

2006 Alcan 5000

Your Mileage May Vary...

Ron Sorem © 8-23-2006

Kirkland WA to Anchorage AK, August 14 to 22, 2006. Rainier Auto Sports Club and Rally Master **Jerry Hines** presented the **2006 Alcan5000 Rally**. Quoting Jerry, *"the official route is 4400 miles but could be as short as 3200 or as long as 5000: There are 1200 miles of optional shortcuts to allow four easy days for problems or sightseeing (you'd take small penalties but still be a finisher). Other options may allow a 5000 mile total, but are offered for personal goals only, with no scoring incentive."* Your Mileage May Vary...

Alcan5000 began in 1984 as a Summer event and presented the first Winter version in 1988. The series now alternates every two years as Alcan5000 and Alcan Winter Rally. Alcan may be the only TSD rally in North America that offers both car and motorcycle competition in a single venue.

With that in mind, the 2006 Alcan started with Registration and a Reception Sunday at Baymont Inn in Seattle's east side suburb of Kirkland. Monday morning brought the usual last minute fitting of radios, designation of alternate frequencies, and assignment of staff positions for the day's two Time-Speed Distance sections, as well as confirmation of room assignments and final packing of all the cycle luggage and spares.

Day One began with 9 cars, 22 dual-sport motorcycles, and 8 full-time staff vehicles hitting the freeway for a long odo calculation run, north toward the Canadian Border. The field spread over two navigational equipment classes for cars and cycles, two displacement cycle classes, and an SUV class. First on the road was a Subaru Outback with Revere Jones (Altadena CA), Brian Deno (Arden NC), and Tom Gould (Manhattan Beach CA). All three are rally veterans, past and current teammates, with Revere on his fourth Alcan. Second on the road were the Novice team of Jasper Long and Brian Burk bringing their Subaru WRX Wagon up from Portland OR, for only their second rally. Quite a range of experience. Car-guy sentimental favorites at the start were Kevin Kittle and Tyler Irwin of Albuquerque NM in the British Racing Green 1960 Morris Minor. Unfortunately their yeoman efforts at restoration and re-creation of the Morris rally team cars of the 1960s was cut short (no pun) by electrical demons in Hope BC (ironic don't you think?). Damage evolved into burnt spark plugs, a damaged head, head gasket (twice), and eventually a rebuild in Whitehorse before continuing into Anchorage. Other car-team members came from New Mexico, Arizona, Georgia, South Carolina, and one co-driver from Kapaa Hawaii.

On the cycle side, returning from last year's Nor'Wester warm-up were Dean Scheel (Lake Oswego OR), Glenn Parker (Bend OR), and Ken Westfall (Crane NY). Joining in the fun were iron butt candidates from all corners of the country: Jose Rodriguez in the long distance class, from West Palm Beach FL, followed by entries from Vermont, New Hampshire, New Jersey, Massachusetts, Michigan, Ohio, Tennessee, Mississippi, Nevada, California, Oregon and British Columbia.

The trip moved from the brisk freeway to the back roads at Alger, giving teams an opportunity to tweak their factors and work out the kinks of the morning. Last year, RASC's Nor'Wester staff developed this "shortcut" course to the border, but on rally day a key bridge was closed for repair. This year, Mosquito Lake TSD went as planned and the rally bypassed Bellingham on smooth and scenic roads to the Sumas/Huntingdon Customs.

Once in Canada, teams made their way to Williams Lake, via Hope, the Fraser Canyon, Cache Creek, Lac la Hache, and 100-Mile House. Excitement along the way included the Morris Minor motor failure, a thunderstorm complete with funnel cloud, and a fully engulfed car fire (not one of ours) dubbed "car-b-que" by our Sweep.

North of Williams Lake, the Soda Creek TSD was pavement early, followed the plateau above the Fraser, and dropped into hayfields near the river on twisting narrow gravel before climbing back to Highway 97 and north to Quesnel. Soda Creek claimed one cycle, due to the very loose surface on an uphill corner. Jose Rodriguez laid down his new BMW R1200GS Adventure on one knee -- Bike One, Knee Zero -- however by Day Four Jose was ready to take on the overnight to North West Territories, and the rest of the rally.

Day Two began as Mile 483, northward from Quesnel on the 22-mile Blackwater TSD, followed by another 125 miles of gravel and pavement through beautiful forest and lake country to Fort Fraser. Fraser Lake TSD was 19 miles of back roads that claimed our second bike. Colin Stenhouse (North Vancouver BC) lost oil through a clutch cover gasket on his KTM 640 Adventure and fried the bottom end bearings -- game over for the bike, trailered out. Colin would continue on Jose's big BMW for one day while the owner's knee healed, then as an addition to the Range Rover team of Robert Lee and Bill Savage, up from New Mexico.

175 miles north of Fraser Lake, Kispiox Valley TSD was the third timed section of the day, and was delayed by a funeral procession at 'Ksan Village. The 47-mile TSD began on pavement but 9 miles in, turned to gravel (at a CP location that would be dropped due to a misplaced decimal in the route instructions). A "critical left turn" at mile 869.958, onto Mitten Forest Service Road, was overlooked by one cycle and fortunately RASC's radio net relayed map info and verified "last point seen" info, while one of the staff vehicles explored possible off-course choices and found the anxious rider slowly retracing his route. The staff "radio relay" was 17 miles west of the rider and his sweep. We now rejoined the chase, 265 miles along the Cassiar Highway to Dease Lake. Verified wildlife sightings on the Cassiar include a wolf just north of the Mitten, several black bear near Medzian Junction, including twin cubs, and contrary to discussions at the driver's meeting, one adult black bear sprinting across the road and up the bank in-front-of four cycles and two cars just out of Bell 2. The Northway Inn at Dease Lake stayed open late to accommodate the pack of hungry and thirsty rallyists and staff at Mile 1151. Close competition over the first two days showed Car 1 in First Overall; Car 5, Frank McKinnon and John Putnam, up from Oregon in a Mustang holding a very close second, and Third Overall, Ned Marandino, from Watsonville CA on a BMW F650GS Dakar.

Day Three began with an optional 140-mile trip to Telegraph Creek. Along the route, roads varied from casual rolling hills and long easy sweeping corners to 20% drops into canyons with tight hairpins, and the occasional opposing big-rig! The village of Telegraph Creek has been a trading and freight outpost since 1860 and the Cassiar Gold Rush (1872), 20-odd years before the Klondike Rush (1896 in Dawson). This is the last point on navigable water on the Stikine River upstream from Wrangell AK, and was a key supply point for men and materials bound for Watson Lake in building the Alcan Highway in 1942. Telegraph Creek teams were exempt from the TSD when they returned to Dease Lake, and began the 394-mile transit to Whitehorse knowing they'd tied the best TSD score for the day, a 2, by Car 1, followed by a 3 (including 2 zeros) from Daniel Petterson from Ludington MI on a Kawasaki KLR650. Sights along the Cassiar included jade and turquoise lakes, slow flowing rivers beckoning a fly-fisher, and magnificent mountains on all sides. Joining the Alcan Highway, the route crossed the BC-Yukon border three times, and the Continental Divide at about 3688ft elevation – only a modest height compared to our lower-48 mountain passes. Whitehorse's Yukon Inn, Mile 1694 would be our home for two nights.

Day Four brought more options: #1 – North Canol overnight for the cycles and 3 support staff vehicles. “Canol” is short for Canadian Oil. The road and the pipeline were built during WW2 between wells in the North West Territories and refineries in Whitehorse. The road is maintained by the Yukon, abandoned by NWT. The option included 365 miles to the NWT, camping and spaghetti feed set up by Joe and Shirley Gardner, and 504 miles on Day Five to Dawson; #2 – South Canol Loop, 462 miles, comprised of east and north to Ross River, then west and south, returning to Whitehorse; #3 – A 220-mile tour to Skagway, chosen by about half the teams and several staff. 1 through 3 got “no-penalty” and Option #4 took a small penalty for playing tourist in Whitehorse. Those who went to Skagway, joined four cruise-ships of tourists. The route parallels the White Pass and Yukon Railroad and an alternate to the famed Chilcoot Trail to the gold fields of the Yukon. Midway to Skagway, Carcross is home to a mini-desert with sand dunes. Dropping into Skagway, the “Welcome to Alaska” sign was obscured by cold dense fog. Skagway was cloaked by low clouds, but the tourists were unruffled. We became a small local attraction as teams walked around with our Alcan5000 caps. People would come up and ask how the rally was going and that they “didn't know it was coming to Skagway this year”. Bizarre.

Day Five began with 7 of the cars and 9 of the bikes leaving Whitehorse for Dawson City via Long Lake TSD. This would be a relatively short 343-mile day. The Morris finally caught up with the rally under tow, but would spend two more days re-powering their car from local parts, compliments of the only Morris owner in the Yukon. Our Georgia/South Carolina entry elected to do South Canol on the way to Dawson, with one staff car attending. Their long day included a cold dip in a clear lake along the way. The rest of the field broke camp on the North Canol, and headed for Dawson.

As you can see, this begins the YMMV of Alcan'06. Unofficial mileage to Whitehorse was 1695, including Telegraph Creek. North Canol added 868 before Dawson, South Canol added 462, and Skagway added 220. So, unofficially the direct

no-option route logged in at 1818, most had covered around 2250, and the high mileage folks right at 2563... your mileage may vary.

Dawson City was another two-night stay. Arriving late afternoon, most teams had time to tour the town and settle in at the Sluice Box Bar in the headquarters El Dorado Hotel. Stories and photos of the “overnight” kept everyone entertained. One rider fell while parked, breaking a collarbone, but continued riding to the next regroup! One cycle had a run-in with a big-rig, with no damage. One sweep truck parked “slightly off” the road. One wolf, and a few grizzlies.

Day Six saw only four teams elect the Midnight Dome TSD for a relaxing 10.5-mile day and a chance to take-in Dawson “Discovery Days” with a downtown parade and salmon bake. The remaining crews chose the 560-mile loop to the Arctic Circle on the Dempster Highway. Several staff did survey and rough measurements for future routes through the gold fields area south of Dawson. Lest you think only the cars get low scores, Day 6 was led by Roger Toevs from Paso Robles CA on a BMW R1150GS Adventure -- SOP.

Day Seven brought the warning “don't miss the ferry”. Crossing the Yukon River from Dawson, the Top of the World TSD began less than a mile from the hotel, passed six checkpoints in 9 miles. Dave Jordan from Cordova TN riding a BMW R1200GS Adventure, led the pack on the TSD with only 10 points, including a streak of 4 zeros. Competition was tight on this section, starting on a climb out of the river – Car 9 took 11, Car 1 and Car 5 continued their “battle” tied with 12. The rally then transited 56 miles along the Yukon's paved Top of the World Highway to Alaska, USA, and gravel. Along the way, with sunrise trying to break through the overcast, scenes of mountain peaks stretched 360-degrees, with no signs of civilization beyond an occasional dirt track off the highway, and the one or two oncoming vehicles. 50-odd miles west of Dawson, rounding a long sweeping curve on a ridge line, we'd been told to watch for rock formations called Castle Rocks by the locals – very spectacular and aptly named, there were several formations silhouetted against the blue sky.

Poker Creek AK, population 2, took an amused stance as the entire rally, staff and competitors, presented a steady stream of cars, bikes, vans, and pickups with Alcan5000 signage. Alaska's dirt road presented spectacular scenery and surprises as we would meet full-sized tour coaches at speed in the occasional hairpin. Our Alcan radios were put to good use again, relaying the positions of oncoming buses. Our route dropped steadily, from 4500 feet overlooking the Poker Creek Customs, to 2000 feet, into the Forty Mile River drainage. At Walker Fork Campground we climbed again, into dense fog, and with a few hairpins reached mile 3177 and beautiful “downtown Chicken AK”, temperature 34-degrees. Two miles later we returned to pavement for the 74-mile run to Fast Eddy's in Tok AK, for lunch and a regroup before the 13-mile Tok TSD. One cycle missed an instruction, and three checkpoints, prompting a search of the area before word came that the rider just hit the highway and headed for Fairbanks. The cars made a come-back in the rainy TSD. Car 1 leading by only 8 seconds over Neil Nash and Dave Porter from Scottsdale AZ in a Jeep Grand Cherokee.

Mile 3363 brought the rally to Delta Junction, one of the claimants to “End of the Alcan Highway”, the other being Fairbanks, some 100 miles further along, on what is also known as the Richardson Highway. Rain was now nearing epic volumes...

At the headquarters hotel in Fairbanks the short mileage was around 2219 and the long around 3512. The main attraction was the in-bar computer, tuned to Alaska DOT and the Weather Channel sites. Rains had washed out several sections of the Parks Highway, connecting Fairbanks and Anchorage, and the Denali Highway between Parks and Richardson Highways -- our route for Day Eight, with an available stop at McKinley Visitors Center and expected views of the big mountain before heading east 135 miles to Paxson and south to Glenallen and Valdez. Nothing but more rain was forecast and no hope for opening in time for our planned Monday. Time to punt!

Day Eight opened with the 11-mile Chena Ridge TSD where a new section leader emerged. McKinnon/Putnam put the Mustang into first with only 4 points, while Nash/Porter took 5. At the end of the TSD, an emergency route change read: *“Proceed east on the freeway to Delta Junction and south to Paxson, for a look at the Denali, or continue south to Glenallen”*. So, in a pouring rain everyone retraced the previous afternoon's wet gray run to Delta Junction. Not as much traffic as a weekend, but the moose don't care! South from Delta Junction the route paralleled the Alaska Pipeline and provided several photo-ops. Approaching Summit Lake, in the worst of the rain, dark figures appeared in the road – not cycles, more moose! At Paxson the staff's cycle support van kept a log of who went into the mountains and who headed south. Several bikes went as far as the washout and took photos; several others turned around at half their fuel range, before returning to pavement and south to Glenallen and sunshine and warmth.

The Valdez option, south of Glenallen should be required for all. The weather was clear and warm (even at Worthington Glacier) and the scenery was awesome. Standing on a rock outcropping at Thompson Pass, looking down maybe 2000 feet to the highway, is a rush. Valdez was spectacular, with several groups of competitors and staff walking the waterfront, taking pictures of the marina with snow-capped peaks as a backdrop, checking out the salmon derby, and having dinner at a great little restaurant. The return to Glenallen featured sunset lit mountains and “required” a stop for photos of Mount Wrangell in shades of pink and orange. Quoting Doug Martin in car 9: *“Post Card shot. Oh, another Post Card shot. Yeah, another one...”* on and on. And we all agreed. In fact I've seen that poster on sale in Seattle.

Day Nine began cold and clear, west from the Caribou Lodge parking lot on the 14.7-mile Talsona Creek TSD before a 134-mile transit to Palmer. Along the way, the weather deteriorated, blocking some glacier views, but not the view of the rivers that just kept rising. Hatcher Pass TSD north of Palmer was saved, according to Anchorage newspapers, by an alert Parks employee who noticed the erosion on the paved hill climb along Little Susitna River. A call to the highways department started reinforcement with truckloads of rock. Our planned Hatcher Pass route had to be detoured however, since the gravel road west of the summit had washed away. The McKinnon/Putnam Mustang took only 8 points over 8 checkpoints to lead the two-TSD day. Jim Robertson on the

Dakar led all the cycles and all but one car taking second place, only 2 seconds back.

The rally was regrouped in the rain at Gold Mint Trail Head and a new transit written for the 62 miles into Anchorage. As cold as all the riders were, Anchorage wouldn't come soon enough. Total event mileage at Anchorage -- approximately 2684 to 4217, before heading home. Your mileage may vary...

Dinner and Awards (and an occasional roast) were held at the Sourdough Mining Company; shuttle provided from the hotel, complete with a six-gun totin' "sourdough" driver. **Winner** of the 2006 Alcan5000 was the first car on the road, the Subaru Outback team of *Revere Jones, Brian Deno, and Tom Gould*. Winner of the **Unlimited Cycles** (3rd Overall) was *Jim Robertson* on a BMW F650GS Dakar, from Aptos CA. **First Cycle2** (5th Overall) was *Dean Scheel* on the sweet Suzuki DL-1000 V-Strom. **First SOP** (6th Overall) was *Doug Martin* with son *Brantley*, and navigator *Will Amthor*, in another Subaru Outback. **First SUV** (9th Overall) to *Phil Stonich, John Stonich, and Michelle Henrie* in a GMC Envoy. **First Cycle1** (10th Overall) to *Jay Ritchie* from Starkville MS. **Team Award** went to Cars 1, 2, and 9: *Team Impromptu Subaru*. The **Ironman** award was shared by 13 entries that went to every option and collected the most miles.

Entry for the next running, February's Alcan Winter Rally 2008, opened unofficially at the end of this year's event, as does planning... Several cyclists have teamed up as four-wheeler entries – game on!

Full results, photos and links, archives on previous events, and more stories can be found at www.alcan5000.com For more rally stories, search links, and schedules, see www.tsdroadrally.com