



The Summer's Longest Rally Tests Competitors, Stamina, and Vehicles

BY MERCEDES LILIENTHAL

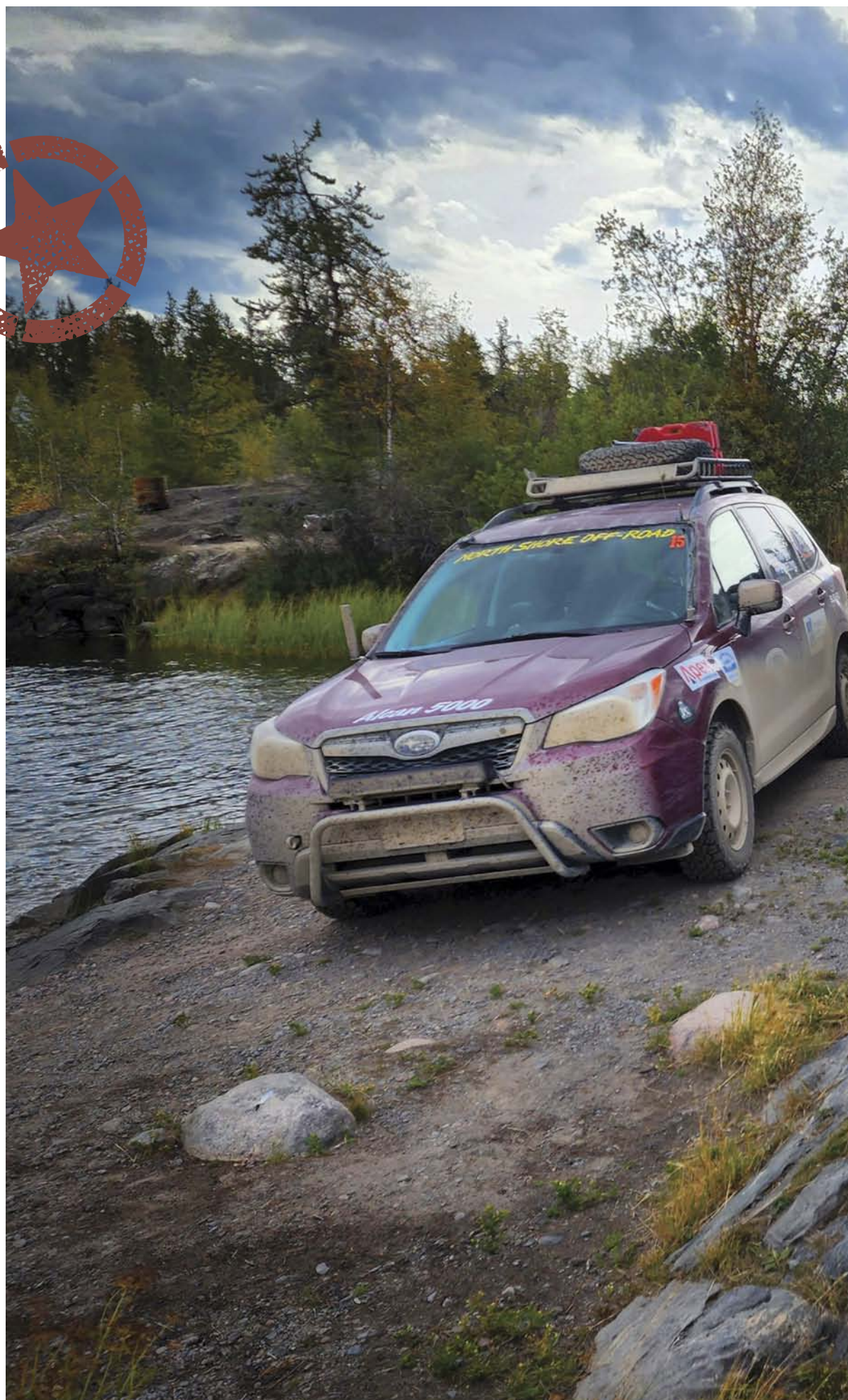
Hurdling through aspen forests and sun-kissed hillsides, ralliers kept on the straight and narrow as time-speed-distance (TSD) competitions intensified. It was Day Three of the 2022 summer Alcan 5000 Rally and teams were heading from Smithers, British Columbia, to Watson Lake, Yukon Territory. Would we hit a bear or miss a moose? Would we escape gazillions of bugs that followed us with intentional fury? Time would tell as sleep deprivation seared deeply into our competitive souls. This is the Alcan 5000 Rally: the summer iteration.

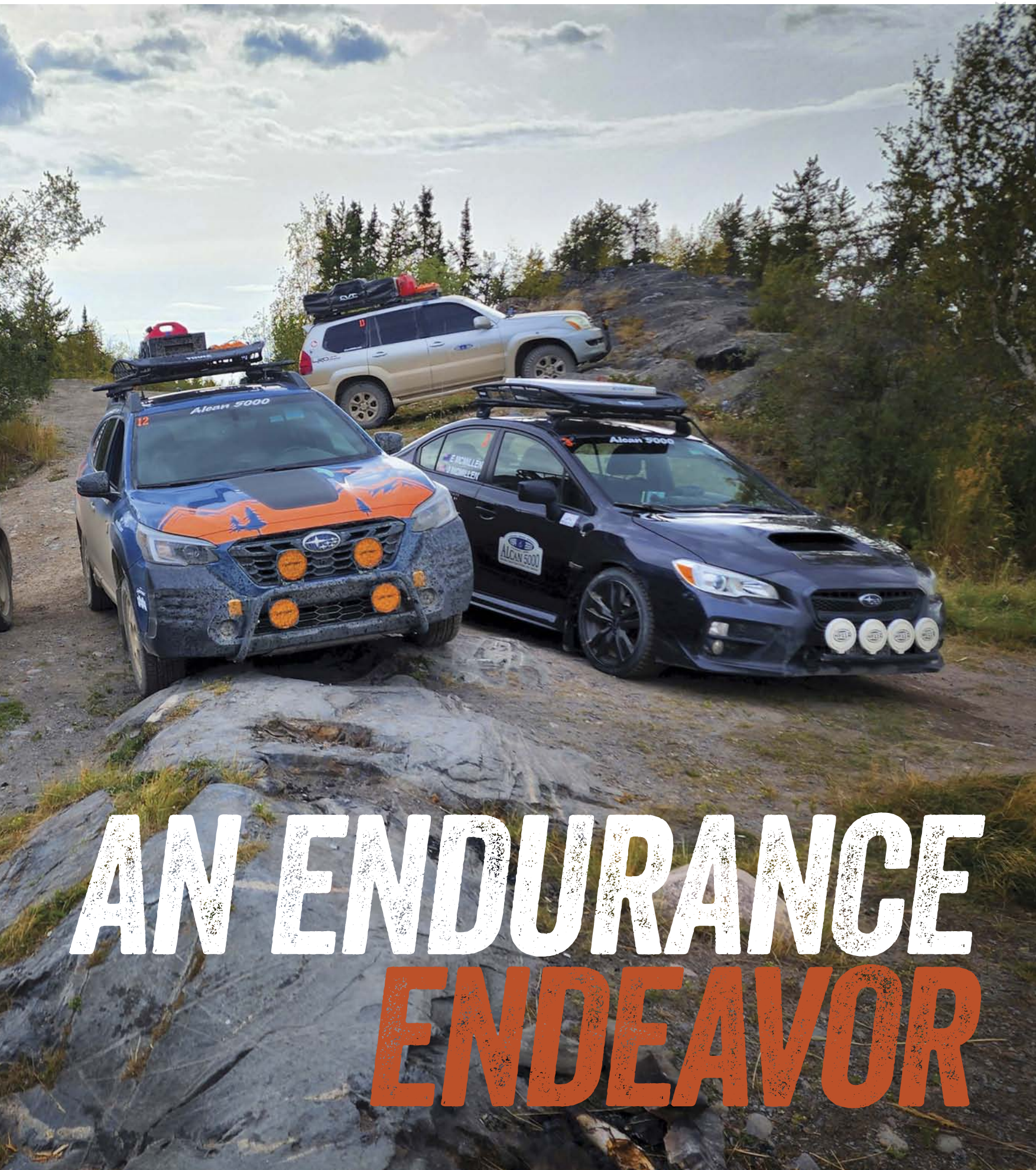
The 2022 Alcan 5000 Rally

Folks were settling into the new norm: wake up, pack up, check the car. Then travel precisely 27 mph for 0.64 miles, change speeds to 34 mph for 1.29 miles, turn right and switch to 43 mph for 5.32 miles, and so on. Once the early-morning timed sections of the rally finished, teams would drive up to 600-plus miles to the next TSD challenge or that evening's motel. Lather, rinse, repeat.

The Alcan 5000 Rally is not a "go fast" race of speed run by high-horsepower adventure rigs. This rally is a game of precision and control while correctly following a thick spiral-bound roadbook of directions.

First created in 1984, the Alcan 5000 Rally follows the same cadence as the Olympics. Whereas the winter rally allows only vehicles,





AN ENDURANCE ENDEAVOR



“ALCAN 5000 RALLY COMPETITORS FORM AN INDELIBLE BOND WITH THOSE THEY MEET AND COMPETE ALONGSIDE.”

Most rally vehicles carried at least one fullsize spare tire, extra fuel, and added auxiliary lighting.

Daniel Merkins and Ryan Smiley, of Vancouver, British Columbia, piloted one of a few Jeeps during the competition. It was because of them that a select few of the ralliers could see the Northern Lights a few miles down the road.

The 2022 Outback Wilderness was already primed for competition in stock form, although the duo added a few key upgrades to enhance its rally-readiness. A Rally Innovations light bar and four Lightforce Venom auxiliary lights were added to the front, whereas a Factor 55 HitchLink 2.0 vehicle recovery point was installed in the factory-optional 2-inch hitch receiver bracket in the rear.

Other exterior accoutrements included Subaru-supplied OE flexible mud flaps (which cover a similar swath of tread as Rally Armor does) and stock Yokohama Geolandar A/T G015 all-terrain tires with full-size matching spare. A factory-available Thule roof basket carried four Maxtrax Mini recovery boards, a stout storage box, and a 5-gallon fuel canister.

Interior add-ons included a variety of Scosche mounts to hold smartphones and handheld radios for emergency communications. A

Driver Andy Lilienthal tops off fluids along route. Ledlenser headlamps provided ample light for detailed checks and managing cargo late at night.



the summer version welcomes four-wheeled people haulers, as well as adventure motorcycles.

This year's summer rally took competitors from Washington state due north through Canada's remote wilderness. Teams of 26 automobiles and 17 motorcycles left Kirkland, Washington, and wound their way through Quesnel and Smithers, British Columbia, before arriving at Watson Lake, Yukon, and north up to Dawson City, Yukon—this year's northernmost point.

The 2022 Alcan 5000 Rally then turned south through Whitehorse, Yukon, with an optional dip into Skagway, Alaska, and back, before heading east towards Fort Nelson, British Columbia and Yellowknife, Northwest Territo-

ries, before arriving at Peace River, Alberta. The rally's finish was in Jasper, Alberta, approximately 5,000 miles later. Optional routes along the way further tested competitors. Landslides, wildfires, and wildlife were dodged. Mechanical issues, split windscreens, and sickness became apparent.

A Variety of Vehicles—including a Subaru Outback Wilderness

From Porsches and Toyotas to Jeeps and a Lexus, there were several 4x4s in action. All-wheel drives were aplenty, too, while a few front- and rear-wheel-drive runabouts were challenged during the endurance rally. Subarus showed up in force, including our modified 2022 Subaru Outback Wilderness, supplied by Subaru of America.





Scosche inverter and power bank helped to keep camera batteries, Ledlenser headlamps and work lanterns, and other critical equipment charged while on the go. A Warn vehicle recovery bag and other essentials were safely stowed in the vehicle, too.

The Subaru Outback Wilderness' rear cargo area housed factory-optional heavy-duty rubberized cargo mat and protective sides. The rear bench seat donned an OE-available thick and fitted khaki-colored canvas seat protector—all which kept the interior from scratches and stains as cargo was loaded and unloaded during the rally.

Optional Earnings

Teams daring enough to complete all optional and extra "extreme control" driving routes earned the coveted Arctic Award. These included secluded gravel treks like 140 miles to Telegraph Creek and back after a long day of rallying or a dip across the border from Canada into Skagway, Alaska, and back through thick fog and winding narrow roads. The Go Farther award and others were also given.

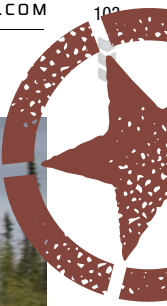
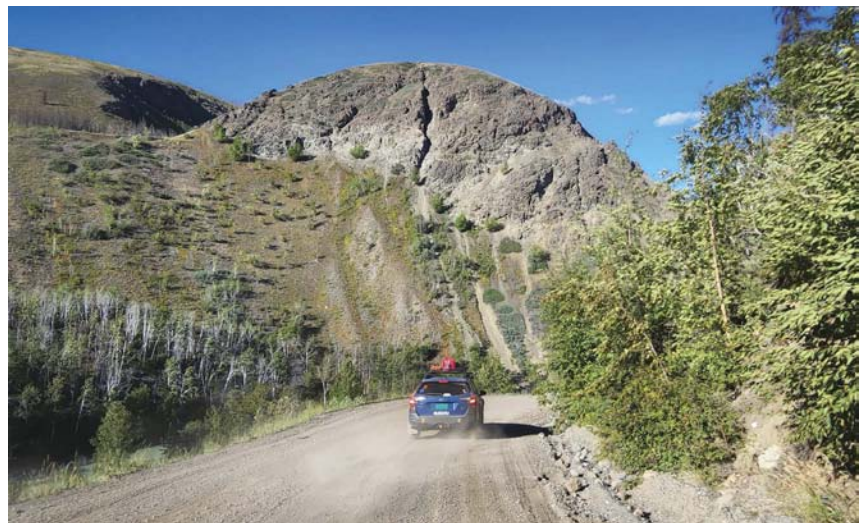
Rally classes included various "seat of pants," or SOP, segments and unlimited designations. Historic teams consisted of vehicles with four wheels and motorcycles with two or three

Buddy #13 rally car, Garrett and Kristen Arendt in their Lexus GX470, cruise over the mighty Mackenzie bridge near Fort Providence, Northwest Territories—the land of millions of bugs.

Although much of the rally consisted of poor to mediocre road conditions at best, there was a surprising lack of washboarded surfaces.

Ralliers encountered dusty and dry conditions, as well as rain along the 1,500 miles or so of dirt and gravel roads. However, Subaru's symmetrical all-wheel-drive system made simple work of challenging conditions.

The Subaru Outback Wilderness offers factory steering response LED headlights and geometric LED fog lights. However, a Rally Innovations light bar and Lightforce Venom LED Lights enhance visibility in tricky driving conditions.



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wheels. Ralliers that had autos 1991 and older (like the Mitsubishi Pajero we rallied in winter of 2020), or motorcycles 1997 and older were considered. The top three teams in each class received First, Second, or Third Place acknowledgements.

One Team Award is also given. Team entries had to include at least one vehicle, one motorcycle, and one rookie automobile (where no teammate has run or worked an Alcan 5000 Rally before). Each entry on designated award teams was given a score factor. The winning team, with the lowest average score factor, won said designation.

Rally Hardships

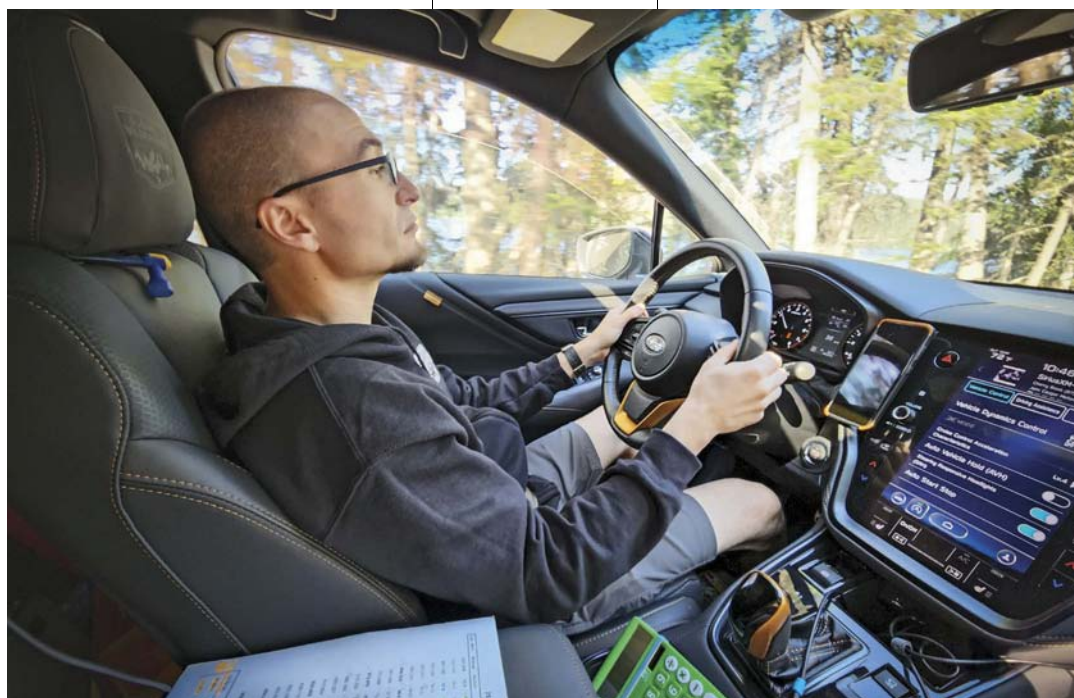
Of the 43 total teams that competed in this year's rally, 42 completed the grueling competition. The 5,000-mile track tore up tires and shattered fog lights. It also clogged up air filters, destroyed distributors, and whisked wheel studs into the unknown.

On day two, moto #34, Ed Fule, riding his BMW R100GS, lost control. His motorcycle laid on its side on the Blackwater Road, just outside of Quesnel, British Columbia. The

Parking lot fixes and roadside assistance were a regular occurrence during the 2022 Alcan 5000 Rally. Moto team #35 struggles to change a tire and was delayed but later back on the road.

Adventure motorcycles start each day after the rally vehicles, each rider playing both roles of a typical rally team: driver and navigator.

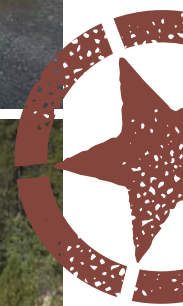
Driver Andy Lilienthal pilots the Subaru-sponsored Outback Wilderness while the author navigates for the entire competition.



bike was damaged, but he tried to continue. Matt and Rick Nash, from the rally's Sweeps 3 team, who were dedicated to help ralliers in need of assistance, offered to help fix the bike, but Fule ultimately turned around and headed home.

Car 21, a 1995 Ford F-150 riding on 35x12.5 R17 Nitto Ridge Grapplers driven by Lance DesBaillets from Oak View, Calif., burned through three quarts of oil in just 8,000 miles, but didn't suffer damage other than accelerated wear and tear. His words of advice: Don't put anything chocolate on the floorboards or it will melt and fill up with fuel before shenanigans ensue. Truth.

"I loved how you could see zero cars for hours, then you come around a corner 500 miles later, and all your buddies are at the right place at the right time, and you feel like you never missed a beat," DesBaillets stated.



"WOULD WE HIT A BEAR
OR MISS A MOOSE? WOULD
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Rick Higgs, rolling on 12-inch wheels with his subcompact front-wheel-drive 1973 Leyland Australia Mini window van, ran into ignition issues on day 3 while driving on the Stewart Cassiar Highway, south of Dease Lake, British Columbia. On day 9, two rear-wheel studs snapped, with the other two crumbling under increased tension—undoing the wheel nuts. Fortunately, the hub was replaced with a spare.

Unbeknownst to him, Higgs's trusty 15-75 ft.-lb. torque wrench had failed as the wheel nuts

(the last two studs that failed) were torqued right before the event's start.

The Power of Community

No matter what happens on the Alcan 5000 Rally, the organizer, rally staff, and competitors are quick to lend a helping hand to those in need. The camaraderie is beyond imagination. Ralliers assisting each other with tools, knowledge, other gear, or even fuel at a moment's notice—it's what makes the Alcan 5000 Rally so special. Not only do teams get to enjoy incredible scenery and drive 5,000-plus miles

Rallier Glyn Trafford stares at unexpected Northern Lights in Fort Nelson, BC.

of challenging roads most others will never see, but they also encounter an abundance of wildlife along the way (like moose, bear, caribou, porcupines, and foxes).

Alcan 5000 Rally competitors form an indelible bond with those they meet and compete alongside. It's why we are already looking forward to the winter 2024 Alcan 5000 Rally. ➔



Author and her husband, driver Andy Lilienthal, make a quick stop at the Northwest Territories border to pose with their rally rig, a Subaru Outback Wilderness. (Photo: Glyn Trafford)



The teams that completed the optional "extreme control" driving route were treated to glimpses of nearby mountains and the Fraser station building and waterhouse of the White Pass and Yukon Route.



As the majority of competitors went to bed, a few sought darker skies as the Northern Lights intensified. A fifteen-minute light show gave spectators spectacular moving ribbons of emerald green, slices of purple and white, and an expansive view across the sky.