

Driving Porsches in the harsh ALCAN 5000 Rally

ALCAN 5000 Winter 2020: 5,120 miles one way from Seattle north to the Arctic Ocean, finishing in Anchorage for the start of the Iditarod.

Photos provided by "Otis" Porsche unless noted.

Each time we successfully complete what we think will be an epic adventure the next one proves to be even more challenging. This was the second winter Alcan 5000 entered by Dolores and Richard Ranhofer and their Porsche Cayenne "Otis" and the first for Jeff Lebesch and his Macan. Eaun Pollock did his first at the summer 2018 Alcan rally. The 2020 Alcan went beyond what even the professional drivers competing were expecting.

The [ALCAN 5000 Time Speed Distance \(link is external\)](#) rally has not failed to deliver an event that is both challenging and rewarding on many levels. Alcan 5000 has been sponsored by the [Rainier Auto Sports Club \(link is external\)](#) since 1984, alternating every two years between a winter then summer event. The Winter 2020 event had three Porsche SUVs entered, two Cayennes and a Macan. In this story we have three accounts of the Alcan 5000 from the drivers of a Cayenne and a Macan during winter, and yes a 911 that participated in the summer of 2018. The vastness and beauty of the North Country are matched by its remoteness and unforgiving environment. These three tales will show how challenging and rewarding this cocktail mix can be. This popular event is already fully booked with a wait list for 2022!

2018 Porsche Macan GTS – ALCAN 5000 2020 Review

By Jeff Lebesch



Alcan 5000 day one at start line – Totem Lake Hotel.

I participated in the Alcan 5000 winter rally, Feb 26 – March 06, 2020, in my 2018 Porsche Macan GTS. Here is my story of how I got involved in the rally, why I chose the Macan, and the two years of planning, preparation, and practice that earned us a second-place overall finish.

A rally is essentially an organized road trip with a number of participants, and usually includes some element of competition. The spectrum of car rallies is very broad, including exotic car parades from luxury hotel to luxury hotel, to half-day or longer rural road drives at legal speeds, to full attack races mode that are glorified by numerous video games. By far the bulk of car rallies are the middle type, known in North America as TSD (Time-Speed-Distance), or in Europe as Regularity rallies. The event takes place at legal road speeds, and the competitive element is to maintain a specific speed as dictated by the route instructions, with penalties assessed for being either early or late to one's ideal time at each checkpoint. The driving day is divided up into competitive sections known as stages, and non-competitive transit sections. The Alcan 5000 is huge, over 5,000 miles of driving, but there were only nine stages of about 15 miles each over the 10 days of the event; the remainder of the drive is transit. Besides these navigational challenges, the winter Alcan serves up huge climate challenges. Participants need to be prepared to endure extreme cold and be self-sufficient through most of it.

As a hobby I enjoy long road trips. I participated in both TSD and speed-performance rallies 40 some years ago, but family/business/other hobbies took priority over those four decades. In early 2018, I learned of the Alcan 5000, a rally that runs every two years, and covers roughly 5,000 miles from its start in Kirkland, Washington through remote and somewhat rugged roads of Canada and Alaska. The events alternate between summer and winter, and 2018 was a summer event. The rally for 2018 was fully booked with a substantial waitlist by the time I learned of it, so I set my sights on the 2020 winter event. I registered the day that registration opened.

I had two years to plan for this. First choice was my car; I have long been a Porsche fan and that was the only make of vehicle I would

consider. I have a 1980 911 SC “project car” that was being modified into a Safari-style 911, with raised suspension and a hood full of rally lights; at first thought this seemed ideal. Unfortunately this car was used and abused by countless previous owners, and while it is fun for an afternoon jaunt on local dirt roads, its reliability is poor, and I was concerned about the efficacy of the heating and defrost system for a winter arctic expedition. I nixed this car. My next choice was my Porsche Cayman R. This car I owned from new, is fantastically fun to drive, was in perfect condition, and had modern amenities and a powerful heater. Downsides of the Cayman are the low ground clearance, two wheel drive, and limited cargo capacity when it is necessary to carry at least one full-size spare tire, some tools, and arctic survival gear for driver and co-driver. I abandoned this car too for the Alcan. Next in my stable was a 2014 Porsche Cayenne diesel. Having seen the success of the identical model Cayenne “Otis” in the 2016 winter Alcan, I knew I could add a couple of driving lights to my Cayenne and have a reliable and capable vehicle, ready to go. I really enjoy my Cayenne, particularly the comfort, 700+ mile fuel range, ample cargo capacity and excellent towing capacity. But frankly it is not that much fun to drive in sporty situations, because it is a somewhat portly SUV that suffers from terminal understeer, and I suspect the sportiness of the diesel models is intentionally toned down by Porsche for the client who might choose a diesel SUV. I was looking for a sportier car for this adventure, so I ordered a new Porsche Macan GTS. The Macan platform offers a much sportier feel than my Cayenne, and provides sufficient cargo capacity, all-wheel drive, and comfort features that I wanted for the Alcan. I chose the GTS in part because of the standard suite of performance suspension options and the bold black-out aesthetic. Essential options for me were the air suspension, PTV (Porsche Torque Vectoring), LED headlights, roof cargo rails, and Bose sound system. The only downside of the GTS is the tire setup, the 20-inch wheels and extra wide tires being a poor choice for snow traction performance, but that was easily changed.



Macan, Toyota Landcruisers, two Cayennes, and a Mini ready for the next stage.

I took European delivery of the Macan in October, 2018, in Zuffenhausen. Being October and that I planned to drive far north in Norway over the next several weeks, Porsche fitted the car with Michelin Latitude Alpin LA2 SUV performance winter tires in the OEM size, 265/45-20 front and 295/40-20 rear. The “performance” in this case refers to dry and wet road handling performance better than a classic winter tire, not snow and ice traction performance. I was very pleased with the tires on the twisty Norwegian fjord roads, albeit with a bit squishy feeling compared to proper summer tires. I drove to the furthest north point in Norway, well above the arctic circle at about 71 degrees north latitude. The Norwegian arctic climate near the ocean is substantially moderated by the effects of the warm ocean Gulf Stream current, and the temperatures hovered somewhat above and below freezing during my time there, with regular precipitation. I found road conditions to be sometimes frozen rain/black ice, and often deep slush. In both of those conditions the Michelin tires performed poorly. Only a studded tire will offer much grip on ice in near-freezing conditions, and the very wide profile tire was prone to hydroplaning on slush, even at low speeds. I had many terrifying, quarter-mile drifts at low speed with little steering or braking control, though fortunately I never left the road. The proper tire for slush performance is skinny, with deep tread grooves in a directional V-pattern to channel the slush away from the center of the tire. Nearly all of the residents of arctic Norway ran studded tires, and the air around the roads shimmered with fine road dust, which over time changed the color of my car from beautiful Carmine Red to concrete gray. I was excited one day to find a 997-generation Porsche 911 parked at my hotel in the arctic, with non-studded winter tires and a sticker on the window proclaiming “Life is too short to drive boring cars.”

Back home I continued the planning phase, first to the tires. The Macan is fitted with a staggered tire setup, the rear wider than the front, however both front and rear are the same outside diameter. I did not like this setup for the Alcan, first that the wider rear tire offered less traction on snow, not more, and I might need to carry two spare tires of different sizes. Porsche would not endorse me using the same size tire front and rear for winter use, so I was left to figure this out on my own.

I researched various winter tires, but never strayed far from the Nokian Hakkapeliitta. I saw John Buffum win the snowy 1978 100 Acre Wood Rally in Missouri using Hakkapeliitta tires. The studded Hakka addresses the issues I found in Norway, and the tire is typically tops in winter tire testing. I ran a square setup of 235/60-18 front and rear and two identical spares, mounted on 18” x 8” Braid rally wheels.

I saw photos of a Trans-Siberian Cayenne with two spare tires mounted vertically in the aft storage area, with toolboxes between the tires. I

found that by removing the Macan's inflatable spare tire and the false floor above it, I could do the same. The tires were secured with ratchet straps looped around horizontal steel tubes bolted to the floor behind the tires and another bolted to the rear seat back latching point (the rear seat backs were removed for the event). This provided a secure mounting for the tires that should keep them in place in the event of a frontal collision. Note that I did not drill any holes in the car for this, I used only OEM mounting points. Tools, shovel, and food bags filled the space between the tires.



Photo by Jeff Lebesch.

Since the daily distance averaged over 500 miles per day and the daylight hours in the late winter Arctic are short, we would be driving a lot in the dark. The OEM Porsche LED headlights are excellent, especially on low-beam where there is a very sharp cutoff of up-scatter light and therefore very little reflection from fog or heavy snowfall. The high beams showed a good pattern, but I felt that the distance illumination was a bit weak, and good auxiliary lighting would be beneficial. I tested various round and light-bar offerings from Hella and Baja Designs, and settled upon the Hella 470 light bars. The Baja Design lamps were poorly focused in comparison. I chose the light bars because the greater side and vertical scatter would give better illumination for wildlife on the sides of the road, and the forward beam was less likely to be aimed too high or too low as the car pitched on uneven road surfaces, when compared to the very tightly focused round Hella LED Rally lamps. I fabricated a mounting bracket, yet mounting it was still somewhat difficult to manage but ties into the structure of the bumper, and also supports the lightweight skid plate. The skid plate I installed fearing an impact with an ice block dropped by a large truck, or something unseen in an off-road excursion. In hindsight the skid plate was unnecessary; it's a road rally after all, not an off-road rally.

Fuel range is required by the Alcan organizers to be not less than 250 miles and strongly recommended to be 300 miles or more. My Macan GTS can barely manage 300 miles on a smooth dry road, and fearing increased fuel consumption in difficult deep snow conditions or with poor fuel, I needed to carry auxiliary fuel. Instead of the crude-looking red gas cans strapped to the roof of most competitor cars and the residents of the far north, I fabricated a plywood shelf hung from the OEM roof rack cross bars and mounted two low-profile Rotopax four-gallon tanks, which would extend my range to over 400 miles. I never needed the auxiliary fuel on the rally, but did on the return drive, where I took the more remote Cassiar highway through British Columbia instead of the more populated Alaskan Highway. For several days in the arctic, fuel mileage dropped to 16 MPG and tank range to less than 240 miles, perhaps due to the low quality, regular grade fuel that was

the only gasoline available. Or perhaps it was the extreme cold.

Finally I needed to outfit the car with hardware and software for precision timekeeping in the regularity stages. There are a number of dedicated computers on the market for this purpose, but I was expecting that there could be a smart-phone app to do it, since the phones easily have enough computing power for the job. I tested perhaps a dozen apps, and sadly the vast majority suffered from one or more design defects such as small display size, small buttons, inability to calibrate the clock or odometer, or overall clunky and confusing operation. I finally found the Rabbit Rally app, which is brilliantly simple in its design and function, and has none of the above defects. I found this app less than two months before the start of the rally and put in plenty of time testing it. For distance input, it can use either GPS or wheel sensors; the wheel sensors should provide the best accuracy, but I did not have time to get that system to work and used an external Garmin GPS/GLONAS device for input. This proved to be very consistent, even at high latitudes, although there was a significant discrepancy between my odometer and the route book on the higher speed transit sections. I have not diagnosed this issue yet.



Photo by Jeff Lebesch

Practice was the final issue. I attended five days of organized ice driving school, split between Dirt Fish Rally School in Wisconsin and the Porsche Ice Experience in Quebec. There I learned that on low-friction surfaces, especially snow and ice, it is necessary to make very deliberate driver inputs to make the car rotate and have the highest corner exit speed, inputs that would be completely out of place on a dry race track. I ordered the PTV option on the car expecting it to improve turn-in rotation, which is noticeable on corner exit on dry roads, but it is ineffective on low friction surfaces; specific, aggressive driver input is required, which does not include mashing the gas pedal. This sort of skill level is not necessary to drive the Alcan, however there was one true ice race scheduled which would affect the scores in a modest way, and I wanted to build driver skills that would make the Macan, with its Porsche race track DNA, excel in the ice race, as I thought it could. Co-driver Ryan Trail and I also practiced navigation procedures and precision timekeeping for two days just prior to the event.

The Alcan started in Kirkland, Washington on February 26, with a 60-mile odometer calibration followed immediately by the first regularity stage, and another in Canada late in the afternoon. Doing our practiced best, but feeling nervous and struggling with odometer calibration, we were surprised to see that we scored 21 seconds combined error over 19 timing controls, putting us in fourth place overall. The Rabbit

Rally app was doing very well for us. The second day was the most challenging for most drivers, again with two regularity stages, but the roads were twisty and hilly and the surfaces were slick mud or deep slush, making it difficult at times to maintain even a 30-mph average speed. I credit the superb handling and ample power of the Macan, along with the Hakkapellita tires, to allow us to have the least “late” penalty and therefore best score for the day, moving us into second place overall. This felt astonishing, we were competing with some of the top navigators in North America, and here I was, a driver 40 years out of rally practice with a total novice navigator beating most of them. We did not talk to anyone about our position, worried it might jinx our luck.

The remaining seven regularity stages were all on packed snow and on straighter, less challenging roads. We worked to hone our odometer calibration, which was always slightly off, however Ryan could fine-tune the odometer on the fly and minimize our error.

The competitive element that I was most excited about was the ice race in Dawson City, on the frozen Yukon River. An undulating circuit course of just under one mile had been plowed by a local snowmobile club for our use. The surface was bare, hard ice, bordered by semi-soft snowbanks, and the air temperature was -25° Celsius. Every driver and co-driver had the chance to make two timed runs, and the two best times of each car were combined for the ice race score. The Macan and I notched the fourth fastest time, and had I not blown one turn on each run, I am confident that the Macan could have posted the fastest time overall. We advanced four seconds over the first place car, but it was not enough to change the standings. It is interesting to note that the second and third fastest times on the ice race were posted by all-wheel drive cars on non-studded tires, highlighting the evidence that road legal studded tires offer little advantage on cold ice, their greatest advantage being on wet ice, in near-freezing conditions. These wet ice conditions might exist in the Norwegian Arctic, but not commonly in North America, and I would not run studs on this event again. The road noise and poor dry road handling make studs not worth the very small chance that there might be conditions advantageous to those running them.

Following the ice race, it was clear that to maintain our second overall position we had to be consistent and never make a mistake, and the only way we could advance to first is if the first-place car made a mistake. Overall winners Kraushaar and Ankeny are very, very good, and were not about to make a mistake. We finished the event second overall, eight seconds out of first, and first in class of SUV/Trucks.

The event lived up to its billing as a great grand road trip. Much of the early driving in southern British Columbia was boring highways in the rain. The road trip adventure kicked up a notch on the second day in Dawson Creek, where the Alaskan Highway officially starts and one can find “Milepost 0,” along with plenty of tourist kitsch and a highway information center. There are likely lineups of RVs in the summer jostling for a photo-op at the Mile-Zero sign in the summer, but off-season we found only our group of dirty rally cars.



Once on the Alaskan Highway we saw an immediate drop in vehicle traffic, and a gradual increase in wild-ness overall. The temperatures dropped, roadside snow banks became much larger, and wildlife sightings became more common. Most unexpected for us were the groups of wild bison, which travelled along the wide roadside clearings that the northern road crews maintain in an effort to reduce vehicle-wildlife collisions. Signs warn about traveling at night in areas frequented by these big black behemoths.

On the third day, the rally kindly directed us into the parking lot of the Laird River Hot Springs, a year-round, maintained soaking pool. Only a handful of rallyists chose to take a dip there in the sub-freezing temperatures, but it was one of the highlights for us. The end of Day 4 took us into Dawson City in the Yukon Territory, located on the Yukon River and once a wild frontier town that grew up practically overnight during the Klondike Gold Rush of 1896-99. Today, Dawson City has preserved its frontier elements of boardwalks and saloons for the enjoyment of tourists. It was also the site of the frigid ice race described above. On day 5, with building winter storm conditions, we were directed onto the Dempster Highway. The Dempster is one of the most remote highways in North America, once a rough and rocky truck route to the northern communities, it is now a graded gravel road accessible to capable passenger cars during much of the year. There are a few river crossings served by ferries in the summer and an ice crossing in the winter, though impassible during freeze and break-up. The Dempster crosses wide expanses of arctic tundra and mountain passes, through areas of skinny trees struggling to gain a footing in the permafrost, and other areas of low growing tundra, dressed all in white during our passage.

Our northbound journey was severely challenged by poor visibility, blowing snow, and unexpected deep snow drifts across the road. The difficult conditions convinced 8 teams to turn back, the remainder pressing onward. Hitting a drift at speed was a thrilling photo op for some; for others, especially those with wide flotation tires, cause to simply slide off of the road without control. We crossed into the Northwest Territories on this driving day, where the road became noticeably wider and better graded. With very little road mileage in the NWT, the road crews there appear to have the time to keep their roads in great shape. The Dempster Highway terminates in Inuvik, a town of about 4500 residents deep in the arctic. Here we saw buildings built on steel pole foundations in order to preserve the permafrost, as well as fully equipped modern hotels. The air temperature was -31 degrees C, a never-before felt chill for me, even though I live in the Colorado mountains. It was time to break out the heavy down parkas.



Photo by Jeff Lebesch

Day 6 was the bucket list day, an out-and-back drive on an extension of the Dempster Highway to the native village of Tuktoyaktuk, on the edge of the Arctic Ocean. Prior to 2017, the only road to Tuk was a winter-only ice road winding through the braided delta channels of the Mackenzie River, but now there is this all-season road. We left Inuvik in the dark and witnessed the slow sunrise on the 90-mile drive to Tuk. The temperature had plunged to -40, and the air shimmered with ice fog. The sunrise was subtly beautiful, with layers of peach and lavender pastels colors mysteriously waxing and waning during our drive. Finally we arrived at the end of the road, the end of the continent, at latitude 69.45 degrees north, on the very shore of the ocean. A big sign illuminated by the soft low sun provided backdrop to the ultimate photo op of the trip, simply stating "Arctic Ocean." We walked on the frozen sea until Ryan's nose turned white from frostbite. The deep chill penetrated

my thick clothing layers with alarming determination. An iPhone was only good for one or two pictures before it shut down from the cold. I was thrilled, we drove to the Arctic Ocean in the winter!

Back in Inuvik before lunchtime, we had the option to drive one more “extreme” section as defined by the rally, the ice road to Aklavik. This road was entirely on the frozen Mackenzie River, plowed several lanes wide, and was rated for fully loaded semi trucks. We passed by iced-in ferries, and navigated our way both by signs posted by the highway crew, and the Garmin GPS, which showed the ice road in its entirety. The surface was slightly choppy with occasional cracks, but it was easy to cruise over 60 MPH, being vigilant for possible holes and ruts that could deflate a tire.



Photo by Jeff Lebesch

The final days of the rally were anticlimactic in comparison. Southbound on the Dempster Highway we had brilliant blue-sky weather and could see mountain ranges on all sides, draped in snow, which were invisible to us on the northbound, stormy weather passage. These last three days took us through Whitehorse again, to Fairbanks, and the finish in Anchorage.

Some people wondered how Ryan and I conjured up the luck to place second in the event. Luck had little to do with it. Planning, preparation, practice; this is what we did. The most important planning choice I made was the car. The Porsche Macan GTS had perfect reliability over 11,000 miles driven round trip from my home, started without assistance in -36 C air temperature, provided comfort to keep us fresh over massively long driving days, and the performance derived by Porsche racing DNA to keep us on time in the most challenging conditions and post best time on the ice race, had the driver been able to deliver. If I wanted to dial up the fun factor another notch, I would do the event in a 911 Carrera 4. Next winter Alcan 5000: 2024!

2013 Porsche Cayenne TDI – ALCAN 5000 2020 Review

By Dolores, Richard and ‘Otis’ Ranhofer

The Spell of the Yukon

*There's the land. (Have you seen it?)
It's the cussedness land that I know
From the big, dizzy mountains that screen it
To the deep, deathlike valleys below
Some say God was tired when He made it;
Some Say It's a fine land to shun;
Maybe; but there's some as would trade it
For no land on earth – and I'm one
- Robert W Service*



Forty-one cars, housing two to three participants each, lined up at the Totem Lake Hotel in Kirkland, Washington for the Winter Alcan 5000 Time Speed Distance (TSD) rally. They were in numerical order leaving one-minute apart. Kirkland is on the eastside of Lake Washington across from Seattle. The date was February 26, 2020. The 2020 Alcan 5000 is so named as it is a ~5,000 miles rally (one way) always starting in Kirkland and driving up to the North Country. This year's route included Quesnel, British Columbia – mile 490; Fort Nelson, BC – mile 1,106; Whitehorse, Northwest Territory (NWT) – 1,730 miles; Dawson City, Yukon Territory – 2,085 miles; Inuvik then Aklavik, NWT – mile 2,500; Tuktoyaktuk – 2,850 miles. Then back to Whitehorse – 3,600 miles; Fairbanks, Alaska – 4,200 miles; Chena Hot Springs and/or Coldfoot, AK – 4,800 miles. The 5,120-mile rally finished in ten days – during most of which the temperature was between -20° to -30° F – in Anchorage for the start of the Iditarod. Why would anyone in their right mind submit themselves to something like this? Read on!

Participants were from California, Oregon, South Carolina, the Seattle area, Texas, Pennsylvania, Alberta, Canada; Montana, New Mexico, New York, Idaho, British Columbia (BC), Colorado, and Connecticut. Rally temperatures ranged from a low of -40° F to a high of -21° F. When we finished in Anchorage and the temp was 21° we thought we were in the tropics. Cars ranged from two Porsche Cayennes, a Porsche Macan GTS, Subarus, Jeeps and Jeep Gladiators, BMW 325ix, Mercedes 350 4matic, Mitsubishi Montero, a right-hand drive Mitsubishi Pajero, Toyota FJs, and the winning vehicle – a stock 1973 Mercury Capri. You read that correctly. You see a TSD rally is precision driving. Speed is not your friend; being at the right place at the right time is the name of the game.



Cayenne, Macan, Cayenne

When we left Kirkland, we expected to encounter snow before we got to Quesnel. We did experience snow, but it wasn't anything to be concerned about. Driving from Quesnel to Fort Nelson the next day was a whole different experience. We were greeted with the "Star Wars" effect and the world disappeared before our eyes. This happened in the evening, in the dark, and became known as "The Blizzard at Pink Mountain." It was truly exciting and terrifying for everyone, but especially for friends of ours from Taiwan, although they are now living in Oregon. They said it doesn't snow where they are from in Taiwan and when Portland does get snow, it's well-mannered snow, not snow that wants to kill you.

You do not get in the way of the fuel, food, and logistics lifeline trucks or the snowplows. The roads may be snow covered or icy, but the plows mostly keep the drifts in check. With our Nokian Hakkapeliitta 8 studded snow tires, we had no issues with staying on the road. Dealing with the Peanuts' Pig-Pen inspired massive cloud of snow the oncoming trucks created was a different kind of whiteout. Trucks are the logistics lifeline getting fuel and food to the outlying settlements. Fuel is a life or death issue in the north country in the wintertime. We had to be careful at fuel stops for a couple of reasons. First consider yourself lucky to find a fuel stop open with fuel and working pumps between the widely dispersed villages. Then it is more usual to find agriculture and/or high flow nozzles at the diesel pumps, neither of which will fit a diesel passenger car. Porsche has an optional funnel to accommodate this situation. Lastly you need to be careful which pump to use as vehicle diesel fuel is right next to the pump for home heating oil. One good thing is that all diesel fuel is pretreated with anti-gel right from the pump. We always added extra as there are no second chances in these inhospitable conditions.



Queued up for the start of a regularity – everyone on their own minute

The rally assigned "Otis" the lucky car number 13. While this meant we had less time to prep for the day, it also meant we would be among the first to arrive at the day's end. This was very important as some locations had a limited number of places to plug in engine heaters. As a special feature, deleted just for North American cars, Porsche does not offer an engine block heater. We had to make do with just an inefficient heat pad glued onto the oil pan. The Rest of the World (ROW) gets a Webasto heater that is programmable to warm both the engine and passenger compartment. Both very desirable when it gets cold outside, especially as cold as it got on this trip!

The drives to Whitehorse and Dawson City, home of the Sour Toe Cocktail (don't ask), were beautiful and we found Dawson to be totally charming. The hotel was glad to see us — they generally don't have many folks this time of year — and the accommodations were great.



It was so comfortable that neither of us were jumping for joy to join in the Ice Races on the Yukon River. Dolores stayed in room while I ventured back out into the icy cold. To digress a bit, having an event on an iced lake or river usually requires an amount of grooming. Growing up in Vermont, we would prep the ice to create an ice skating rink on the lake in front of our house. The accumulated snow drifts plowed, a brave soul then determined its thickness for safety. The city of Dawson in preparing the surface had their plow break thru the ice. Ice racing is a popular sport there, plow swimming is not. Lucky for us, by the time we were to use the track it was thick enough but had some deep cracks. It was determined safe to use and no further issues ensued, aside from some trying to attain aspirational speed.

As I was arriving late to the party the vehicles were already staged for the course. I took the ferry road that looked like it was the way to go – not! About a third of the way there were no issues, then Otis broke thru the hard surface but still was making good progress. A bit further we were not able to move forward or backwards. From snow wheeling in the Pacific Northwest I tried lowering the air suspension to pack down the snow and raising it to drive off. This was futile. Another competitor leaving the ice race offered to help. Getting a pull, we were making good progress. That was until a third car tried the same path getting stranded and blocking our exit. After much work, all were back on the hard pack and on our way. During the rally many vehicles got stuck and were recovered with assistance from their fellow competitors.

Being prudent knowing that Otis had ~3,000 rally miles yet to go, my ice runs were fun but only placed mid pack for time.

Dawson is also where we were going to enter Highway 5 - THE DEMPSTER. The Dempster, Yukon Hwy 5, begins about 25 miles east of Dawson City, YT at its junction with the Klondike Hwy and leads 456 miles north to Inuvik, our destination. The first five miles are “seal coated” and the last six miles are paved. The rest of the 456 miles is gravel and so is easier to drive in the winter. At least that’s what [The Milepost \(link is external\)](#) chapter on the [Dempster Highway \(link is external\)](#) says. The highest point on the Dempster is 4,593 feet and is the continental divide between the Yukon River watershed where rivers flow west to the Bering Sea and the Mackenzie River system where rivers flow north into the Beaufort Sea. (So much for statistics.)



Everything stops for the logistics lifeline. This truck's heavy load gave it a bit of trouble on the icy hill. A road plow offered a push from behind

Let the games begin or how we survived whiteouts, snow blindness, outrageous winds and never got out of the car. The trip to Inuvik started reasonably enough. We learned to be aware of frost heaves, slick stretches, trucks, built up ice patches, and several other challenges. As we got closer to the 4,593-foot summit all hell broke loose. The mountains disappeared, the road disappeared, the wind was terrifying and the only way to continue driving was to locate the poles on the side of the road indicating where the road stopped and the ditches began. It was truly an alarming situation. We understand this was supposed to be a stunningly beautiful section of the highway, but when the mountains are white, the sky is white, the road is white, and it's snowing, appreciating the landscape was the last thing we were interested in. Once we crested the summit, conditions cleared and we were able to continue into Inuvik without any further disruptions. My first thought after this experience was: "We have to drive back the way we just came." My second thought was: "It's the journey not the destination." Not to worry, the return trip was three days away.



Inuvik was the way to the Holy Grail. We were going to [Tuktoyaktuk \(link is external\)](#) and the Arctic Ocean, a bucket list item if there ever was one. The only landmark north of here is the North Pole. On March 2, the day had arrived. We left for “Tuk” before sunrise and it was a glorious day. The sunrise was stunning, the road was easy to drive and we arrived just as the sun was coming up. “Tuk” was a lovely little village. People were walking around and here we were, all 40 car occupants, taking our pictures and thrilled to be in this spot. One notable site was seeing the schooner ‘[Our Lady of Lourdes \(link is external\)](#)’ that was both a logistical life line and used to take native Inuvialuit children away from their families to send them to Catholic institutions and schools. The highlight for Richard and me was we had now been to all of the earth’s [oceans \(link is external\)](#). We swam in the Atlantic, Pacific, and Indian and appreciated the beauty of the Arctic Ocean and the “Tuk” area. The only downside was it was -40F and so our picture taking time outside the car was limited. But, we had made it to one of the most isolated spots on the planet and that was special.

(As time passes definitions do change. Currently the International Hydrographic Organization lists over 70 distinct bodies of water called seas vs the traditional ‘[Seven Seas \(link is external\)](#).’ This body is currently deciding whether to include the Southern (or Antarctic) Ocean as the planets 5th ocean.)

The low temps were interfering with our electronics and our tire pressure monitors. Due to our geographic latitude, the confused navigation system map showed Siberia, the Bering Strait, the whole State of Alaska and the part of Canada where we were located at the time. So, the little orange delta on the Nav map just had us sitting somewhere, but we couldn’t tell where. At 69.4456° N, 133.0285° W, the ‘End of the Road’ (Inuvik-Tuktoyaktuk Highway (ITH)), we were as far north as we could drive on land. The next major northerly waypoint from here is the North Pole at 90.0000° N, 135.0000° W.



The TPS system was operating like a pinball machine - the numbers kept changing and we had no idea how much air was in each tire. Richard had a tire gauge, but it was -39F outside and that didn't include the wind chill. We decided to just let the temps and latitude have their way with Otis and wait until he was back in Seattle. (Everything returned to normal a few days after Otis was home.)

We were scheduled to leave Inuvik the next day. Richard decided the afternoon after we returned from "Tuk" to have the right front tire checked as it was registering about 10 pounds less than the other tires. While I was waiting for him in the lobby of the hotel, I heard the woman at the desk say: "The Dempster is closed because of a blizzard and they don't know when it will be open." We played this game two days before and I wasn't anxious to replay the weather. As we had checked out of the hotel word had it that there were no rooms available. I double checked and there were four rooms still available. I reserved one. The group was being split anyway, with the majority going to Eagle Plain and six couples staying in Inuvik. There were not enough rooms available in Eagle Plain due to the Dempster closure. Those staying in Inuvik would have a long 716-mile drive to Whitehorse the next day. If you went to Eagle Plain, it reduced the drive by ~200 miles. Somehow a warm bed and 700 plus miles seemed like a better deal. They did open the Dempster that evening and part of the group that had waited out the blizzard had motel rooms and part were invited to spend the night in the warming room of a church. The church was also having a Wake and they were invited.



Our drive back to Whitehouse on the Dempster was stunning. We had sun and mountains and a quick ice bridge transit across the Mackenzie River and the Peel River. It was everything we had been told it could be. There is an area named the Tombstone Mountains that has to be one of the most spectacular locations on the earth. We are so fortunate to be traveling in the winter where the landscape is wide open and there are few vehicles and no mosquitos. It was well worth driving the ~700 miles and enjoying the beauty of the day. We arrived in Whitehorse at a reasonable hour and were looking forward to driving to Fairbanks the next day. We spent two nights in Fairbanks at Pikes Lodge, some of the best accommodations we had on the trip. On March-5th we had the option of going to China Hot Springs or Coldfoot. We visited Coldfoot in 2016, the first time we did the winter Alcan, and so opted for the hot springs. We decided not to enjoy the springs or the Appletini that is served at what is supposedly an ice cave but is in fact a metal building that looks like a make-believe igloo. The Appletini is served in a glass that is carved out of ice. I like my martinis with vodka, a puff of vermouth and two olives and so cold that ice forms on the top. There is something about an apple martini that just doesn't appeal to me except maybe the ice. We drove back to Fairbanks and Pikes Lodge.

We left Fairbanks on March 6 and arrived in Anchorage in late afternoon. The award ceremony was at 7 pm that night at the Alaska Aviation Museum, a wonderful venue. The best part was talking to friends who had participated for the first time in the Winter Alcan and getting their impressions. Most have signed up for the summer Alcan in 2022.



The next day was the start of the Iditarod and the Running of the Reindeer. We saw the start in 2016 so passed on that, but did view the Running of the Reindeer. Actually, Reindeer are not as aggressive as bulls. This was more like the trotting of the reindeer.

However, some of the costumes were amazing considering how little they covered and the temp was +21F.

With lots of driving time, philosophical discussions ensued on topics as varied as

- Moisture in our dried Turkish apricots actually is water shipped from Turkey.
- When going ice fishing do you call your catch fresh or fresh frozen?

Our timing was perfect, as when we left COVID-19 had not yet brought travel restrictions in North America. Lucky to have returned prior to having border-crossing restrictions. After our return travel, restrictions were put in place like this one:

“Travel into NWT prohibited, with limited exceptions, The Northwest Territories Chief Public Health Officer has prohibited ALL travel into the NWT by non-residents to prevent the spread of COVID-19. There are limited exceptions.”



The road to Eagle Plain

As with our 2016 winter Alcan run we opted to ship Otis back to Seattle via Alaska Auto Transport. After driving competitively for 5,120 miles in winter conditions, a comfortable Alaska Airline flight home was welcome. We enjoyed our 911 RS America while awaiting the return of Otis.

Returning to the lower 48, it is now time for us to mentally and physically recover. The crazy times of social distance and staying at home are things we did not have to deal with when we set out on February 26. A good thing after 10 days of living inside a Cayenne, being home gives us a lot more room!

The summer event will have two major groups: dual sport motorcycles and autos. There are several classes to compete in from Unlimited that permits any and all TSD rally aids to the Touring class that is essentially coming along for experience. Any street legal vehicle is eligible for entry. Remember — a 1973 Mercury Capri won the 2020 Winter Alcan 5000!



1973 Mercury Capri that won the 2020 Winter Alcan 5000

Prior Proper Planning Preparation is critical to finish and for survival.

- Vehicle preparations – some were provisioned for our 2016 Alcan 5000 entry:
 - Diesel funnel, 100,000-mile check that included refresh of all fluids, serpentine belt, differentials, transfer case, and new brake

discs and pads, and winter tires – to stud or not to stud.

- Clothing most were provisioned for our 2016 Alcan 5000 entry:
 - Natural fibers are preferred to synthetics. In the event of an accident wool will keep you warm even if it's wet. Most of the clothing came from Filsons, Feathered Friends, Ibex.

Will we participate in 2024? The route will be different, the adventure will be beckoning, and life should be amazing. After an East Side Auto Salon detail, Otis does clean up nicely – ready for his next adventure



Would you be interested in participating?

It is not too early to start the planning and preparation for the winter 2024 event. The remoteness and rigor of the Alcan 5000 requires that both you and your vehicle and to be in good shape. This is an endurance run for you mentally and physically. You will also want to learn as much as you can about what TSD rally is about. Getting both one day and multiple day events under your belt will prove to be most beneficial. Like most sports TSD, while fairly straight forward, has a language and rules to become familiar with. Doing events prior will also give dividends for driver and co-driver coordination (navigator). This will also help set a routine for being cooped up in a vehicle for 10- to 12-hour days in a stressful / competitive situation that will strain any relationship.

Immediately after this winter's rally, 20 people had already submitted entries for the 2022 Summer Alcan, and now there is already a wait list. The summer rally includes motorcycles; in 2018 there were 40 cars and 40 motorcycles.

You may want to consider the 2024 Winter Alcan when entry opportunity becomes available.

For the winter 2016 rally we had three Porsche entries, 'Otis' one from South Africa and the other New Zealand. A stock 911 entry from Portland, OR successfully completed the Summer 2018 rally and has entered his 924S for 2022.

2009 - 997.2 Carrera 4 - ALCAN 5000 2018 Review

By Euan Pollock



Getting down and dirty. Photo by Euan Pollock

I, along with my dad Bill, did the 2018 ALCAN 5000 summer rally in a 2009 Porsche 911 Carrera 4. I am also signed up to run the summer Alcan again in 2022, though I missed out on the winter running this year due to work commitments — a situation I need to rectify. For the 2022 ALCAN I've got a different Porsche lined up, a 924S. I also have a Cayenne - an incredible car.



Photo by Euan Pollock

The event itself is incredible and organized by truly dedicated people who put a huge amount of work into the event. I cannot speak highly enough of Jerry Hines and his team. Fantastic people and a fantastic event.

The idea behind running the 2018 Alcan for me was that it roughly coincided with my dad's 70th and my 40th birthday. A great plan, not particularly well thought out, but for me that is fairly typical. I am currently a resident of the US. I've lived all over the country, but for the last few years I've been in Oregon. This made good sense with the Alcan start being just up the road in Seattle. The challenge is, I'm Scottish, so we had to get my dad and my mother over here for the Rally and deal with all the logistics entailed in that. Growing up, my dad was an avid motorsport fan and participant. When I was a kid he raced cars for many years. He has also owned Porsches over the years. I think this inflicted me with the curse of being a car fan.



4,500 miles of largely deserted, beautiful roads. Photo by Euan Pollock

Our original plan was to run my 1957 Triumph TR3, but for a variety of reasons this plan did not pan out — surprising with a couple of sprightly young lads like us. The back-up car was my Porsche 911 Carrera 4, a 2009 model with the six-speed manual. The car is essentially stock with the exception of Bilstein shocks and lowering springs (yep, a lowered 911 for the Alcan). I downsized the standard wheels and tires — 235/40 and 295/35-18 to 215/60 and 265/55-17. I did this to get a bit more padding from the slightly taller tires, and I switched to Yokohama tires as they had the most aggressive tread pattern I could realistically get. Other than that, I folded down the back seats and stuffed a spare in there and that was about the sum total of the preparation.



Carrera 4 near Stewart, BC. Photo by Euan Pollock

Rocking up to the start in Kirkland in a lowered 911 and seeing not much other than lifted Jeeps, pick-ups, and other off-road machines, a bit of panic set in. Luckily there were a few other more adventurous types, driving things like Minis and Hertz Mustangs that put our minds at ease a tiny bit. With respect to road conditions, I'd say we encountered pretty much every type of surface you can imagine, from freeways to narrow, potholed and rutted-out gravel roads. Once we turned left off the Trans Canada highway in BC we were out of traffic and the fun began. It was probably 4,500 miles of largely deserted, beautiful and fast roads. I'm not sure of the actual mileage of gravel but with the top of the world highway in there it was probably close to 200 miles or so. As I said above the gravel ranged from rough to really rough. The only time things were a bit sketchy was getting off the Dawson City Ferry, I managed to crumple a bit of the front bumper over a pothole. there,

but it was nothing too serious.



Dawson Ferry - only real trouble spot. Photo by Euan Pollock

With all the hard running for many hours each day, the car consumed a bit of oil, maybe two quarts in the 10,000 mile round trip. There were no squeaks or rattles in the car at all over the entire trip. The car was the least eventful part of the journey, it handled everything flawlessly with no issues at all. When I got it back to Oregon, I serviced it and took the underbody linings off – apart from some gravel and dust there was no evidence at all of what it had been up to. To answer the question more directly, the car ran like a dream, took everything thrown at it with no issues at all; it was thrashed for a solid two weeks from Oregon to Fairbanks and back again. I'd say we basically just jumped in it and drove it like crazy through some of the most beautiful scenery in the world and over roads 99% of 911 owners wouldn't go near, and it just lapped it all up. There is no doubt in my mind Porsche builds these cars to be as tough as nails yet perform like a supercar and still be fine doing the school run. I would do it again (and hopefully will) in a 911 anytime – but for 2022 I have a bit of a trick 924S up my sleeve.



Photo by Euan Pollock

This is my second 911 and it is a keeper, we have definitely bonded and I could see it being with me forever – the way they are built I'll fall apart long before it does.
