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# Miniology MAGAZINE



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**VOLUME 2 ISSUE 1**

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# The Incredible

*Words and Images by Ken Friend*

Driving from Kirkland, Washington to Anchorage, Alaska via Tuktoyaktuk, Northwest Territories in 10 days in the middle of winter? Who'd do that? Myself and George Thomas from Gresham, Oregon in my 2010 Mini Clubman JCW, that's who! After surviving the 2018 Alcan 5000 Summer Rally driving the same Mini, I thought, how tough could the Winter Rally be? All I have to do is add a fog light, I already have the driving lights, it will be more dark than light up there, raise my suspension 2" for clearance in deeper snow, stick sump heater on and run plug up to grill, already have the sump guard so on it goes. 4 studded winter tyres, 2 spare winter tires, chains just in case. Remove back seat for all the extra winter gear, install VHF radio, throw on the roof rack, and away we go.

So what is this all in aid of? The Alcan 5000 Summer and Winter rallies, I bet you have not heard of them. The first Alcan 5000 Rally was held in 1984, had twenty-three entries and covered an astounding 4,700 which at that time was the longest rally ever held in North America. The event alternates between a summer and winter date with the route and length varying. In fact the 1990 event now lays claim to being the World's longest and coldest rally when the route peaked at 6,275 miles with temperatures dropping at times to -58F. So you can see why you need to be prepared for this motorsports marathon.

I was glad I had started that process six months ahead of time, a lot more prep then one thinks, especially when trying to acquire all the parts needed and then trying to fit them, nothing is ever as straight forward as you're led to believe.





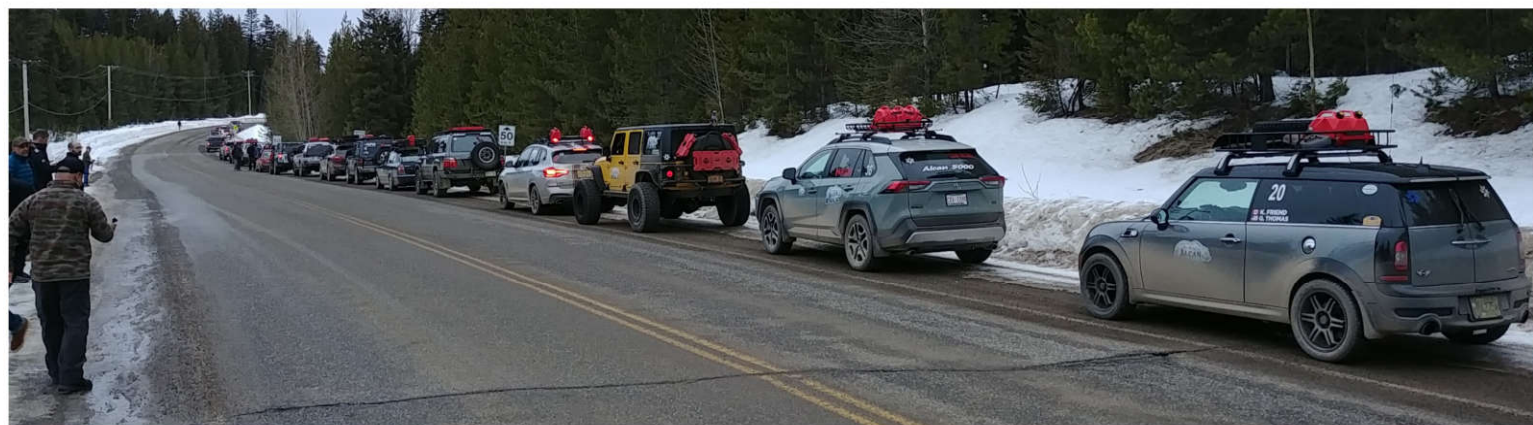


After a wheel alignment at Cedar Valley Alignment in Mission, I was finally ready to go. I headed down to Seatac Airport in Seattle to pick up my navigator, George Thomas, then back up to Kirkland, Washington to the Totem Lake Motel to meet up with everyone else on the rally, 40 rally

entrants, plus organizers and volunteers.

Our weapon of choice as I stated was a 2010 JCW Clubman but there sure was a huge mix of cars and brands assembled at the start point. Entrants came from all over North America, New Jersey, New York, Texas, New





Mexico, South Carolina, North Carolina, Montana, Idaho, Colorado, California, Oregon, Washington, Alberta and BC.

The rally started first thing Wednesday morning, Feb. 26th, with a 54 minute TSD (explanation below) section. What is a TSD you say? This rally is not about speed like the World Rally Championship or stage rallying but uses Time Speed Distance route instructions where the navigator is given start and finish times and distance, and it is his job to meet those times. You may sometimes hear TSD rallies called a regularity or navigational rally. It sounds easy, but having to do that for 5000 or so miles can be quite a chore.

Like most rallies, directions are given for turns with mileage points and often with Hwy signs with mileage to keep you on course. Still easy, right? Now the tricky part... you are told how fast to go, not necessarily the speed limit, this is your average speed for a particular section until you are told to change to a new average speed. This will continue throughout the TSD until the finish. Still sounds easy? Remember, these are average speeds, you have stop signs, traffic, uphill, downhill, ice and snow and other hazards. Okay you say, what's so hard? Checkpoints! They can be located anywhere along the course and usually somewhat hidden, you are timed to the SECOND early or late as you pass

by. How accurate has your speedometer been? Is the odometer correct? Was I spinning my tires too much? Was I cutting the corners? Remember average speeds, did I accelerate too fast, too slow and it goes on and on how things can go wrong very quickly. But with good math and calculations before the start of the section, one can calculate time and distance given the average speeds and get good results. Did I mention good math?

The one thing about this rally is that it tends



to throw all sorts of things at you. Day two started off with a nice breakfast hosted by the Rainier Auto Sports Club, before getting on the road at 8am for the start of the second TSD section called "11% Grade". This was on a very narrow, snow and ice covered up and down and very twisty section, great fun to drive, but George didn't say too much, Hmmm. It only lasted for 23.5 miles and about 38





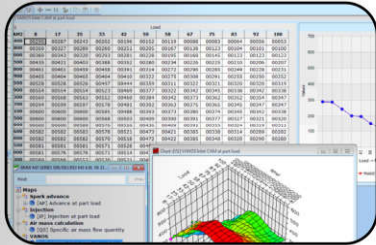
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minutes but it got the first snow and ice of the event out of the way.

On a long rally like the Alcan 5000 TSD sections are interspersed by road sections that do nothing other than get the team to the next competitive part of the event. Day two ended with another long drive through Prince George to Dawson Creek to the start of the last TSD section of the day. The "Old Alaska Highway", was 17 miles to be completed in 25 minutes. With the competitive part of the day over we continued north to Fort Nelson. Fort Nelson?! Do you know where that is?

We finally reaching our destination in Fort Nelson (founded in 1792), at about 9:30pm, it was time to fuel up and baby, it was cold outside, have a drink and a meal and chat about the day's events with the other entrants. Two days of driving....over 1,100 miles so far.

Day 3, saw breakfast provided courtesy of Nitto Tire, the major sponsor of the rally. We start the day with a 25 mile TSD Section, "Simpson Trail" taking 42 minutes, then transit north crossing the Continental Divide, to Watson Lake, Yukon, and the Signpost Forest and continuing on back into BC and then up to Whitehorse, Yukon, arriving at the Yukon Inn about 9pm. The tripmeter was showing 1,725 miles which was not bad for three days.

We wake up for Day 4 in Whitehorse, it's dark but we manage to source breakfast at the gourmet McDonalds across the street, it's damned cold, and hope the Mini starts, it wasn't plugged in, hopefully that does not turn into an oops moment.

So, today we have a choice, do the morning TSD "Fish Lake" or drive straight to Dawson City to go Ice Racing and take a time penalty, well duh, off we go to Dawson City. On the way up to Dawson

City, one must stop at the Braeburn Lodge for the cinnamon rolls, they are only a little on the large size and can take three days to eat.

The huge unknown of the rally or ice race choice was the ability of being able to get on the Yukon River for the Ice Challenge, the sooner you got there the better chance of doing it. As it turned out, the weather was perfect, if you call -20C perfect, and everyone got to run, but we only got two runs instead of four as it was getting late and nobody was turning down any chance of a run.

After arriving in Dawson City and checking into the Eldorado Hotel, we unloaded the car and headed down to the river, the locals had the course all set up, a long quick course, if you have enough traction. Only problem was, no time for warm up/familiarisation laps, you just had to go for it.

Wait a minute, you can't see the course, the snowbanks are taller than most of the vehicles and hard as ice, where the hell do you go. The GPS was just a boat anchor here! You just had to put your foot down and hope for the best, remembering slow is fast. It is so hard to remember that when you're having so much fun, turbo kicks in, tons of traction

on the straights, holding on for dear life, and I'm driving, braking is good, but getting through the many turns was oh so difficult, not slowing down enough, oh well. The fun factor certainly outweighed the time, although I still kick myself for not doing better. First in Class and 6th Overall, shouldn't complain, I guess.

At the end of the day with everyone half frozen, it was time for beer and burgers.

The more hardy souls, went

to the Sourdough Saloon for the human Sourtie Cocktail, "Be sure to remember the most important rule: "You can drink it fast, you can drink it slow, but







your lips have gotta touch the toe"

I chose to not partake, but many have, and many did. What else are you going to do in Dawson City in the middle of winter?

Got the car all loaded up and ready for the early start to Inuvik, NWT. Only 2,100 miles travelled so far. Day 5 Mar. 1st. No TSD today, just a 482 mile drive into the Northwest Territories and drifting snow. Did I mention it was cold?

One rule I haven't mentioned is, NEVER pass a fuel opportunity! Always keep your tank as full as possible, you never know how the road conditions may be, if you get stuck, you're stuck, always travel in a pack, you may need their help and vice versa. So up the Dempster Highway we go, a couple of hours in and the blizzard hits.

Snow drifts, whiteouts, it's becoming a nightmare and worse for some. Jeeps getting sucked into the drifts and needing a pull out. At one point everyone had to stop as the drifts were so big and many vehicles got stuck. It was at this point that numerous vehicles made a sad choice and turned around and headed back either to Dawson City or Whitehorse, eight teams in all. Unfortunately, George and Jay Whitman in their Cooper S Mini got so much snow packed under their car after hitting too many snowdrifts that their transmission was jammed in reverse, they were able to get it out of reverse but then only had 1st and 3rd, so they, along with Jack and Claire Holdaway in their Subaru headed back south, slowly.

After much deliberation and all vehicles pulled out, we soldiered on, much slower at first, but it slowly cleared, and everyone was back up to speed on the ice/snow packed road. When I say speed, I mean speed. It's so cold that ice tires have so much grip it's incredible, not like the slop we have in Vancouver. 80mph is the norm, if you don't, the frequent semis will roll right over you.

Beautiful country, varied terrain, rolling hills, long valleys, exceptionally low sun, then back into some mountains with the road carved through them with twisty, winding turns, did I mention the semis don't slow down. Then back to slow rolling terrain and sparse trees. Stopping at Eagle Plains for fuel and a bite to eat. Then it was back on the road, the next stop; The Arctic Circle. I've never been this far north before!

Still a few trees around but they are getting sparse. The driving and scenery has been spectacular, even though most everything is white. The roads up here



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are much better in the winter to drive on as all of the pot holes are filled in by the ice and snow, even though the shale roads are kept fairly clear, they are still covered by the ice and snow, so much less chance of getting a flat tire. Who wants to change one at 40 below!

After what felt like forever, we make it to the Northwest Territories. Weather hasn't changed much. Here, we enter into Mountain Time. Didn't notice any difference. Now we are heading for the largest Canadian town above the Arctic Circle (pop. 3,586), Inuvik and the end of the Dempster Hwy. It's getting late and the sun is low in the sky, oh, wait, it's been low in the sky all day, and we are almost there, almost time for another beer and burger. We check into our hotel, the Capital Suites, check that, we wait in line to check into our hotel, each check-in is taking 20 to 30 minutes, unbelievable. All reservations are there, but the gentlemen behind the desk had no clue how to check anyone in, working off of two computers, we have no idea what he is looking at, line is getting longer and people are getting pretty peeved off.

Finally, we get our keys, these are suites so there is no restaurant or bar here, so off we go to the other hotel where the more of the participants are staying. Into the restaurant to order and dang, it's Sunday, and the bar is closed. Oh well, we must get up early anyways.

Monday March 2 is the start of Day 6. We have a few of choices, no TSD today, just Extreme Controls, participants must reach one Extreme

Control to avoid a points penalty. Option 1, is to drive to Tuktoyaktuk and back to Inuvik, a distance of 191 miles or Option 2, drive the ice road to Aklavik and back to Inuvik, a distance of 146 miles and then head south to Eagle Plains, another 227 miles, thus avoiding a 762 mile and a possible 14 hour drive from Inuvik to Whitehorse on Tuesday.

We chose option 3, drive to Tuk and drive the



Ice Road to Aklavik, you're there, why not. For those who don't know an Ice Road is one forged on top of the frozen ocean. Now it was time to hit the Ice Road. A huge frozen river, wide, flat, and relatively smooth, that is maintained as a highway with a posted speed of 70 KPH that everyone obeys, not. It even has directional arrows for some of the turns as everything is white, so they give you a heads up on

which way to go. What a blast, one could drive normally, but why? It's so cold and dry the traction is quite unbelievable, it was hard to get a drift through the corners, well not that hard, but trying to maintain that fun for 73 miles to Aklavik and then having to do that again back to Inuvik, longest ice race ever! In





the photo with the Coastguard ship we are actually driving on an Ice Road that would be open water in the summer. We were sure glad we did. Both bucket list items, (didn't know I had a bucket list) seeing the frozen Arctic Ocean in -40 C or is that -40 F temperatures, the wind chill being colder than -50, my teeth are still chattering.

Everything freezes really fast, but at least it is a dry cold, a frozen desert. Tuktoyaktuk is 690 27.330'N and 1330 2.230W, look it up on a map, it's way up there and very desolate, but it is an active community, and the people very friendly.

The actual drive to Tuk and back to Inuvik was quite interesting, besides being barren, the area is known for it's Pingo's, no not Pingu the cartoon penguin, Pingo. It has the world's largest concentration of Pingo's (cone shaped hills with a core of ice) the tallest being 160 feet tall and still growing.

Once back in Inuvik we had lunch. Inuvik is quite the busy town, lots of restaurants, hardware stores, banks, clothing stores and many of the fast food chain restaurants.

Back in Inuvik for dinner, and head to a pizza

place, looking at the menu on the wall trying to decide, the chef calls out "have the Chinese 3 course meal", okay, we had Chinese in the pizza place. So now we are pondering the long drive back to Whitehorse....Hmmm.....

Back at the hotel, we hear that the group that left early in the day to head down to Eagle Plains for the night, did not make it due to a blizzard that had closed the road. They will have to stay the night in a small place called Fort McPherson, just 115 miles south of Inuvik. Find out later that most had to sleep on cots in the church hall which also fed them as well. This proves we are not on any Sunday afternoon jaunt.

Tuesday and day 7, we have driven 3,000 miles and no hiccups with the Mini or with George so south we head. In the summer to get to Inuvik, there are a couple of river crossings that you have to take a ferry to cross, in the winter you just drive across and Ice Road, but the road down to the river is, of course, the river bank and fairly steep and abrupt at the river edge, for a car or truck it's not too bad, going down is easy, getting up the other side you better be moving or you may not make it on the

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shear ice. How the loaded semi's do it, I have no idea, would love to have watch one.

About 2 hours out of Inuvik, we pull over to adjust our personal fluid levels, and smoke starts coming out from under the hood and we smell oil. Oh no so we pop the hood and see oil had sprayed everywhere from somewhere around the turbo. Quick wipe, and decide there is nothing we can do here, so back in and hope for the best, pondering the whole time what the problem could be.

We make it to Eagle Plains and stop for fuel and ask the owner if we could use one of his enclosed bays to look at car. He was more than willing to help out. He opens the door and lets us in closing the door just as quickly.

Pop the hood and nothing happening, hmm again. Still oil everywhere, so I wipe it all down and clean everything off, the owner is trying to help, offering tools and anything else I might need, couldn't find anything wrong, everything around the turbo is tight, no loose connections, oil level really hadn't changed from the

morning. Very puzzling, I believe it had to have been the oil feed to the turbo, frozen o'ring in the connection at the turbo or something like that. To this day, I have not fixed anything. Bizarre to say the least. Many thanks to the shop owner, such a nice man.

After grabbing a bite to eat we were on the road again, fortunately the weather stayed pretty good for us on the way down, but we had to drive through the remnants of the storm that had hit the

day before and could see why the road had been closed.

We're 650 miles into the day, only 110 more miles to Whitehorse, it's dark and snowing heavy, time for dinner in Carmacks, small little roadside restaurant with excellent food and service. Their specialty, pizza, so I had the pork chops that were soo good. Finally we make it to the Yukon Inn in Whitehorse and met up with everyone else to hear all their road warrior stories and have a beer in the basement bar, oh, it's karaoke night, so off to bed and try not to think about another early start.

It's Day 8, and after getting up early, we were back



over to the gourmet McDonalds across the street for breakfast then off for the start of today's first TSD, "Fish Lake". 9 and a half miles up to Fish Lake and then 9 and a half miles back. Seems simple, certain speeds one way and different speeds back and hey, they moved the checkpoints. Fish Lake was genuinely nice though.

Now the long 600-mile drive to Fairbanks via Beaver Creek and the US border. Small wait at the border but nothing unusual, then on to Tok for lunch



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and our second TSD for the day.

It seems we were slow getting to Fast Eddies in Tok for lunch, it was packed with hunters and rallyists, figured it would take too long so gas station food it was. TSD "Tok Junction" short 9 1/2 mile route most of which was on very narrow snow packed roads that were a blast to drive on, don't know how some of the wider track folks did it, rubbing the snow banks on both sides??? Got her done, now transit another 200 miles to Fairbanks.

100 miles in we got to Delta Junction, which is the end of the Alaska Highway. It says so right there. It was another long day of driving, almost there and we come to the town of North Pole and yes, Santa Clause's house was on the left.

circle again, to Coldfoot Camp, a grueling 260 mile drive in what could be extremely harsh conditions and then another 260 mile drive in what could be extremely harsh conditions again. Gee, guess what we chose?

Day 8, yes, a relaxing day, sleep in, have breakfast, easy drive in beautiful sunny but cold weather to Cheena Hot Springs. We were there in 2018 during the Summer Alcan Rally, but it was much warmer then. Now, with frigid temperatures, in a bathing suit, one must leave the warmth of the changing rooms and brave the stroll to the pool. It's not far, maybe 25 feet, but at -25 below it feels like an eternity. Into the nice, hot steamy water where everyone's hair, including eyebrows



We arrive at our hotel in Fairbanks, AK. Pikes Landing, a beautiful resort beside a frozen river, 5 stars indeed. Strangely enough though, the restaurant and bar are a detached building half a block away and it was absolutely freezing out. What we must do to get a beer and a burger.

Tomorrow we have another choice to make, one of two extreme controls. An easy day driving 66 miles up to the Cheena Hot Springs and enjoy the nice hot, relaxing, and so gratifying pool, and then another 66 miles of relaxed driving back to Fairbanks or driving up the Dalton Highway, past the Arctic

and eyelashes, and any other exposed hair, freezes in about 15 minutes. Jack and Claire Holdaway are fine examples of the frozen hair syndrome. After spending about an hour under the wonderfully blue sky, and thinking about the drive we could have taken up to the Arctic Circle again and further up to Coldfoot, yeah right, we thought it was time to make the dash back indoors and head back to the hotel for a beer. Cheena Hot Springs is a resort one can stay at year-round, they also have an Ice Museum, sled dogs and hiking.

After that grueling day at the spa, the rest



of the day was spent relaxing and sharing stories about the strange and wonderful events that happened along the way with the other rallyists and volunteers. Who had the most rock chips and cracks in their front windscreen, who got stuck and had to be extricated from a snowbank, who got rear ended in a whiteout when a semi went by in the other direction, Paul Eklund and partner Yulia, rallyists extraordinaire, in their Subaru, no injuries, just blew out their rear window and tailgate damage, and, who slipped and fell and broke his ankle, Steve Perret, a long time rallyist and volunteer on Alcan Rally's. Another day done, and over 4,500 miles in, with one day left, with a TSD and transit section to Anchorage for the finish.

Day 10 and we head to the start of the final TSD "Chena Ridge". A 12 mile section completed in just over 19 minutes, then onto Parks Highway for a 360 mile drive to Anchorage where we drive by Denali National Park, absolutely stunning scenery in the winter. Did I ever mention it was cold out?

Nearing Anchorage, we drive by the "Dog Mushing Capital of the World", Iditarod Trail Committee Visitors Center and further down the side road, the Museum and Dog Mushers Hall of Fame. Did not stop, didn't want to see any 'mushed' dogs, so on to our final destination. We also had to stop by MINI of Anchorage on the way in, was hoping to get a hat but had to settle for a freebie license plate frame.

WE MADE IT! The Anchorage Clarion Suites. It's over, complete, done, another one checked off the list of things to do that may never get done again. Or will it?

A side anecdote, a team from Texas in their Subaru, had presold it to someone in Anchorage and then were flying home. About 50 miles before reaching Anchorage, bang, the

engine blew. They had it towed into Anchorage, contacted the buyer to cancel the deal, put ad in Craigslist and sold it right away for parts, how unlucky/lucky can you get.

The Nitto Awards Banquet was held at the Alaska Aviation Museum, with some spectacular old aircraft and a very nice buffet meal. Speeches were made and awards handed out, the overall winner being Russ Kraushaar and Garth Ankeny from Battle Ground, WA, and Portland, OR respectively in their yellow 1973 Capri.

I came away with an Arctic Award for finishing, Ice Champion 2wd in the Ice Race, (6th overall), and the Go Further Award for completing all the Extreme Controls. We finished 12th in Class, 21st Overall in the rally.

Many thanks to George Thomas for all of his effort, with his bad knees, bad back, bad shoulder and other ailments, he never complained hardly at all.

None of this would have happened without all the work and efforts of Jerry and Colleen Hines who have put on an Alcan 5000 Rally every 2 years since 1984. Thank You!

#### *Editor's Note*

I want to give Ken a big shout out for sending this article to us about an event most of us have never heard about.

When the Miniology Magazine team heard about the Alcan 5000 we all decided we needed to cover it in some form or other, especially when there were going to be MINIs/Minis running this year. Ken's article is the perfect lead in to the event coming up later in 2022. We eagerly await updates from the MINI/Mini contingent that will challenge the frozen North for the 38th running of the Alcan 5000.