

# **Nor'Wester 2005**

Ron Sorem © 08-19-2005

**Totem Lake WA, to Williams Lake, Bella Coola, and Victoria BC.**  
**August 15-18, 2005.** Rainier Auto Sports Club presented a 4-day TSD Tour in preparation for the 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary **Nor'Wester** running in 2007, and as an Alcan5000 Rally School for 2006 entries & staff.

**Day One** began with a quick 65-mile odo-calibration run, north from the Seattle suburb on I405 and I5, for the **Mosquito Lake TSD**. The “best laid plans” as they say... The first four checkpoints were placed and ready to receive competitors. However, a quarter mile north of CP4 a paving crew was stopping traffic. NOT a good sign. If that wasn't enough of a frustration, two instructions further along the course, Mosquito Lake Road was closed—bridge out—so after a brief discussion of alternatives between the control crew assigned beyond the bridge (former Alcan winner, Peter Schneider), and the course opening crew, the solution was to ignore the closure, turn the rally around after CP5 (saving a nice little twisty section), draft a solution, and complete the section as a transit. All this was accomplished with less than five minutes before first car. Nor'Wester instructions have no provision for a Route Control, or checkpoint handouts (cars are timed as they pass hidden controls, without stopping), and the improvisation was to place the club president, Marvin Crippen, in a safety-orange vest in the middle of the road as a roadblock, to stop cars, turn them around and send them off to receive “emergency instructions” from me in the course opening car. Relatively seamless for the competitors, but a wee bit tense for the staff.

The remaining miles of Mosquito Lake TSD now became part of the **Transit Though Customs**. The crossing was uneventful for most, however Ken Westfall's BMW R100GS wouldn't restart after clearing the booth and received a welcomed push by other competitors. The rally continued east on Trans-Canada Highway 1, through Hope, and the scenic Fraser Canyon, passed Hells Gate to Lytton where BC12 turns north, rising and falling along the twisting canyon walls of the Fraser, at a brisk pace to Pavillion. The ONLY retirement of the rally occurred leaving downtown Lytton as Glyn Trafford and Bart Vogelzang's Toyota Corolla GTS disintegrated a clutch. Their trip back to Vancouver Island courtesy of a U-Haul and trailer.

**Pavillion Mountain TSD** climbed steeply from Pavillion Village through three miles of gravel switchbacks to top out at the Diamond S Ranch (“Public Road over Private Property”), with great woodland views contrasted by open plains of grasslands against massive rock faces covered with conifers. Ten miles into the section the route drops quickly through two miles of tight hairpins, some covered by ankle-deep dust, to the pavement near Kelly Lake and a short transit to Clinton for gas and snacks. All of the motorcycles elected to bypass the dusty hairpins (spooky enough on four wheels by the way) and regroup at Clinton, taking a minor time penalty but remaining upright!

**Dog Creek TSD** started ten miles north of Clinton on BC97. Meadow Lake Road took the competitors westward over wide, smooth, rolling, gravel roads. The

route passed scenic woodland lakes, scattered cabins, and a spectacular log-home manufacturer, before a gradual descent through Canoe Creek valley. Hard Right, Exposures! Dropping steeply to Hairpin Left, then dropping further to Hairpin Right. The route skirted the upper edge of a gently sloping bench above a sheer drop-off into the river. Several switchbacks and cattle guards later, the TSD section ends with an overlook of the Fraser River Suspension Bridge to Gang Ranch (whose roads were a bit too rough to rally this summer).

A **Transit to Williams Lake** began with three miles of hairpins and exposures climbing out of the canyon, and another two miles twisting down to the village of Dog Creek. A wide smooth gravel track twisted west into a blazing sun, then north passed Alkali Lake to pavement and Springhouse, where several lightning shows finally resulted in a major downpour. Dropping down the paved slalom into Williams Lake, the sky cleared and Day One finished in bright sunlight after 434 miles in 11 hours.

**Day Two** began with the **Soda Creek TSD**, immediately out of the hotel parking lot, winding north on city streets and BC97 to Soda Creek and west toward the Fraser Canyon and gravel. Soda Creek Road hugs the edge of the Quesnel Highlands, first above Williams Lake River, then turning north, far above the Fraser. At 12.9 miles the route crosses a railroad and drops through hairpin left, long hairpin right, hairpin left, and a long 90-right into the single lane Fraser River Bridge. CP crew, Ken and Sue Lingbloom, at the west end of the bridge commented on the humorous antics of nearly every competitor trying in vain to "zero" at the CP car, only to find later that they'd been timed at a sign before the bridge. One mile further along, another hidden CP caught several off the pace, with no workers in sight. Bear Left, Keep Left, and Left, were instructions on the early drafts, however, part-time CP crew and part-time Sweep, Joe and Shirley Gardner were the first on the scene of a missing final version "Left". Again, the alert Rainier staff had one person direct traffic and another continue on, to work a nearby control. Arriving at the end of the TSD, everyone had survived the freshly graded mud, and both graders, in between the trees. Most were able to maintain the 36-mph average, including the Mustang of Frank McKinnon and nephew John Putnam, from Oregon, who are more adept at the 100-plus averages in Nevada's Open Road Racing series.

A meeting of competitors and staff decided upon the next break location, and everyone was released to either drive straight to lunch, or to explore wildlife viewing or pictographs at Farwell Canyon and Bull Canyon. Wildlife viewing was not limited to the off-highway adventurers, as Peter and Joanne Schneider found a bear and three cubs at a Hwy 20 Rest Area.

After lunch, the rally again split into groups to explore, complete survey work for Alcan, or just enjoy the scenic beauty of Hwy 20 to Anahim Lake. This small resort town was to be the informal regroup point before leaving pavement behind for the gravel across "**The Hill**". Heckman Pass rises gradually through twisting cattle country, and fly-in-lake fishing resorts, into Tweedsmuir Provincial Park. A set of gates mark the summit at Rainbow Range trailhead and snowmobile area, where the "steep" descent is marked by 12% grade warnings for the trucks. "Steep" is a relative term, not so noticeable with trees on both sides of the roadway. Then, at the first

hairpin, no protection at the outside edge and hundred-foot-drops definitely get one's attention. Grade warnings now show 14%. The wide two-lane gravel narrows to an optimistic lane-and-a-half, then sheer wall on the right and just air on the left, a single track with turnouts. No real time to contemplate how many hundreds of feet the drop is now. Overlooks along the descent provide a chance to walk to the edge amid the bluish haze of warm brakes, but photos will never do justice to the extreme elevation changes. "Somewhere" in that chasm there is a stream, and somewhere those little specks in the distance will turn into cars. In less than ten miles the GPS recorded elevation changes from 5000 down to 287 at pavement. In the 45 miles remaining to Bella Coola through a narrow valley of pastures and farms, the rally was treated to views of snow-capped peaks, sheer rock faces, and avalanche chutes topped by blue glacial ice.

Side trips, as time allows, along Hwy 20 include: Farwell Canyon, for California Bighorn Sheep (also nearby Deer Park Reserve and Junction Sheep Range Park); Anahim Lake, home of endangered American White Pelicans; Rainbow Range Trail with dense Lodgepole pine changing to sub-alpine forest, home of one of BC's largest herds of Mountain Caribou; 845-foot Hunlen Falls at the bottom of "The Hill", six miles up Tote Road then a ten-mile steep trail; Fisheries Pool, along Hwy 20; or Alexander McKenzie Heritage Trailhead, honoring the first European to cross North America by land, reaching Bella Coola in 1793.

**Day Three** was a transit of 1.2 road miles and approximately 200 nautical miles aboard BC Ferries' 376-foot Queen of Chilliwack. There were spectacular views in North Bentinck Arm, with the Captain's commentary on early villages and native clans, recent commercial ventures that boomed then busted, and various whales, sharks, and dolphins. There are two stops enroute for local commerce, and a stop to drop sea-kayaks into the water for primitive camping and to await the next ferry. During the night portion of the 24-hour cruise, under a full moon, the open ocean of Queen Charlotte Strait had 9- to 18-foot swells and buffeting winds, neither of which helps with sleep. Dawn brings the early-risers to the northern tip of Vancouver Island, a brief mandatory lifeboat drill, and then Bear Cove, near Port Hardy.

**Day Four** began as we left the ferry. Some well-rested; others definitely not. Nor'Wester Sweep, Kevin Barrows, with Jim and Sue Elder along for CP duties, came upon a vehicle that had left the roadway. Not being one to pass up an opportunity to help, Kevin extracted the errant vehicle in no time and went on down the road to take up another CP location. A turn at mileage, off the highway, with no signage, caught even Rally Chairman Jerry Hines off guard. The narrow strip of pavement marked the entrance to **Gold River TSD**; covering 39 miles of twisting, sometimes rough gravel, with numerous "narrow" and "very narrow" bridges but surprisingly light traffic. Competitors had been cautioned to watch for elk, however only a few smaller deer watched from the tree line.

The town of Gold River marked the return to pavement, and traffic, and construction. Transit speeds were moderate, however delays on route were plentiful until **Campbell River** and the 4-lane. Summer tourist traffic through the "Grove of the Giants" on the 2-lane entering **Port Alberni** brought a shorter than desired lunch

break. Very heavy traffic, including one of the island's huge "off-road loggers" taking up most of the road, on the gravel 40-mile **Bamfield transit** necessitated a revised Car Zero Time to regroup the workers and competitors.

**Carmanah-Walbran TSD** left the busy haul road and gave competitors a feel for Canadian-style "brisk" rallies. (Special thanks to Brian Carriere of the Island Rallysport Club, for writing this section of the rally.) Eight miles of smooth gravel at 42 turned to rocky and rutted with no speed change. Then, very tight, narrow, twisting at 20, before smoothing somewhat at 42 again. The two cars with 40-series, 17-inch street tires survived the rocks and maintained the speeds. Gravel rally tires on the leading Subaru may have been more of a prudent choice.

**Bamfield South Transit** led the rally through another 50 miles of twisting, dusty scenery along several picturesque lakes and campgrounds before the welcomed pavement and fuel near Cowichan. Another 58 miles brought the "weary" to Victoria's Traveller's Inn to relax briefly prior to the Awards Banquet at the elegant Canoe Brewpub, overlooking its own marina in Victoria Harbor. The route book called out 1155 miles... Your mileage may vary.

- - -

**First 'Cycle Touring'**, on his BMW R1150GS was Glenn Parker of Bend OR. "Buddy system" partner on another BMW, and farthest traveled, was Ken Westfall from Port Crane NY. Ken had the most mechanical trouble of all the riders, and came away from it all with the biggest smiles.

**First in "Cycle SOP"** on his Suzuki DL-1000 V-Strom, with street tires, was Dean Scheel, Lake Owego OR. Dean chose one of the optional survey routes, with KTM 640 Adventure rider Paul Burke from Abbotsford BC (2<sup>nd</sup> overall on Day Two), and one of the Rainier four wheel drive Sweep crew. Paul's KTM "supertanker" had plenty of gas left, but Dean was "on reserve" and taking it easy before the pavement at Tatla Lake and fuel. They arrived four hours later than most of the others.

**First SOP** (cars) on their first rally were Tony and Siobhan Dodge, over from Wyoming, in an Audi A6. Both vowed to do Alcan, but "in a different car!"

**First Unlimited** went to Steve Richards of Everett WA, and Gary Reid of Olympia WA, in the Subie Impreza Wagon. Steve and Gary have been rallying for nearly 40-odd years each. Nor'Wester was first presented in 1967 and that year's winner was---a much younger Steve Richards. None of us can remember which car he drove that year.

Results, photos, more Rainier event info at [www.rainierautosports.com](http://www.rainierautosports.com)

Alcan 5000 info at [www.alcan5000.com](http://www.alcan5000.com)