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Chill Vibes

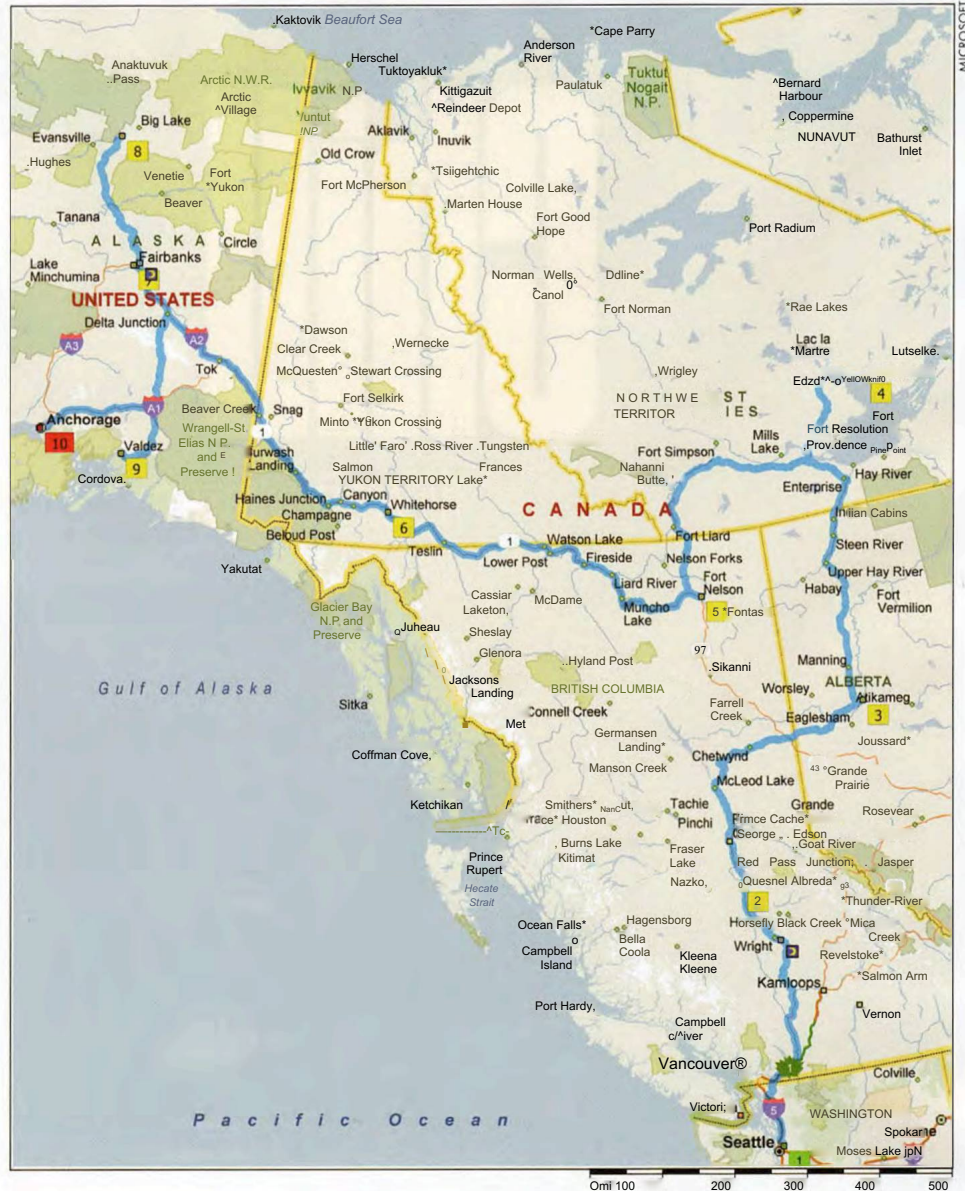
THE ALCAN WINTER RALLY CREATES WARM MEMORIES
DESPITE THE HARSH ENVIRONMENT.

STORY BY **DAVID GREEN**
PHOTOS BY **MITCHELL LEONG, DAVID FOX,**
AND DRIVE TIME STUDIO



The Alcan Winter Rally

is among the world's last great and most demanding automotive adventures. Jerry Hines, the Rally Master and visionary behind the Alcan Winter Rally has orchestrated this epic adventure for 40 years. Thirty-five vehicles, including seven Porsches, competed in the 2024 rally, covering more than 5,000 miles of frozen picturesque roads in 10 days, with temperatures as low as minus 45 degrees F. "For the first time in the 40 years of the Alcan Rally, we had more Porsches than Subarus," Hines said.



The journey started in Kirkland, Washington, wound through British Columbia, Alberta, the Northwest Territories, and the Yukon Territory of Canada before venturing north of the Arctic Circle to Coldfoot, Alaska, down to Valdez, and finishing in Anchorage. The rally tested the competitors' driving skills, navigational ability, preparation, persistence, and teamwork.

The Alcan Winter Rally is a Time-Speed-Distance (TSD) rally consisting of stages, transits, and an ice slalom. Being precisely on time to the 1/10th of a second was the objective during the TSD stages.

The Porsche team came together thanks to Miles McEwing, as Porsche Centre Calgary and Porsche Canada provided three generations of Cayennes for the rally. McEwing drove the 2005 Cayenne, with Tracey Martin navigating. The 2005 is the Porsche Centre Calgary shop truck and previously was a rally podium-finisher. Nathan Hayashi drove the 2024 Cayenne, with Mitchell Leong navigating and photographing. I drove the 2016



Cayenne, with Tom Pastore navigating. Jeff Lebesch joined the team and drove his Dakar, while Ryan Trail navigated. Touchette Motorsport shod the Porsches with Michelin snow tires. Mark's, a winter gear supplier, kept the team safe, warm, dry, and comfortable, and the Gear Shop added driving lights to the 2016 to illuminate the route during the dark winter nights. The team set out to embrace the rally's exhilarating spirit, support local businesses, and forge connections with fellow participants and the people we met.

Before the rally, McEwing contacted merchants and restaurants along the route so we could support local businesses. Each night, we visited locally owned restaurants, got to know restaurateurs passionate about their craft, learned about locally grown produce in an area with real winter, and enjoyed delicious food.

As we headed north, the landscapes became more exquisite. The scenery was so picturesque that there was a view fit for a postcard around every corner. Bison,

moose, and other wild animals became familiar sights. The sense of open space was incredible.

Everywhere we stopped, people enthusiastically jumped at the opportunity to sign a Cayenne hood. Border agents, other participants, a security person on the ice road, locals, restaurant owners, waitstaff, and Tribal Elders all signed.

The competition was intense, but camaraderie was evident throughout the event. On the first night, an expert navigator coached a competitor to help her ultimately win her class. Everyone was quick to help each other when issues arose. A vehicle problem could have quickly become a safety risk given the extreme cold.

WE STOPPED FOR a dip in the Liard River Hot Springs. Getting changed was a chilling experience and required constant movement to avoid bare feet freezing to the icy ground. Once in the water, it was almost spiritual, with snow covering the ground as the rising steam crystal-

Previous:
Miles McEwing
kicks up snow
during the ice
slalom on
a frozen lake.

Above:
The Dakar leads a
Porsche caravan on
a frigid day near
the Arctic Circle.



lized on the trees. Maybe it was insufficient sleep, too much caffeine, being in the car for too long, or the hot water, but regular life was a distant memory.

How cold was it? “We were standing on the ice on one of the ice roads having a sandwich,” McEwing said. “A piece of cilantro fell to the ice and shattered like glass. While laughing about it, the finger broke off of my glove. I guess it was cold.”

The ice slalom was an autocross on a frozen lake, minus the cones. A boat frozen in the ice marked the finish.

We pushed the cars, got them sideways, and tested the limits while avoiding the snowbanks. The Dakar was fast around the course, with its outstanding balance, AWD traction, and power. The Cayennes were quick, predictable, and fun when sideways. The Michelin tires had excellent traction in the slippery environment.

Yellowknife, Northwest Territories, claims to be the capital of northern lights tourism, and based on the number of people heading out to get a glimpse of the aurora borealis, this is probably true. After a short drive

It was an epic adventure rallying great cars on slippery roads in unique places, with spectacular views, plenty of wildlife, the northern lights, and even a chance to drive by a boat frozen in a lake sporting the Jolly Roger.





to Vee Lake, the northern lights danced across the night sky. Charged particles from the sun created mesmerizing colors and patterns to watch.

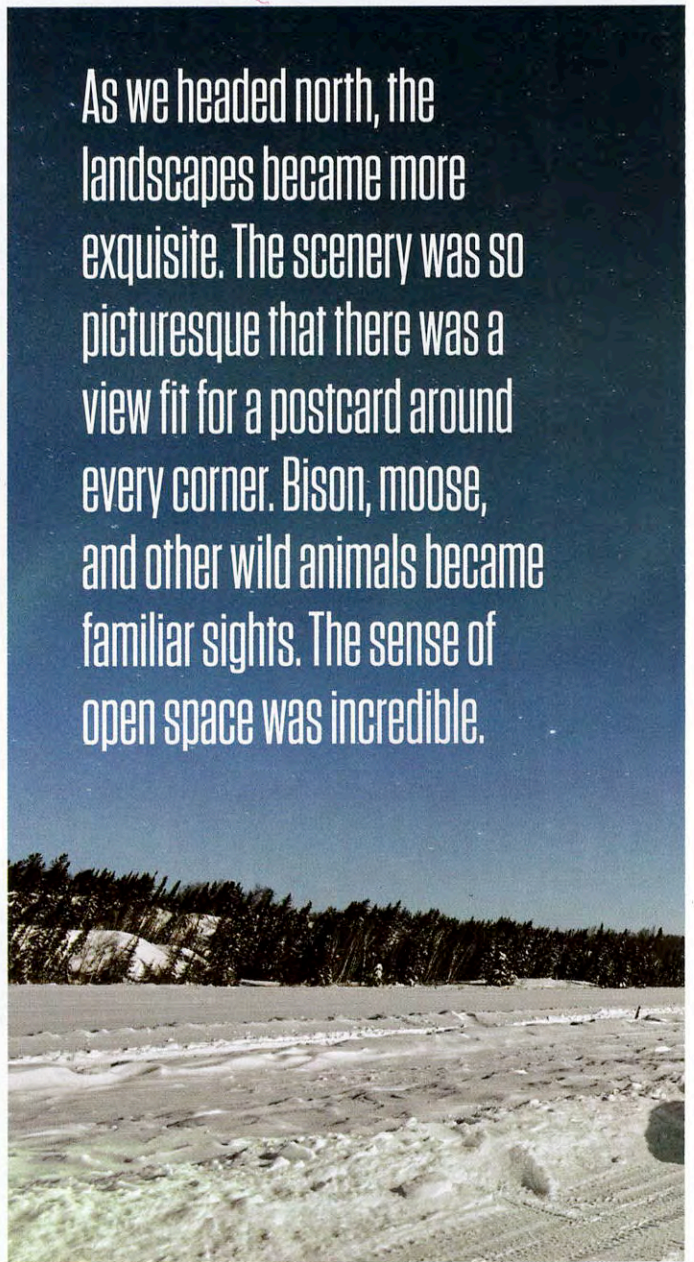
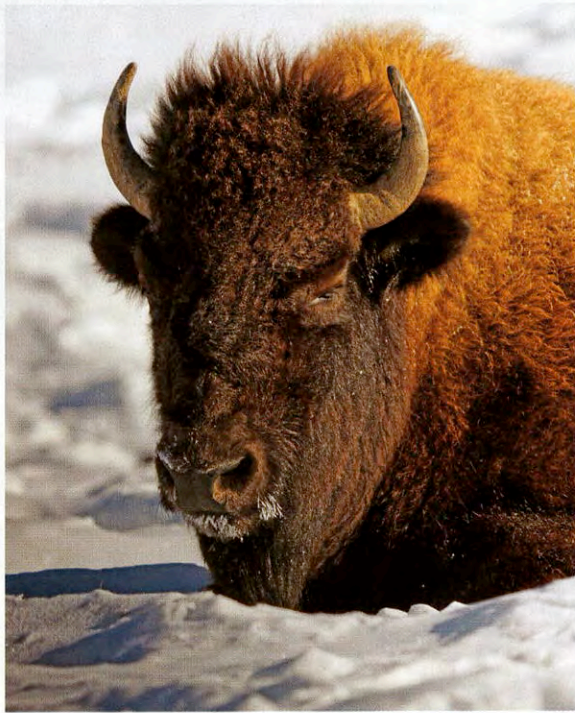
The rally then headed north of the Arctic Circle and on to Coldfoot, Alaska. Coldfoot is a truck stop with a population of 34. In 1983, truckers delivering supplies to Prudhoe Bay wanted a place to thaw out, so they built the truck stop out of crates—true Alaska spirit.

The Dakar performed flawlessly on the long days and did outstandingly in the ice slalom. Winter survival gear,

recovery equipment, navigation equipment, communications, and clothes filled the Dakar. “Life is too short to drive boring cars,” Lebesch said. “I pick my cars for the driving dynamics and accept compromises that others might consider shortcomings, such as the racing bucket seats or challenging luggage storage of the Dakar. For me, this is the best car ever.”

Comparing the three Cayennes, the power, comfort, and entertainment systems improved with each generation, as expected. The 2016 was the lightest and had





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"A piece of cilantro fell to the ice and shattered like glass.
While laughing about it, the finger broke off of my glove."

—Miles McEwing



the best fuel range due to its better mileage than the 2005 and a bigger tank than the 2024. What stood out the most was that all three Cayennes performed well and had no issues. They all started like clockwork, even at minus 45 degrees. The high ground clearance and tall wheels smoothed over the roller coaster ice heaves. The comfortable and quiet interiors worked well against the fatigue of the long days, and the heated seats made the cold mornings more comfortable.

The rally competition was fierce, with Lebesch and Trail staying near the top of the score sheet. They finished second in class and third overall in the Dakar. Hayashi and Leong put in a solid performance at their first TSD rally. While they weren't the only first-time TSD competitors, it was a challenging first event with a steep learning curve. The tight competition meant a small mistake could significantly impact a team's place. McEwing and Martin missed a checkpoint on one stage and slid down the score sheet, but they fought back to finish sixth in class. Pastore and I started slowly, but found our rhythm and clawed back to finish second in class and fifth overall.

The Alcan Winter Rally was more than the competition. The camaraderie within and among the teams, building new friendships, strengthening existing ones, and the spirit of the rally left a lasting impression. It provided an opportunity to escape the daily pressures and be single-minded. Competitors enjoyed beautiful but potentially deadly scenery, ventured north of the Arctic Circle, drove on ice roads, and polished their car-handling skills. Altogether, the Alcan Winter Rally perfectly combined competition, friendship, adventure, and scenic beauty. 🌐



Above:
Signatures collected along the way on the Cayenne hoods.

Left:
The team at the Arctic Circle (L-R): David Green, Mitchell Leong, Ryan Trail, Jeff Lebesch, Nolan Channon, Tracey Martin, Miles McEwing, Tom Pastore, and Nathan Hayashi.