



We have to interrupt this month's episode of "Tales from Chateau Negative Cash Flow" for, of all things, a rally story. Hard to believe but after thirteen full moons, sixteen days, two hours, thirty minutes and no seconds, THE MASS is back on course with TH at the helm and your humble scribe looking as green as ever in the right seat.

The event, "Criterium de la Petite Nation". The place, Montpelier, Quebec. A 25 car entry, which included an 8 car boost from the states battled the 350K event with 13 stages totaling 160K. This CASC regional event is comparable to an SCCA divisional but from this seat it had all the drama of a full fledged national - Speed Week cameras and all! That evaluation can be pretty evenly distributed between rally anxiety (I got us off course twice on transits), the fact that the first two stages were paved (I hate paved stages), the reality that 11 of the 25 competitors DNF'd (more about this later) and finally, at long last, we finished an event intact, still married and still speaking!

The MASS, despite a pesky array of rally gremlins that came along for the ride, performed like a champ. At four different points during the event little glitches almost forced our retirement, but perseverance and TH's uncanny ability to think on the fly saved us from joining the Valley of the Crippled or Mangled. The first gremlin showed up in the middle of stage # 4 as we were at full-tilt-boogie.....iceberg. The MASS just plain died. No cough, no sputter, no histrionics, just no go. I went for the warning triangles while TH played diagnostician and four minutes later he had reset the fuel pump relay that had jarred loose after an EXTREMELY large rock had attempted to eat part of our skid plate. We made it to the finish control without further adieu.

Stage # 6 - a grueling 28K ride on a roller coaster - took its toll, but fortunately this time in the transit to service after the stage. The ignition system simply shut down. More diagnosis, a scurry for some tools and five minutes later without the application of a single screwdriver or ballpeen, the engine simply started again. To this day we have no idea what happened or why, so have allocated that crisis to the Steven Spielberg Twilight Zone File.

Right smack dab in the middle of Stage # 11 the gremlins managed to loosen up the alternator belt making visibility a true adventure and our stage time telephone numbers. We managed to limp back into service on the parking lights to recharge the battery. Reading route instructions and interpolating the odometer only with the

benefit of a pen light is an experience I have now had and do not need to repeat.

Last service before the final stage - lucky 13 - euphemistically titled "As Fast as Hell"! Routine checks reveal we have plenty of gas, the tires are in good shape, the windshield is clean, the alternator belt is tight and we have lights. We're ready to go, TH fires the engine and instantly a cloud of steam and the smell of coolant fills the air. Our crew chief, the Right Reverend Billy Sol Turbo springs into action with The Wise and Wonderful Rally Goddess close on his heels ready to help. Out of no where sprang Ray Cadieux and his driver, Marc Giguere, plus their crew, Jeff Chretien and Daniel Verreault all prepared to be helpful. The Right Reverend screams orders, TH screams questions and Ray (who is tri-lingual: he knows French, English and Rallyspeak) interprets. More questions, more orders, hands are flying. The Right Reverend screams for a blade and duct tape, both are produced. TH screams for a jug of water that Ray produces and precisely three minutes and forty two seconds later, the radiator hose that had been gashed by the alternator fan had been cut and rerouted out of harm's way. The radiator was refilled, the engine fired and off we went on the final adventure of the evening, me with one eye on the temperature gauge and the other on the route instructions. This was without a doubt the Keystone Kops finest hour and we owe our finish to them all. We made our In Time with 24 seconds to spare. The Indy 500 pit crews had nothing on us!

Now, believe me when I tell you, if a rally has to end, "As Fast as Hell" is the way to go. This 13 K stage started out pretty much like its predecessors. Twisty roads, rough terrain, water protecting narrow bridge passages. Then, out of nowhere at mid-stage the road surface turns to packed dirt and becomes four lanes wide complete with highway directing signs and with visibility forever. This was the competitors reward for making it this far - this was the TOP GUN of stages. For 7K we negotiated S curves with the alacrity of an F-14 and all I could think to do was to suggest that perhaps slowing down just a bit was probably a good plan. TH couldn't do it - he was having a ball and whooping it up like a cowboy on the last leg of the last round-up. We got into the stage close, got our time and headed off for the transit to the finish. TH pulled over, stopped the car, pulled off his helmet and

looked at me as earnestly as I have ever seen him look. Finally he formed the one word that he reserves for special moments. "WOW!"

The usual array of on and off course catastrophes forced eleven of the competitors to retire at various points along the event. The '89 Celica 4WD of Smith and VanSteamburg managed a zealous roll/endo on Stage 3, our savior, Ray Cadieux and his driver, Marc Giguere went out with electrical failure, at least two others blew strut towers and our chief "factory" rival, the '73 Datsun 510 of Buffe and Joyal went for a swim on stage 11 (only the yellow roof was peeking out of the lake). Now there was one other car that you all know that was forced to retire. During the course of conversation in future weeks with either driver or co-driver, a story about a broken turbo mount will be offered as valid explanation for their DNF. Well, that may be the mechanical reason but just between you and me, the REAL reason the Violet didn't finish was the driver's failure to visually credit the efforts of the Wise and Wonderful Rally Goddess somewhere on the Service Vehicle. After mentally beating L. Mark into submission about this obvious deficiency, that problem was resolved in the parking lot of a Friendly's in Plattsburgh (in the mud on the rear spoiler).

Open class and first overall winners were Demetrios Andreou and John Bellefleur in a Libra Racing 4000 Quattro with JB himself handling crew chief duties. This just goes to prove that there are a myriad of employment possibilities after one retires from competition. Production honors went to J. Pierre Lechasseur and Andre Gaze in an '86 Corolla just beating out Rusty Campbell and John McArthur in their hot stuff '89 Toyota truck. John reports that he is trying to figure out a way to put the brake peddle on his side of the vehicle and still remain in the Production class! The GT class went convincingly to the '88 323GTX of Yves Barbe and Bruno Carre besting John Daubenmier and Stan Rosen's '88 Shelby CSX by better than five minutes.

The event itself went off without a hitch. It ran on time, the stage crews, both start and finish were superb and the general organization was among the finest we have witnessed. There was one small faux pas that I'm almost too embarrassed to relate but now it's funny so what the hell. We were stopped, getting our time at the end of Stage #12 and the Stage Captain inquired if we had seen Car # so and so on the course? I replied, "Yes, he's about two kilometers back." He looked at me a bit strangely and asked, "From the start or the finish." I replied, "From the finish." He shrugged his shoulders and let us go. At this point I can hear TH laughing hysterically through the intercom. I inquire what is so funny and all he could spurt out was, "Moose, he asked if you saw the Moose!"