

Roundel

JUNE 2000

TO ALASKA!



Roundel

The Magazine of the BMW Car Club of America, Inc.

Vol. 31 No. 6 June 2000

COVER

*If it's Tuesday,
this must be
Telegraph Creek.*

Photo by Mark
Jon Calabrese



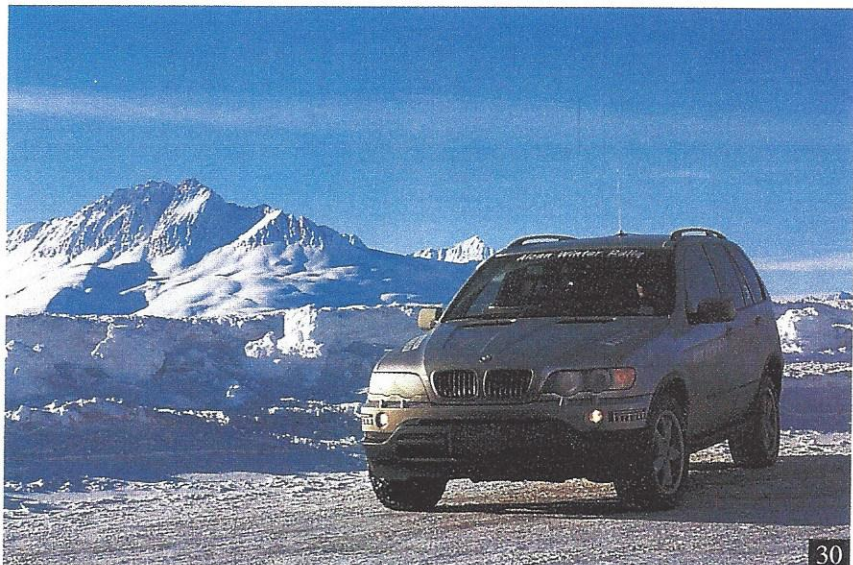
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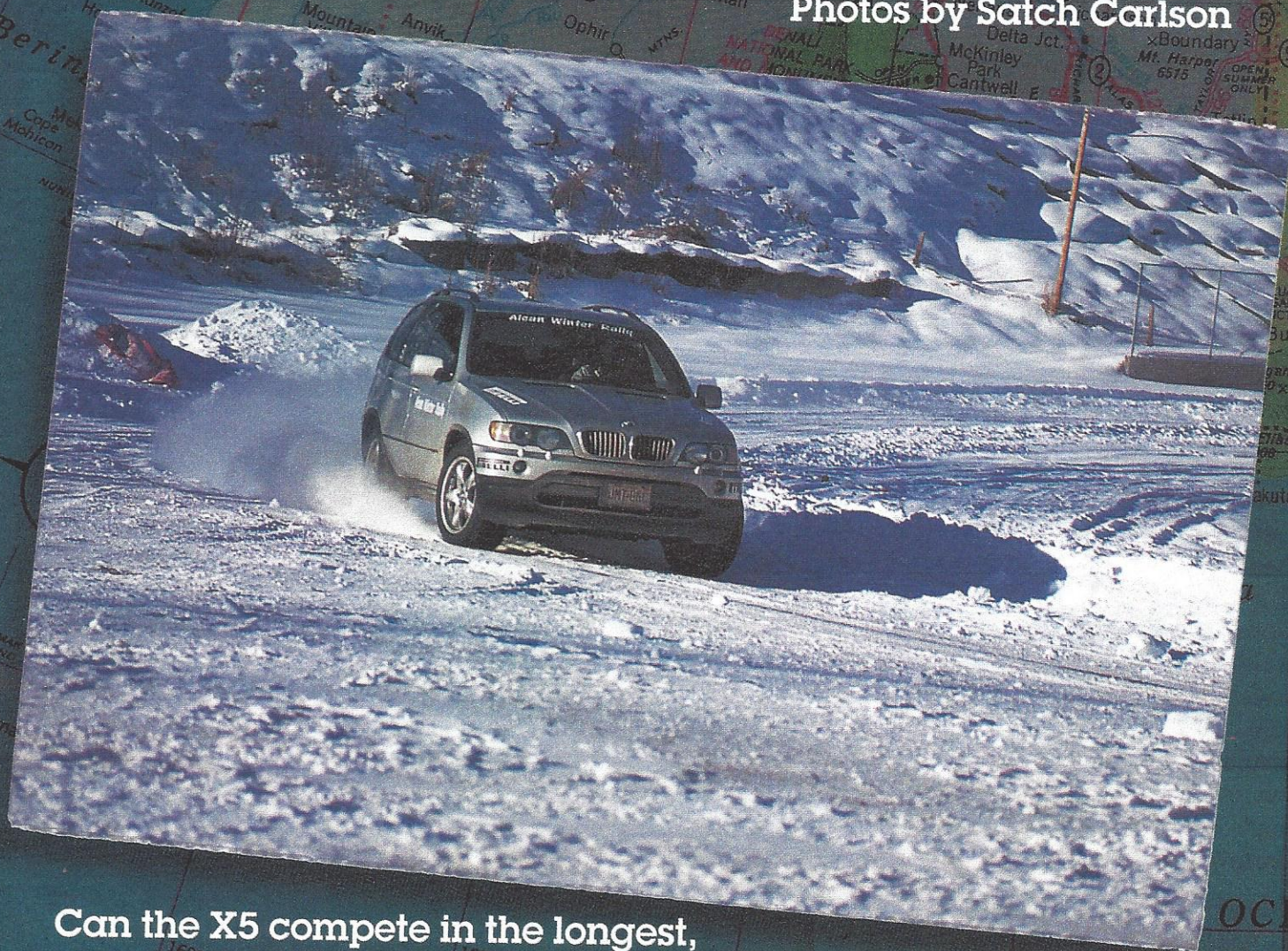
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TESTING THE X5

Alcan Winter Rally

By Bailey Taylor
Photos by Satch Carlson



Can the X5 compete in the longest, northernmost winter rally in the world? You bet.

Prologue: "Hello, Kentucky? This is Satch Carlson. Can Bailey come out and play?"
—message left on my answering machine in early November.

Fortunately, I beat Ann home that day; otherwise she might have deleted it without my knowledge—and then I would have missed out on that wacky and somewhat grueling Alcan Winter Rally, the brainchild of rallymaster Jerry Hines, who has been conducting summer and winter versions of this madness across the Alcan Highway to Alaska since 1984. A typical—if you can call anything like this "typical"—Alcan consists of ten to twelve days of TSD stages, ice autocross, and lo-o-ong transit stages. The 2000 Alcan would cover over 4,500 miles in ten days by taking the hapless participants from Seattle to Fairbanks to Prudhoe Bay and finally back down to Anchorage.

In the middle of February.

Carlson—a past Alcan Winner—had a cunning plan: convince BMW NA to loan us an X5—the first X5 loaned out for such an outrageous purpose—recruit ace driver Russ Huntoon, throw in a journalistic flunky—that would be me—and use the Alcan as a proving ground for the X5's first foray into competition. I had read about this rally for years and gladly volunteered. So in early February, equipped with insulated boots, parka, vest, and gloves, I find myself headed for Seattle.

The first stop is BMW Seattle, a top-drawer establishment owned and operated by Steve Norman, who will run the rally in his own 325iX—the Red Dog. There our X5 receives final competition preparation—which, since NA has forbidden any drilling, cutting, or welding anything to their pride and joy, consists of mounting four 18" studded Pirelli Scorpion S/Ts in place of the 19" sport-package tires; installing the rally computer as well as the required short-wave radio; and sticking my trusty Valentine One Radar Warning Receiver to the windshield. Oh, and there is the Secret Weapon: Huntoon, skeptical of the DSC, CBC, ABS, etc., pulls the 50-amp fuse which controls all the Bavarian acronyms.

Thus equipped, we head for the Alcan HQ motel for "orientation," where we learn not to spill gasoline on bare hands at sub-zero temperatures. We are also warned that suicidal truckers will tailgate rally cars at over 80 mph, and that you will be seriously killed if you hit one of the several million moose populating the northern latitudes. Each team is assigned one or two "buddy" teams; we team with Steve Norman and navigator Gary Reid in the Red Dog, as well as R. Dale Kraushaar, Larry Richardson, and Paul Eklund in a Subaru Impreza RS 2.5. Kraushaar's car is a privateer, but Subaru, Isuzu, and Chinook—yes, as in motor homes—have fielded serious factory teams. One Isuzu—a Rodeo equipped with throaty exhaust, lumpy idle, and remote-adjustable anti-roll bars and shocks—is manned by no less than Paul Dallenbach, Johnny Unser, and Tom Grimshaw.

Subaru has a four-car team, including Antonio Pirelli—guess what tires they're running?—and all are nattily attired in bright yellow team jackets, pants, and hats. Team Chinook has entered two 4WD Baja RVs replete with coil-over Bilsteins and laser-cut skidplates. Then there is a gaggle of privateers, including Ken and Donna Boyce—Alcan Summer veterans—who drove their Jeep Cherokee all the way from North Carolina—on unstudded tires, no less. Once we load the X5 with serious Road Food—Pepsi, Fritos, and Hershey Bars—our trusty SAV is as ready as it will ever be.



Day One: Seattle to Quesnel, BC, 540 miles.

"You guys are crazy."—businessman at the HQ motel observing last-minute rally preparations

Subaru sponsors a fine breakfast buffet, and at 8:30 a.m. the Alcan begins. We are Car #3 and roll away at 8:33 to thunderous applause—no, wait, that's just the heater blower on high. Eighty-five miles into the rally we face our first TSD leg, a section which involves following route instructions (RIs) at various speeds (CASTS) to be maintained during the leg. Hidden along the route are

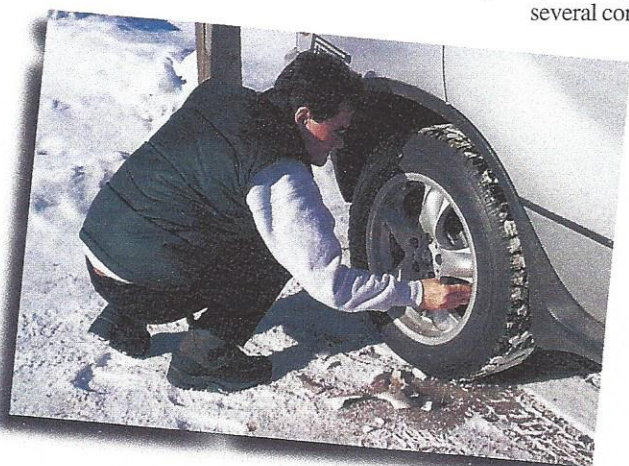
several controls or checkpoints which record the time you pass by; for each

second early or late you are penalized one point. In our quest to zero as many controls as possible, Carlson has installed a new TimeWise 798 rally computer. Built by Rally Guru Jack Christensen, the TimeWise calculates whether you are early or late and displays the info on a dash-mounted readout in front of the driver. There's only one catch: The navigator must enter all necessary data quickly, accurately, and at the proper time. The front faceplate—which looks like the navigation console of the Millennium Falcon—features several LED readouts, a dozen toggle switches, and a couple of knobs. And I'm going to have to learn how to operate it, because Carlson now informs me that he will be leaving the Titanic about halfway through the event, leaving me to navigate for Russ. Fun, fun, fun.

Anyway, our first leg starts out on a rather exhilarating note. We begin with a 34-mph CAST behind a fifteen-mph logging truck. Russ pulls out to pass, sees an ONCOMING logging truck, and ducks back into line. He finally gets around just before the

no-passing line starts on a blind uphill corner. We thank thee, Lord, for our 4.4 liters of Bavarian V8.

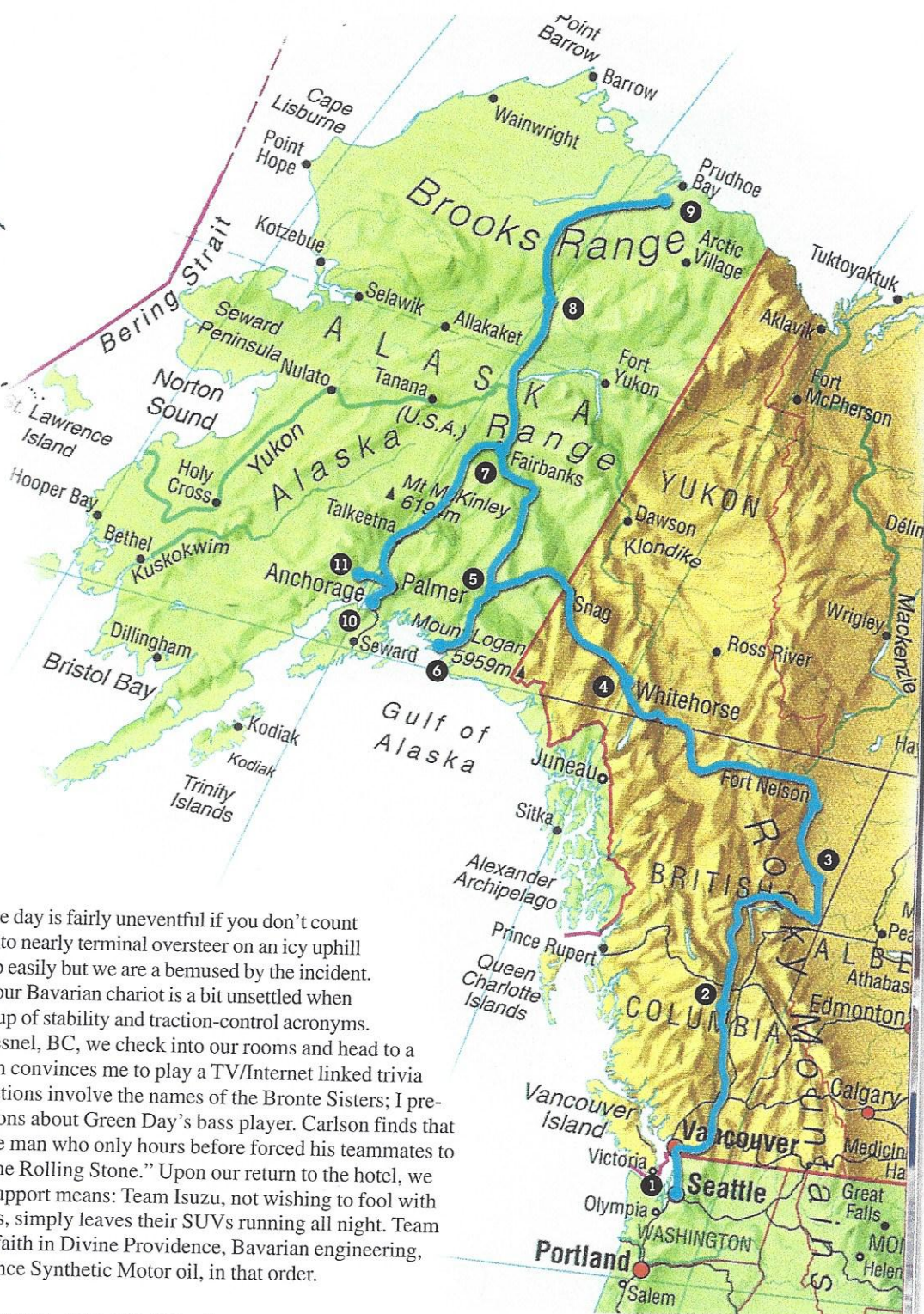
The distances between the various TSDs and ice-autocross sections are known as transit stages. Satch and Russ have a philosophy which I also adopt: "First in peace, first in war, first to the end of the transit." Since the next TSD is over 360 miles down the road, we settle back and enjoy the luxurious trappings of our X5. Carlson quickly commandeers the CD player and serenades us with several Eurythmics and Annie Lennox CDs. Midway through the transit, however, he switches to Dr. Hook and the Medicine Show. That's right: For the next hundred or so miles we get to hear "Sylvia's Mother" and "Sexy Eyes" as well as other modern classics. These angelic melodies are interrupted only by the occasional strident warning of the Valentine One, which saves our bacon several times.



Kentuckian Bailey Taylor adjusts the wheel balance by removing a pound of ice after his first ice autocross.



Alcan Journey



Our final TSD leg of the day is fairly uneventful if you don't count the fact that the X5 goes into nearly terminal oversteer on an icy uphill sweeper. Russ gathers it up easily but we are bemused by the incident. My personal belief is that our Bavarian chariot is a bit unsettled when deprived of its alphabet soup of stability and traction-control acronyms.

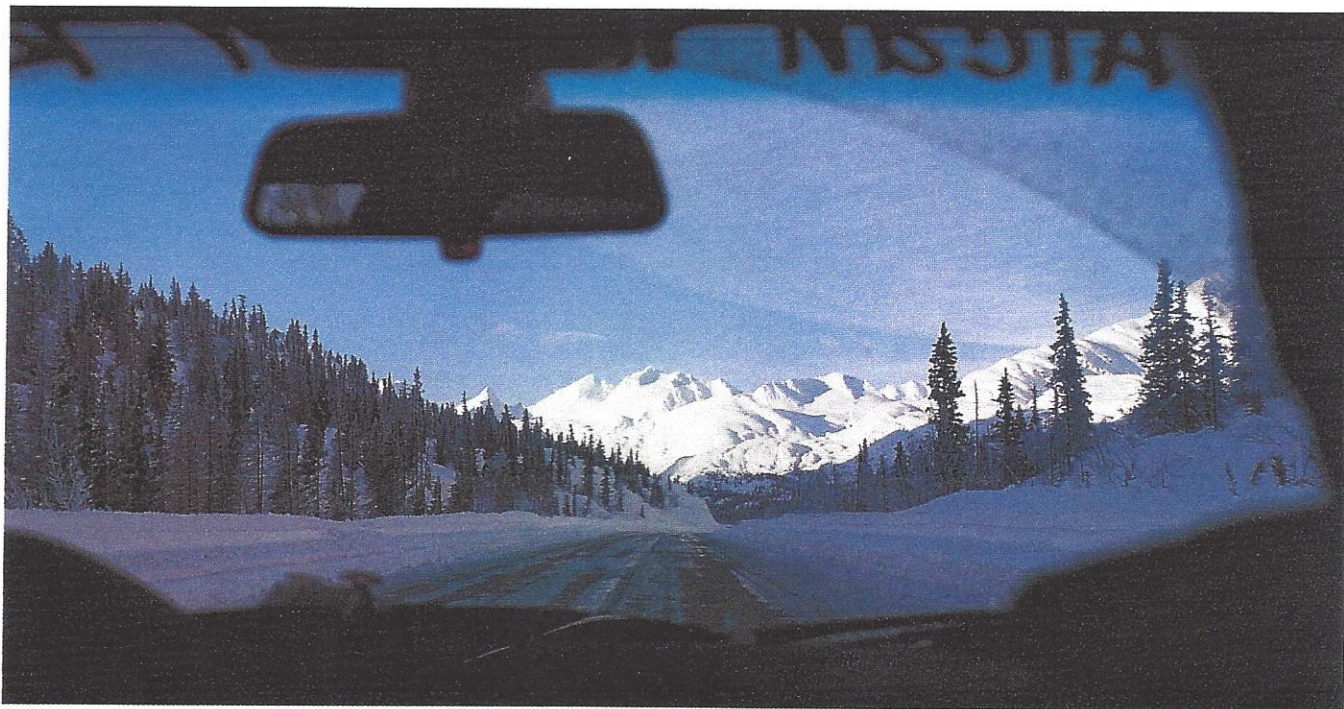
Arriving in scenic Quesnel, BC, we check into our rooms and head to a nearby pub. There Carlson convinces me to play a TV/Internet linked trivia game. He wins when questions involve the names of the Bronte Sisters; I prevail when there are questions about Green Day's bass player. Carlson finds that quite funny—this from the man who only hours before forced his teammates to listen to "The Cover Of The Rolling Stone." Upon our return to the hotel, we see what serious factory support means: Team Isuzu, not wishing to fool with inconvenient block heaters, simply leaves their SUVs running all night. Team X5 chooses to place their faith in Divine Providence, Bavarian engineering, and BMW High Performance Synthetic Motor oil, in that order.

Day Two: Quesnel, BC to Fort St. John, BC, 400 miles.

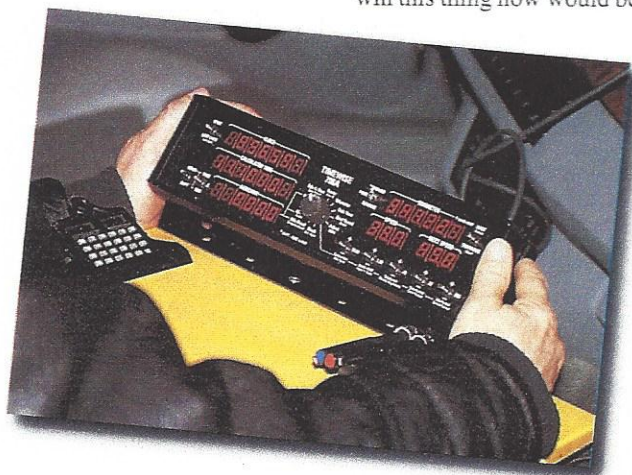
"Start each day with a smile—and get it over with."—John Fouse, driver of the #8 Subaru Outback.

Our first ice autocross is held on the quarter-mile snow-covered oval at Gold Pan Speedway. A large sign on the entrance shack reads, "No shorts or halter tops allowed." Just what kind of speedway is this? We quickly unload our gear and prepare for battle. Russ makes his first run with DSC/ABS disabled. We then reinstall the fuse—and lo and behold, his next run is over a second faster! I go out for the final two runs. On my first, I spend precious time arguing with the DSC, which insists on bringing my tail-happy driving style back into Teutonic line. For run #2 I switch off the DSC with the dash switch, leaving the ABS enabled. I'm now faster and can work up a nice four-wheel-drift. From now on Hans and Fritz can manage the ABS, we'll handle everything else, thank you. But although we all agree that the automatic is a barrier to performance, we're better off than some other teams. Subaru's Gene Henderson, too, has a self-shifting automatic. "First is too low," he says, "and second doesn't have the power to pull a whore out of church."

1. Seattle, WA
2. Quesnel, BC
3. Fort St. John, BC
4. Whitehorse, YT
5. Glenallen, AK
6. Valdez, AK
7. Fairbanks, AK
8. Coldfoot, AK
9. Deadhorse, AK
10. Anchorage, AK
11. Big Lake, AK



Our next TSD is a disaster: the odometer input cable falls out of the back of the TimeWise, and in the heat of battle Carlson enters some spurious data in a frantic attempt to get us back on time. We wind up running a minute late—though the computer assures us we are on time—and max out the leg with 200 points. From now on we will be running just for the fun of it, to see how well the X5 performs in rally conditions, but the pressure is off; the only way we could win this thing now would be for all the other teams to join some weird northern cult and throw themselves into the Yukon River.



Rallyists love the TimeWise because it's very forgiving, thanks to creator and Windy City craftsman Jack Christensen.

I drive the next transit and get to experience the X5 under somewhat sedate conditions. It feels just like a 540, only with a bit more mass and height. The V8 provides immediate and awesome thrust, although the Steptronic auto/manual is way too eager to upshift or refuse downshifts in manual mode. The ride and handling are typical BMW—tight and controlled. Snow and ice begin to cover the roads as we proceed north, and I let the Subaru team lead the way. Then I get the X5 waaay loose on a downhill straight, provoking an exclamation from Carlson which is not suitable for inclusion in a family magazine. I finally gather it up, missing the guardrails on either side by a good ten feet.

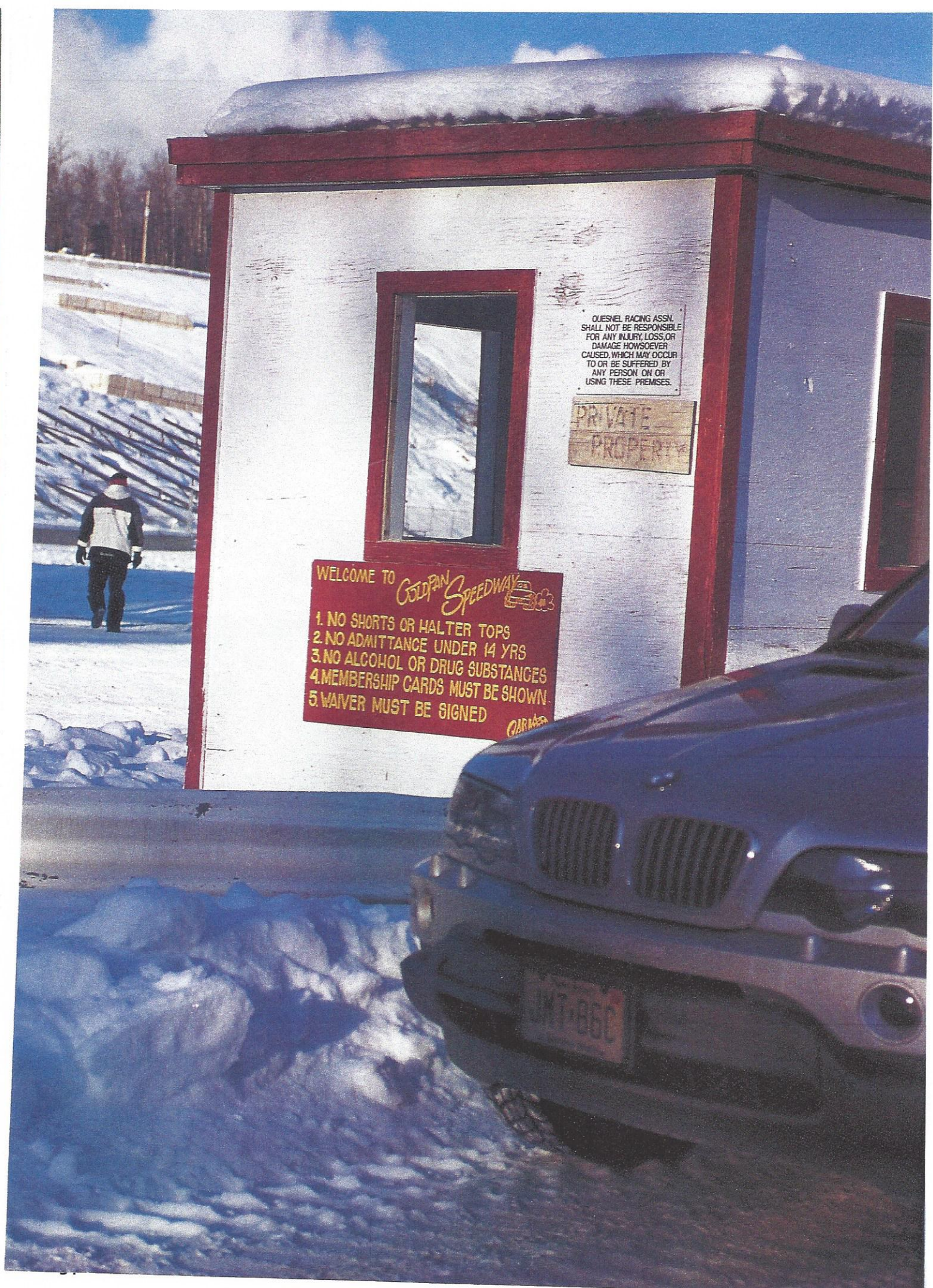
We ace the night's TSD leg—now that the pressure is off, we are consistently near the top on every TSD section—while disaster strikes Steve and Gary in the iX. Well, actually, it was a deer—and the iX did the striking. The deer runs off, leaving all four driving lights shattered and the mounting bar bent into the grille. At a lonely truck stop the ever-resourceful Huntoon finds an itinerant welder asleep in his Dodge Ram who for \$20 pulls the bar back into shape. Team Chinook generously donates two of their own PIAA lights to the Red Dog—installing them at 1:30 a.m. at about 27 below zero—and Team BMW is back in action.

Day Three: Fort St. John, BC to Whitehorse, YT, 830 miles.

"There I was. Alone. On my own against 22 other drivers—and 23 navigators."

—Russ Huntoon during the 7:00 a.m. TSD

We rise at oh-dark-thirty for breakfast and gasoline. (I manage to break the frozen gas cap with a pair of pliers, but we make it work.) After the TSD—another near ace—I practice on the TimeWise during the long transit on the Alaska Highway. When I take over the wheel, Russ



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2. NO ADMITTANCE UNDER 14 YRS
3. NO ALCOHOL OR DRUG SUBSTANCES
4. MEMBERSHIP CARDS MUST BE SHOWN
5. WAIVER MUST BE SIGNED

CARMEN

WVT-860

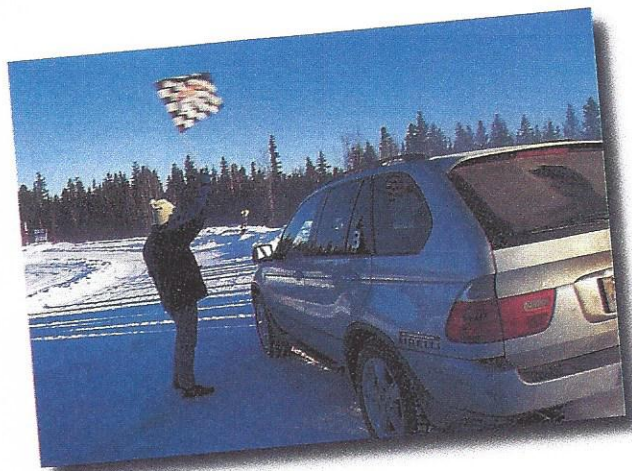
suggests I rest my elbows on the armrests and drive with my fingertips; he thinks the nine-and-three hand position is not the hot set-up on ice. He's right, as usual. Nevertheless, I keep my speeds generally below 75 mph, in the belief that sliding a \$56,000 borrowed SAV off a downhill snow-covered switchback is a Very Bad Career Move. After a photo op at Summit Lake, Russ takes over again, and our average speed jumps by ten mph.

About fifteen miles shy of Whitehorse, our buddies in the Impreza run out of gas. We hook them to our tow strap and pull them to the nearest gas station. So now we know how the X5 performs as a tow vehicle. Not half bad, actually.

Day Four: Whitehorse, YT, to Glenallen, AK, 535 miles.

"I would kill a nun for a six-speed manual."—Carlson lamenting the absence of a certain transmission option

We start the day with a short TSD, then head over to the Yukon River for our second ice autocross. The "slalom" in this case is a road course plowed out on the frozen river—over four miles long. Our first run finds us over twenty seconds behind the leading 2.5 RS, so we decide to waive our other runs and head for Alaska. Russ drives the first leg and we see Very High Numbers on one icy stretch of the Alaska Highway. I take over on the leg to Tok Junction, driving somewhat more cautiously, between 65 and 85, though there is absolutely no traffic. In the face of ice, snow, and frost heaves, the X5 remains steady as a rock; I had heard some whining about the X5's prowess in snow—or lack of prowess—but I'm here to tell you that if you fit it with suitable tires you can go anywhere. At Tok we stop for gas and refill our windshield-washer reservoir. "Good to -40" the bottle says. On the way to Glenallen the new fluid freezes at minus five. If it wasn't a 150-mile trip back to Tok, Russ and I would return the antifreeze container to its vendor in a most uncomfortable fashion.



The first ice autocross was a test of the traction control system.

Day Five: Glenallen to Valdez, Valdez to Fairbanks, 515 miles.

"Relax. The navigator can't win a rally; he can only lose it. And I've already shot this one right in the ass."—Carlson again, as he leaves me to navigate the remainder of the event.

This day begins with back-to-back TSD legs. Carlson is bailing at Valdez today so he watches from the back seat while I run the TimeWise. I complete the section with no obvious screw-ups. The official leg to Valdez is canceled to give everyone a little rest, but we head there anyway to throw Carlson out at the airport. This drive features some of the most breathtaking and awe-inspiring scenery of the entire trip. After ridding ourselves of an editor, Russ and I drive to the Valdez end of Alaska Pipeline Terminal so that we can say we traveled the entire length of the pipeline, and then head for Fairbanks. When a long, empty, dry stretch appears in front of me, I let the X5 have its head, and we cover the next four miles in under two minutes. As we approach Fairbanks the police presence increases, and Steve and Gary get nabbed by Alaska's finest. We are continually grateful for our VI.

Day Six: Fairbanks to Deadhorse, 520 miles.

"Car 3, this is Scoring. You might want to know that there are quite a few police up ahead." —warnings that always seemed to be directed at us. Go figure.

No TSDs today, just a long slog up to the top of the world. The official plan is for everyone to rendezvous at Coldfoot—the approximate halfway point—and continue by caravan to Deadhorse. Russ and I agree that I will drive the convoy legs to allow him to make up time in the "unsupervised" sections. Our trusty mount receives its sole battle scar when a huge snowplow punts a fist-sized rock into the windshield. Luckily the major damage is confined to the area next to the A pillar.

The caravan to Deadhorse is a bit nerve-racking; the completely ice-covered Dalton Highway has a friction coefficient of just above zero. To top it off, the Dalton travels through the heart of the Brooks Mountain Range: the 4,800-foot Atigun Pass. Lots of steep ascents and descents switchback plus a liberal portion of huge tractor trailers known as B Trains. I use the Steptronic to good effect, easily selecting lower gears to keep descent speeds down. I have a bit of a moment when an oncoming truck causes the rally car in front of me to STOP on a steep

downhill section, but ABS and fervent prayer keep the excitement to a minimum. We finally roll into Deadhorse. I am exhausted by the drive.

Our lodging is provided by the world famous Arctic Oilfield Hotel. Think of a huge elevated interconnected trailer park. Our room is a chilly 55 degrees—but it's still 70 degrees above the outside temperature. I sleep in my clothes under three blankets. Russ gives up and goes out to the X5 and sleeps in the idling beast. If I could sleep sitting up I would do the same.

Day 7: Tour of the Kuparuk Oil Field and Return to Fairbanks, 620 miles.

"Car five is off! Car five is off!"—Alberto Pirelli's radio transmission as his Subaru falls victim to a B-Train-induced whiteout

Oil-field manager John Fouse has arranged a special tour of the Kuparuk oil field; we are only the second private group allowed into the area. It is nearly 50 miles from the hotel to the shores of the frozen Arctic Ocean. The landscape is a frigid, bleak wasteland broken only by the functional steel structures which provide housing, service, pumping, and drilling stations. At Oliktok Point we pull up to the edge of the Arctic ocean. Fouse threatens certain bodily harm to anyone who walks out on the frozen ocean; it seems one writer for *Car and Driver* ignored that advice and managed to actually fall into an ice crevasse and got nearly frozen solid.

Poor Russ has finally caught the cold or flu which has afflicted several other rallyists, so he bundles up for the drive back to Coldfoot. (I notice that Russ sleeps a lot when I'm driving. I think it's because he believes that what he doesn't see won't kill him.) A storm begins to blow in as we leave Deadhorse, and we are soon smack in the middle of a Phase One whiteout. A frigid northeast wind blows clouds of drifting snow across the road. The wind has trouble blowing the 4,800-pound X5 around, but it has no trouble blowing icy jets of air out of the power-window control panel on the door armrest. Thankfully, the weather clears up after about fifteen minutes—which only *seems* like fifteen hours. A couple of rally cars do slide off the road, the most exciting "off" occurring when an oncoming oversize truck generates a whiteout which causes one Subie to stop; another one takes to the shoulder to avoid it. Directly in front of us, Car Six barely misses the melee, and we just squeak by as well.

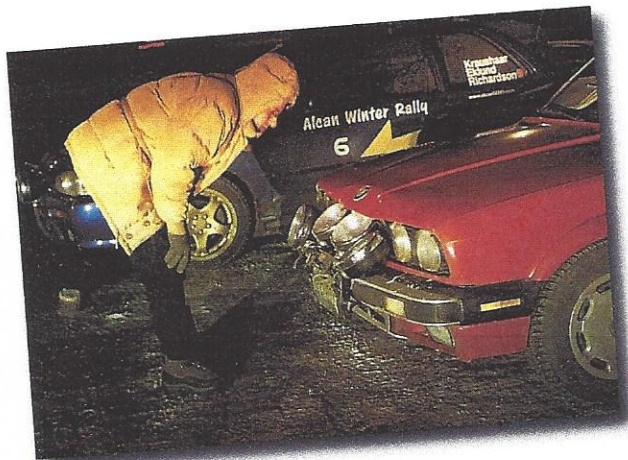
Despite the ice, rest stops, and Atigan pass, we average 48 mph between Deadhorse and Coldfoot, where Russ, having made a partial recovery, takes over the wheel again to Fairbanks. Russ averages 60 mph (of course). We have more excitement when Russ passes a trucker who is well and truly ticked off by the hordes of rally cars buzzing south sporting 100-watt driving lights. As Russ pulls out to pass, the trucker crowds him onto the snow-covered shoulder. Huntoon completes the pass and cranks the wheel hard right to get the left wheels out of the snow. The X5 gets a bit sideways, and the DSC, apparently flustered by the speed, steering angle, and yaw rate, ramps the throttle way back—it's like pulling a switch. Fortunately, the X5 decides to relinquish control to Russ just before we get seriously up close and personal with the front grille of the annoyed trucker; as long as it's straight, the X5 accelerates like—well, like a 5 Series V8. Finally, after what seems like an eternity, we pull into our Fairbanks motel.

Day Eight: Fairbanks to Anchorage, 440 miles.

"Satch? It's Russ. Bailey has a question for you."—Huntoon on his cell phone about five minutes before the start of first TSD leg

As the route instructions proclaim, "Finally, a short day...." And so we start the day's first TSD leg. While fiddling with the multitude of knobs and toggles on the TimeWise, I begin to wonder if I have screwed up an important mileage correction factor. Russ calls Satch on his cell phone and we determine that all is well, but by the end of the leg I'm pretty convinced that I've bungled things up. Imagine my surprise when Scoring radios us that we've won the leg with only two penalty points! I celebrate my good fortune by buying lunch for Russ and our buddies in #6 and #10.

The second TSD leg is a disaster. I enter an incorrect time factor—a number that has us 44 seconds early. The worst part is that we are *exactly* 44 seconds early at every control; had I entered the correct time, we might have aced this leg—woulda, coulda, shoulda, I suppose. The remainder of the drive is uneventful, and we pull into the Regal Alaska Hotel in time to run the X5 through a car wash and enjoy a fine seafood dinner.



One small deer rearranged the front end of Steve Norman's 325iX.

Day Nine: Anchorage TSD, ice autocross, and banquet, 250 miles.

"Winter always catches Alaskans by surprise."—Carlson commenting on the vehicular carnage caused by the freezing drizzle

The last day of the Alcan brings freezing sleet and some of the worst driving conditions of the entire event. On our transit to the start of the TSD leg, we pass dozens of locals who have managed to flip, spin, and otherwise run their cars or 4x4s off the road. The high volume of traffic has already convinced the organizers to shorten the TSD by about 50%, and the weather also causes them to add a ten-minute pause to calm things down. All the rallyists make it to Big Lake for the final ice autocross. Big Lake is just what the name implies: a huge frozen expanse the locals use for snowmobile, motorcycle, and sports-car ice races, not to mention for general transportation. Some enterprising folk even have ski-equipped Cessnas or Pipers which land on the ice and simply taxi up to lakeside homes.

The snowmobile course is impassable, so the ice autocross is moved to the motorcycle ice oval. A free-for-all results as the Chinooks punch a couple of holes in the ice, a Subaru Forester goes up a snowbank so far that it takes twenty minutes to extract it, the #4 Rodeo winds up high-centered in the infield snow pack, and the #7 Isuzu Trooper manages to knock THREE right front tires off the rim. For our part, Russ and I have a dilemma: The 35-degree weather has rendered the ice so slick that DSC is required on the straights, yet the system fights with us in the corners; convinced that we are on the edge of certain disaster, the DSC kills the power and applies the brakes to the outside wheels to curtail our dirt-track slip angles. As the ice begins to creak ominously, we decide discretion is the better part of valor and retire to the lakeside restaurant. The rally proper concludes with a caravan back to Anchorage, where we take the checkered flag at the local Isuzu dealership. We fight our way past the crazed hordes

of well-wishers and return to the hotel.

The awards banquet is a pleasant and entertaining end to a fantastic experience. We end up twelfth overall and fourth in class—not bad, I suppose, considering our computer disasters. We have driven some 4,600 miles across the Alcan in winter, from Seattle to the Arctic Ocean; we have not fallen off the road, nor have we required extraction from the trees and canyons. We have ridden in comfort and style, idly zipping down icy roads that would give ordinary cars much pause and keep Brand X SUVs home shuddering in the garage.

Give us a little more traction and a real transmission, and you'd be a fool to bet against us in 2004. As long as we don't let Carlson hook up the TimeWise cable.

Epilogue

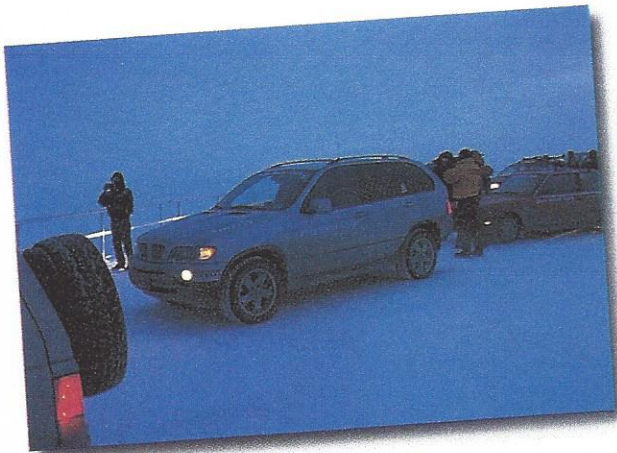
"See you in 2004."—Jerry Hines

I'd read Satch's stories of the Alcan since his days at *AutoWeek*, but I never thought I'd wind up driving that legendary rally across that legendary road with him (guess you should be careful what you wish for). So what did we learn from our 4,600 miles of arctic travel?

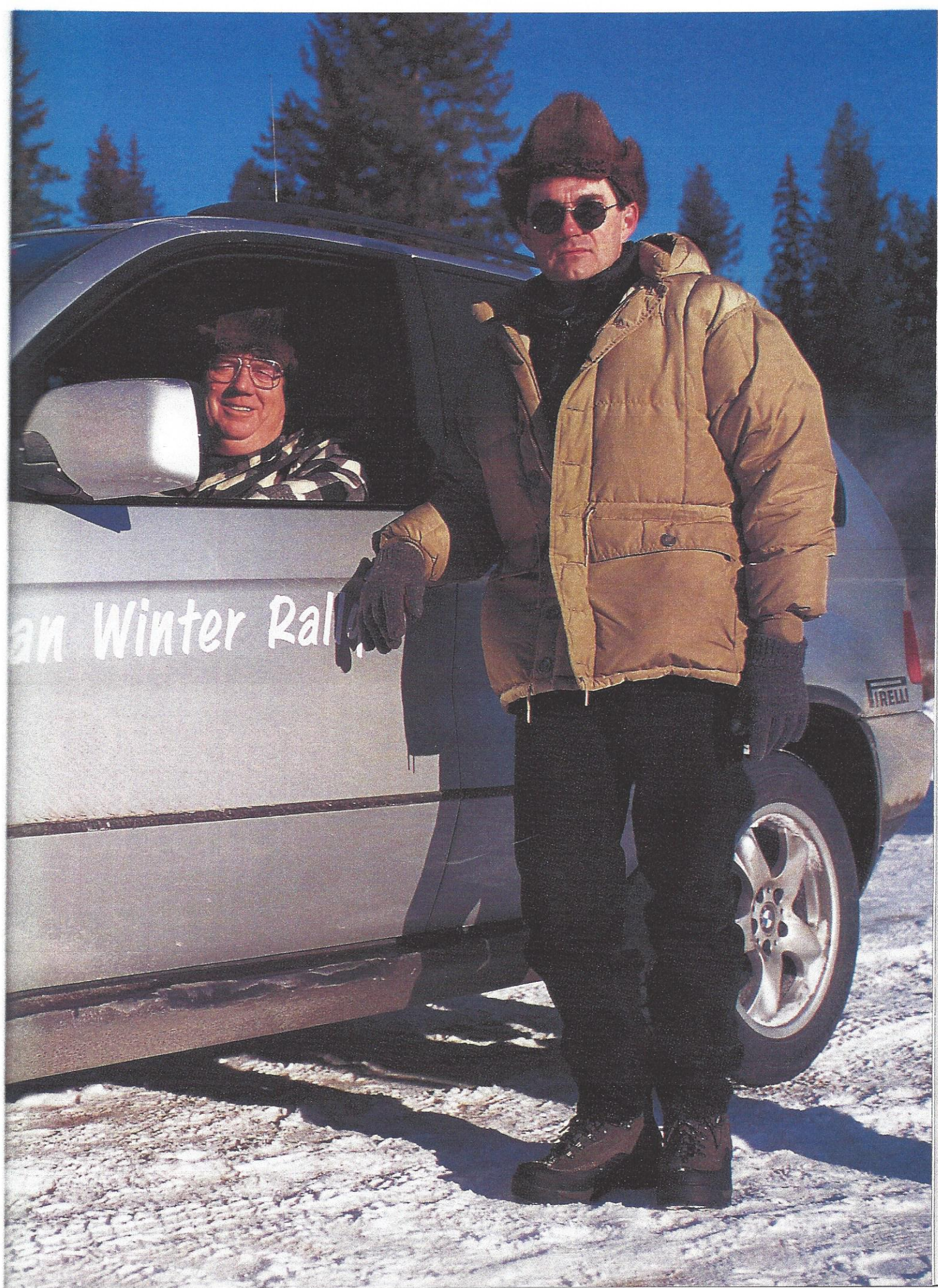
1. The X5 is one tough, amazing vehicle. Yes, we could have used better tires and better lights, but the fact remains that Munich's SAV is the class of the field. SCCA solo champ Paul Eklund, who eventually won the rally with Larry Richardson and R. Dale Kraushaar, admitted having trouble keeping up with the X5 on the road—when Russ was driving, anyway. And we averaged seventeen mpg for the entire event—not bad for a 280-hp 4,800-pound vehicle. And I'll always remember tackling the Dalton in total comfort, Vivaldi's *The Four Seasons* being faultlessly reproduced by the CD player.

2. The Alcan experience brings out the best in most everyone. The Chinook team went above and beyond the call of duty providing lights, batteries, and Chinese take-out to needy rallyists. Team Subaru's all-star navigator Russ Kraushaar was always happy to help me set the Official Rally Time on the inscrutable TimeWise stopwatch. And I can't forget Russ and Satch, who gamely tolerated a rookie driver/navigator with bravery and good humor.

3. The Alcan experience is addictive. Jerry is already planing the Summer 2002 rally as well as Winter 2004. How about a vintage 2002 team for '02? Or maybe a 330xi Touring for 2004? Team Munich has a nice ring to it, I think. Give me a call. I know an excellent navigator. ●



The edge of the Arctic Ocean was a mandatory turn-around point for the Alcan Winter Rally. Russ Huntoon and Bailey Taylor (in muskrat hat) won a rally section after ridding themselves of their erstwhile navigator.



Pirelli Saves

In the beginning, there were the rumors.

It's all because of the Internet, of course. What you read there must be gospel. After all, it really, really happened to a friend of a friend of mine... really!

And so it was with the new X5: When a late-winter snow fell on the east coast, suddenly the airwaves were awash with tales of the X5's ineptitude on snow and ice. And *Roundel* correspondent Pete Brock had tried the Sport version on a sand hill in Nevada and found it wanting: "laughing-stock" was his kindest description.

"Well, duhhh," I said. The X5 Sport runs Bridgestones about as wide as John Goodman on 19" wheels; they work fine on asphalt (see Dan Tackett's notes on taking them around Buttonwillow at a driving school), but any Son of the Tundra can tell you that what you need for snow is something narrow and deeply ridged, and what you need on ice is studs, the more the merrier—the fewer the scarier. (Consider where we have come when the space-saver spare on the X5 is a 17" wheel.)

Our problem in preparing the *Roundel* Alcan X5 was twofold: First we had to find wheels smaller than the 19" Wide Puppies, and then we had to find some boots to put on them. The Tire Rack, Yokohama, and other sources were sympathetic, but powerless; there was simply nothing available that would fit that situation, nothing that could be assembled before we were supposed to be a thousand miles beyond the edge of daylight.

Enter Pirelli.



Okay: Enter BMW NA first, because they found a set of 18" loaner rims that were borrowed from some department which prefers to remain unnamed and shipped them to A 'n' T Tire in Portland, Oregon. Meanwhile, certain insiders at Pirelli revealed that in fact they had been working on exactly this situation—in Canada. And we knew that Pirelli has the technology for this sort of extreme adventure because a little research will tell you that Pirelli's World Rally Championship winter tires—the ones used on the Monte Carlo Rally, for example—are available in 18" sizes. With ice-loving rubber compounds. And studs.

But we were more interested in what the ordinary driver would put on his car. "Try the Scorpion S/Ts," said our Pirelli insider. "They're not a snow-and-ice compound. But I think you'll be pleasantly surprised." At that point we had nothing to lose—heck, anthrax would have been a pleasant surprise—and when A 'n' T's wizards had finished mounting and balancing the Scorpions, we saw that they even had studs—a few, anyway. Exactly 100 studs per tire. (This may sound like a lot of steel to those blessed with mild climes, but remember that 100 studs spread out around these tires looked like one stud per county. Driving on ice, I am much more comfortable with numbers like one stud per every bit of rubber you can find to stick it in.)

So how did they work? Well, Pirelli was right: I was pleasantly surprised. We did not fall off the road even once, even when I was driving. The aggressive open pattern cleaned itself well in unpacked snow, and the scanty studs gave us confident acceleration and braking in most icy situations. But in serious ice, they have the same disconcerting tendency of unstudded ice tires; that is, they work so well in a straight line that you forget that when subjected to side loads, they don't recover quickly once they start falling out from under you. Hence a couple of Yeehaw Moments experienced by each of us. That's when all the electronic magic in the world won't help you, and you have to hope you haven't run totally out of skill.

Perhaps the best testimony to the Pirelli Solution occurred in Alaska, when I was congratulating Russ Huntoon on his excellent driving. "You know," I said, "if we'd stuck with those 19-inch Bridgestones, we'd've been off the road a dozen times at least."

"No, we wouldn't," he replied, "because we'd never have left Seattle."
—Satch Carlson