



COMPETITORS Subaru of every stripe excelled in the Alcan rally.



SWAYING THE OUTCOME The X3 responded with precision and thrilled us.



LIKE CURLING TSD rallying makes peculiar demands, offers arcane charms.

MARATHON

Three Zero

winning the **Alcan Winter Rally** pushes the BMW X3

WALD AHRENS PHOTOGRAPHY BY GUNNAR CONRAD

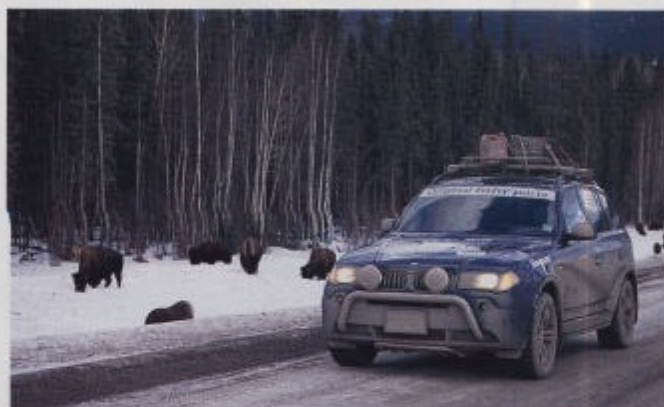
Heroes

to the limit and helps us to find c





ON THE CLOCK Flats, more than a mere common nuisance, could cost points.



ALASKA HIGHWAY HABITUÉS included bison, mountain goats, and moose.

My horoscope said, "Spend some time alone to think things over." Instead, I was sharing 167.1 cubic feet of space for nine days and 4665 miles with a bear and a weasel. The bear was Gary Webb, one of America's finest time-speed-distance (TSD) rally drivers, and the weasel was Peter Schneider, a navigator without peer. Instead of driving their own car, they had landed a ride in one of three factory-backed BMW entries in the Alcan Winter Rally. The catch? They had to bring me. I was the skunk.

Even before we met, I had raised a stink with Schneider about driving the competitive segments myself. My predesignated role had been to grind out the long highway transits between segments; as a sop, I would be allowed half the attempts during three ice races, and although no one said it, mine were expected to be flops. After all, Webb had competed for fifteen years in SCCA ProRally, had done twelve years on Maine's frozen lakes, and even owned a winter driving school. As for my accomplishments, call me the Dennis Kucinich of motorsports campaigns.

These two men, each with thirty years' rallying experience, meant to win the Winter Alcan and would not countenance my sinking their chances. It was pointed out in the initial drivers' meeting that journalists have a less than distinguished record in this event, which was being contested for the seventh time since 1988. While we loaded the BMW X3 3.0i, I gave some thought to shuttling back to the airport for a home-bound flight. Why pursue this folly deep into the Canadian Arctic?

But a slow change began taking effect as soon as we rolled away at 8:00 a.m. on February 18, a warm, wet morning. We left Seattle and cruised north for the first TSD, "Paradise Road," marked out over easy Puget Sound Basin farmland. Once we had entered the section, Schneider worked his box, an Alfa rally computer, while Webb watched the null, or target speed, on his display and minutely adjusted the X3's pace, staying almost perfectly on the rally master's zero and picking up just one penalty point for missing a checkpoint by a second. This little prelude deceived me into thinking every TSD would be so easy.

PHOTOS: RONALD SHERMAN



ESSENTIAL ALASKA Stunning views of mountain ranges on the Parks Highway between Fairbanks and Anchorage fulfill expectations of the Last Frontier.



LIT SLALOM The Big Lake ice shimmers under low-angle, boreal rays as a BMW 325ix cooks along. In this winter rally, every discipline must be mastered.

Afterward, we crossed the Canadian border into British Columbia. Now lace curtains hung in the windows of houses, and the road signs included French instructions. Relaxing during the highway ride, Schneider tried explaining the techniques of navigation, and I recalled the observation made by Satch Carlson—editor of the BMW Car Club of America's *Roundel* magazine and the TSD driver in Car 3, the second X3—who had quipped, "TSD rallying is like curling. The only people who care are those who do it."

What it came down to was an algebraic ratio of the null to the

