

# Alcan Winter Rally

**F**or sports car enthusiasts, the Mille Miglia is the Holy Grail of events. For guys who think that 40 degrees below is balmy, and a four-wheel drift at 80 mph on a slick mountain road is just part of an everyday drive, the Alcan Winter Rally is where they'd like to be.

Weather is your friend, and weather is your enemy on the Alcan. Two weeks before the 2004 Winter Rally, temperatures in the Yukon hit minus 54 degrees Fahrenheit, while Fairbanks, AK, hovered around minus 36. But by the time the Feb. 18 start date rolled around and 16 cars left suburban Seattle, WA, the jet stream had pushed into the northern reaches of British Columbia, driving the temperature up to 47 degrees in some areas.

Bound for Anchorage, AK, the rally cars found themselves climbing out of minus 8 degree valleys onto hills that were nearly 40 degrees warmer. The effect was like walking into a ski lodge, as the windshield would fog, then ice over instantly. When that happens, you'd better be good at remembering where the road goes.

For the 16 teams entered, that path would lead a snowy 5,000 miles north, taking them within 1,200 miles of the North Pole. The rally's route was divided into time-speed-distance sections of 10-30 miles, where drivers held exact speeds to arrive at checkpoints on time, and transits between the TSD stages, some as long as 500 miles. As if this wasn't enough, there were three ice races that counted in the final tally.

Entries ranged from a late-1980s Mazda 323 GTX to new BMW X3s, and included



Photo: Paul Duchene

nearly every model of Subaru, two Mitsubishi Lancer Evos, and a Florida-registered Audi S4 towing a two-wheeled trailer driven by the grandson of the Red Baron, Rene Baron von Richthofen. Fourteen of the 16 cars finished, though none without broken windshields.

This was my fifth Arctic rally, though I hope it won't be my last. I'm already craving the intoxicating mixture of the loneliness of the

open arctic roads, the majesty of the scenery, the ruthlessness of the weather and terrain, and the camaraderie of the other similarly afflicted souls who participated.—Paul Duchene

*A special 20th-anniversary running of Jerry Hines' Alcan 5000 for "vintage" vehicles and motorcycles will be held August 18-26, with a June 18 deadline for entries. More information can be found at [www.alcan5000.com](http://www.alcan5000.com).*

