

2006 Alcan5000: Your mileage may vary



This isn't a road hazard you'll see on a typical Washington highway. Alaska moose scatter for Alcan rallyists.

STORY AND PHOTOS

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SOMEWHERE BETWEEN KIRKLAND AND ANCHORAGE — Rainier Auto Sports Club and rallymaster Jerry Hines presented the 2006 Alcan5000 Rally. Quoting Hines, "The official route is 4,400 miles but could be as short as 3,200 or as long as 5,000." 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.

Day One began with nine cars, 22 dual-sport motorcycles, and eight full-time staff vehicles hitting the freeway for a long odo calculation run, north toward the Canadian border. First on the

road were Revere Jones (Altadena, Calif.), Brian Deno (Arden, N.C.) and Tom Gould (Manhattan Beach, Calif.). All three are rally veterans, with Revere on his fourth Alcan.

Second on the road were the Novice team of Jasper Long and Brian Burk up from Portland, Ore., 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, N.M., in a restored 1960 Morris Minor. Their rally was cut short by a head gasket in Hope (ironic, don't you think?), B.C., a second head gasket in Watson Lake, 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, joining in the fun were iron butt candidates from all corners of the country: Florida, Vermont,

New Hampshire, New York, 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. 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 north of Williams Lake. The Soda Creek TSD followed the plateau above the Fraser River, and dropped into hayfields 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. By Day Four, the rider was ready to take on rest of the rally.



Car I joined about half the Alcan entrants in a 220-mile detour to Skagway on Day Four.

Day Two began as Mile 483, 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 claimed our second bike, to an oil leak. Colin Stenhouse (North Vancouver, B.C.) would continue as an addition to the Range Rover team of Robert Lee and Bill Savage, up from New Mexico.

Some 175 miles north of Fraser Lake, Kispiox Valley TSD was the third timed section of the day at 'Ksan Village. The 47-mile TSD began on pavement but 9 miles in, turned to gravel. A "critical left turn" at mile 869.958, onto Mitten Forest Service Road, was overlooked by one cycle. RASC's radio net relayed map info and verified "last point seen," while one of the staff vehicles explored possible off-course choices, finding the rider. 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.

Wildlife included a wolf, several black bear, including twin cubs, and one adult black bear sprinting across the road 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 1,151.

Day Three began with an optional 140-mile trip to Telegraph Creek. The route included 20-percent drops into canyons with tight hairpins, and the occasional opposing big-rig! The village of Telegraph Creek has been a trading post since before the Cassiar Gold Rush (1872), and 20-odd years before the Klondike Rush in Dawson. This was a key supply point for the Alcan Highway in 1942. Telegraph Creek teams returned to Dease Lake, and began the 394-mile transit to Whitehorse's Yukon Inn, Mile 1,694, our home for two nights.

Day Four brought more options: No. 1, North Canol overnight for the cycles

and 3 support staff vehicles. "Canol" is short for Canadian Oil, the pipeline built during World War II between the Northwest Territories and Whitehorse. The option included camping and a spaghetti feed and Day Five to Dawson. No. 2, South Canol Loop, returning to Whitehorse. No. 3, a 220-mile tour to Skagway, chosen by about half the teams and several staff. Option no. 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. 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.

Day Five began with seven of the cars and nine of the bikes leaving Whitehorse for Dawson City via Long Lake

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Telegraph Creek offered lots of exposure to go with the curves.



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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 1,695, 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 1,818; the high mileage folks right at 2,563. 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.

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." The remaining crews chose the 560-mile loop to the Arctic Circle on the Dempster Highway.

Day Seven brought the warning "Don't miss the ferry" crossing the Yukon River. Top of the World TSD began less than a mile from the hotel, passed six checkpoints in 9 miles and transited 56 miles along the Yukon's paved Top of the World Highway to Alaska, USA and gravel.

Poker Creek, Alaska, population two, took an amused stance as the rally 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 4,500 feet to 2,000 feet, then climbed again, into dense fog, and with a few hairpins reached mile 3,177 and beautiful "downtown Chicken, Alaska," temperature 34 degrees. Two miles later we returned to pavement for the 74-mile run to 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. Rain was now nearing epic volumes.

At the headquarters hotel in Fairbanks, 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 — our route for Day Eight. Time to punt!

Day Eight opened with the 11-mile Chena Ridge TSD, followed by an emergency route change: "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. Approaching Summit Lake, in the worst of the rain, dark figures appeared in the road — not cycles, more moose! At Paxson several bikes went as far as the washout and took photos; before returning to pavement and south to Glenallen



Wrangell-St. Elias glowed in the Alaskan summer sunset.

and sunshine and warmth.

The Valdez option should be required for all. The weather was clear and warm (even at Worthington Glacier) and the scenery was awesome. 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 Mount Wrangell in shades of pink and orange. 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. 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 long Hatcher Pass route had to be detoured however, since the gravel road west of the summit had washed away.

The rally was regrouped at Gold Mint Trailhead and a new transit written for 62 miles into Anchorage. As cold as all the riders were, Anchorage wouldn't come soon enough. Total mileage to Anchorage: 2,684 to 4,217, before heading home. Your mileage may vary.

Dinner and awards (and an occasional roast) were held at the Sourdough Mining Co.; shuttle provided from the hotel, complete with a six-gun totin' "sourdough" driver. Winner of the 2006 Alcan5000 was the Subaru Outback team of Revere Jones, Brian Deno and Tom Gould. Winner of the Unlimited Cycles (third overall) was Jim Robertson on a BMW F650GS Dakar, from

Aptos, Calif. First Cycle2 (fifth overall) was Dean Scheel on the sweet Suzuki DL-1000 V-Strom. First SOP (sixth overall) was Doug Martin with son Brantley, and navigator Will Amthor, in another Subaru Outback. First SUV (ninth overall) to Phil Stonich, John Stonich and Michelle Henrie in a GMC Envoy. First Cycle1 (10th overall) to Jay Ritchie from Starkville, Miss. First Team went to Cars 1, 2 and 9 as Impromptu Subaru. Ironman was shared by 13 who completed all the options and collected the most miles.

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.