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No Espresso in Tuktoyaktuk

RALLYISTS HEAD NORTH FOR FUN AND ADVENTURE IN THE ALCAN 5000 BY JIM ELDER

THE ALCAN 5000 WINTER RALLY is billed as "The World's Longest, Coldest Winter Rally." At 10 days and 4,710 miles, the 2008 running to Tuktoyaktuk, 315 miles north of the Arctic Circle in Canada's Northwest Territories, was not the coldest in the event's history; the low of -17 degrees Fahrenheit was about 40 degrees warmer than usual. Nor was it the longest, ending this year in Jasper, Alberta, rather than the traditional end point of Anchorage, Alaska.

But it did attract the most entrants. Twenty-four teams left Kirkland, Wash., on Feb. 17. Drivers, co-drivers and navigators came from eight states, three Canadian provinces and Britain. Entrants included a record 17 women, who, along with the men, drove long, hard transits and ice-racing events and some time-speed-distance (TSD) stages. There were husband-wife, father-son and father-daughter teams. A third of the 24 teams have already signed up for the 2012 rally.

Vehicle choices were diverse, but all-wheel drive was a common trait. Subaru, as usual, dominated, with 11 entries. There were two BMW 325xi's and two X5s, two Mitsubishi Outlanders, one Dodge Ram and one Chevy pickup, an Audi 80 Quattro, a Volkswagen Passat W8, a rented GMC Envoy, a 1985 Saab 900T and an '08 Honda CR-V.

A rented Envoy? Yes, but don't tell the rental company. Rentals have been entered in the past, once taking second place overall. But with the possibility of a stealth GPS



The Alcan 5000-winning Subaru, left, successfully negotiated several snowbanks along the 2008 route.

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in the Envoy, the team had to honor the "No Northwest Territories" restriction and forgo the runs to Inuvik and on the frozen Mackenzie River to Tuktoyaktuk.

The Alcan 5000 Rally, which began in 1984, runs every two years, with alternating summer and winter events. Routes have included the Alcan and Cassiar roads and turnaround points such as Prudhoe/Deadhorse in Alaska and Yellowknife and Tuktoyaktuk in the Northwest Territories.

Tuk has become a favorite run because it

features a 240-mile round trip on the frozen Mackenzie River, from the road end at Inuvik to the Arctic Ocean. The ice road is plowed, but finger drifts can make for excitement at high speeds. So can cracks that in the past have blown tires and broken alloy wheels. Ice racing consists of solo timed runs on Grand Prix-like courses plowed out on frozen lakes. Each team gets two runs for each driver, so there are four chances for success or humility. TSD stages and transits present winter-driving challenges.

The Webb/Hightower/Kraushaar team took first overall, driving a Subaru Impreza 2.5 RS, and the team won the vote for most spectacular ice-race recovery.

The 2008 event was Gary Webb's third Alcan win. After 10 days, nearly 5,000 miles and at least \$8,000 in prep, entry fees, fuel and food, Webb's team won a glass cup. And he's planning to defend his title.

A warning to adventure seekers: The last coffee shop going north is in Inuvik. ☕