

One less star in the rally sky

I don't think I've ever had a more generous friend than the late Gary Webb, and the rally community has lost one of its most innovative practitioners. According to his friend Joey Sears, "When you said, 'I need,' Gary was the one who was there to make it happen—no matter what it was that you needed."

Sears, who owns a Canadian driving school, was instrumental in convincing Webb that since he did such a great job of explaining rallying—from mild-mannered TSD rallying to full-on, full-bore SCCA Pro rallying—that he should open a driving school himself. The result was the Atlantic Driving School, which Webb and his wife, Glenda, opened in Maine in 1985. And not content with improving the skills of just a few students, Webb contracted with school districts to provide genuine driving education in place of the go-through-the-motions programs provided by most high schools in America.

Whenever I see a Tire Rack Street Survival school, I think of Webb, because more than anything else, he enjoyed teaching kids, no matter what their driving ambitions might be. In his Pro Rally days, he would surround himself with novice drivers and patiently give them the benefit of his experience and training. More than a few were surprised to discover that their new mentor was one of the stars of a rally firmament that included the likes of John Buffum and Rod Millen—and a certain journalist who loved the rally game, even if I could never hope to contend with those hombres.

Glenda Webb—I never heard Gary call her that; she was always Sweetie, even in the third person—says that Gary was always a little bothered by the fact that he was never picked as a factory driver. "He decided that he was not pretty enough," says Glenda.

Pretty or not, Webb was truly popular, because he was a story-teller; if he showed up at a dinner party, your first task was to persuade the host to seat you next to him. Maybe the stories are the best part of rallying, and Webb had more than most. However, most rally stories concern disastrous, thrilling mishaps; I can tell a few of those myself. But in more than 45 years of rallying, Webb *never crashed a car*.

Not a bad record for a one-armed driver.

Well, that's not exactly true; Webb had limited use of his right arm, but he could usually employ it to shift down. He would reach across his body to shift up with his left hand. You

would be amazed how easy he made it seem.

It was 1996, and Gary and I had borrowed Steve Normans's 325iX in order to run the Thunderbird Rally in British Columbia. After the first day, we were running in second place against steep competition when we came to a left turn that put us on an unplowed logging road—and directly into about eight inches of new-fallen snow.

In such conditions, it's impossible to stay on time, even if you have two useful hands on the wheel, and our tracks down the road must have looked like someone had been herding snakes from one to the other. Let me just say that Webb was *busy* on his side of the car, while I merely watched the rally computer and told him how late we were from time to time—first a half-second late, then a full second, and so on. I finally decided to spread out the depressing news, calling out only the tow-second increments.

We were eight seconds down when we finally passed a timing control. Eight seconds late at a single control! In the computer classes of a TSD rally, this usually means you'll be clapping for the other guys at the awards banquet. But when the scores were posted that night, we were in for a surprise; not that we didn't have those eight points, because we did—but that ours was the best time through the unplowed section, and the next-best time was *32 seconds*.

That was not the only time Webb won the Thunderbird, and it was not his only BMW victory, either. When somebody convinced BMW NA that they should enter three X3s in the AlCan Winter Rally in 2004, Webb drove one car with an *Automobile* journalist, while I drove one for *Roundel* and Mike Miller drove the third for *Bimmer*. We spent a week of high adventure, swapping the lead until Miller's car sacrificed a tie rod to keep our X3 in the running. (Hey, I'd've done the same for him if he was leading—or at least I think I would Have.)

The AlCan is the sort of marathon rally where one good team usually stretched out a lead that starts on the first day, but this time the two BMWs and one Subaru were in contention until the final Alaska miles. The roundel entry was eventually flummoxed by a confused computer that put us into limp-home mode whenever we put the car sideways, so an ice-racing segment pretty much saw the end of our promise. But Webb had no such problems, winning the rally to the glee of BMW workers in the plant in Graz, Austria. We managed to finish ahead of the Subie to make it a BMW one-two.

I thought a rally story or two would be a fitting salute to Gary Webb. He leaves behind Glenda—and about a million friends, give or take.

Satch Carlson