



## “THEY DIDN’T GIVE US MUCH OF A CHANCE,” SAYS RUSS KRAUSHAAR, “WHEN THEY SAW THE AUTOMATICS.”

The Alaska Highway – commonly called the AlCan – has come a long way from its muddy beginnings; it was carved through the wilderness in eight months during 1942

could draw on the talents of driver Gary Webb and navigator Peter Schneider, while *Bimmer's* Mike Miller had Paul Duchene and Katy Wood and, as *Roundel's* crew chief, I had Henry Joy behind the wheel and Russ Kraushaar at the navigator's station.

Even with experienced crews, however, the scribes would have no casual stroll up the AlCan Highway. Besides precision “regularity” sections in which the teams had to stay exactly on time for any number of miles, despite the conditions, there were several ice-racing sections that called for multiple runs by two drivers from each team. It was the first of these ice races that proved the agility of the X3's innovative xDrive system when the X3s – all equipped with STEPTRONIC automatic transmissions – stayed within fractions of the specially equipped manual-transmission Subarus that had been favored from the start.

**If onlookers were surprised at the performance of the BMWs on the ice,** they must have been dumbfounded after two full days of rallying, because it was on the frozen up-and-down logging roads of British Columbia that the X3s moved into a confident lead. From there the *Automobile* and *Roundel* crews swapped the lead back and forth with never more than a few seconds between their scores, while the *Bimmer* team fought their way forward from seventh place among the Subarus.

But the *Bimmer* crew became the heroes of the BMW effort in Dawson City, at the foot of the long, frozen road to the Arctic Ocean. In a show of true sportsmanship and team solidarity, they sacrificed a lower control arm to replace one damaged during an ice-racing off-track excursion on the *Roundel* car, keeping the leading two cars in the one-two position as they trekked up the Mackenzie River – across 120 miles of river and ocean ice – to the remote village of Tukoyaktuk in Canada's Northwest Territories.

From that remote, forbiddingly beautiful edge of the world, the remaining X3s rolled down the Dempster Highway, the Klondike, and across the AlCan to Fairbanks, Alaska, and finally to Anchorage for a well-earned break. The awards banquet confirmed the victory: the *Automobile* team in first, the *Roundel* crew right behind them, and the Sportsmanship Award going to the *Bimmer* team who had assured the BMW sweep. “It was especially sweet that we had these bone-stock unmodified X3s,” said Russ Kraushaar. “The Subaru teams had been preparing for months, and they didn't give us much of a chance when they saw the automatics.”

Their chagrined opponents will be really dismayed if the X3s show up next time with six-speed manual transmissions and special rally preparation. And if they really need an unfair advantage, they can always bring  more journalists.



# RTH STORY



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The sun hangs cold in the eerie winter twilight near the village of Tuktoyaktuk, on the edge of the Arctic Ocean





Text: Satch Carlson Photos: Henry Joy/Gunnar

**Nine days on the road.** Nearly 5,000 miles of daunting driving, over surfaces ranging from dry tarmac to fresh-fallen snow to frozen river ice. The AlCan 5000 Winter Rally would take three new BMW X3s from the balmy Starbucks luxury of the Pacific Northwest to the frozen salt edge of the Arctic Ocean, where Fahrenheit meets Centigrade at 40 below zero. For their first competitive outing against more than a dozen well-equipped, experienced competitors, BMW might easily have hand-built a "one-off" racing prototype, a carefully assembled rally special, and staffed it with professional drivers. Instead, they grabbed three cars

from the press fleet, installed brush bars, auxiliary lights, and minimal underbody protection. They mounted studded Hakkepeliitta snow tires on stock wheels.

Then they turned them over to *journalists*.

That's right: Taking a page from the George Plimpton handbook, BMW of North America handed the keys to *Automobile Magazine*, *Bimmer Magazine*, and *Roundel*, the magazine of the BMW Car Clubs of America. But these journos weren't tossed out on the ice floes to flounder; BMW also recruited some of the ablest rallyists in America to bolster the three crews. So *Automobile's* Ronald Ahrens

