and I was able to further my education with several new entries into the idiomatic English data bank.

So, how did we do? Well, the MASS will get that new differential it needs, and probably a years supply of windshield washer solution. I have the satisfaction of knowing that I can barter in eight languages, some more successfully than others, but all with only ten fingers! We managed to only have to repack six boxes of "stuff" after unpacking twelve, the Salvation Army made out like a bandit and the 1968 vintage Waring Blender has been returned to its rightful spot in the appliance closet. So, please, when you visit, ask for a whiskey sour, would you?