

# Totem Rally 2002

Ron Sorem © 2002

We arrived Friday night. The Subaru RX Rally Team with Ron Sorem and Max Vaysburd, passed tech inspection, applied the necessary numbers and decals, and settled in for dinner and rally lore with a good sized group ready for 2002 Totem on snow.

Saturday morning brought the reality of no snow, some mud, and some ditch-to-ditch ice. Tire choice was highly discussed and our choice of studded Hakkas seemed right.

With exception of Car 1 being the BMW 325ix of Eric Horst and Steve Willey, the next seven cars were Subaru, as were 15 of the 33 entries. The first six cars on the road were Unlimited. Car 7, Gary and Travis Rea in a WRX, was Calculator. Max and I were Car 8 in the RX, running USA "Equipped" in BC's "Unlimited" class with the AlfaPRO odo and an unattached laptop. The competition would be very tight.

Car 2, Greg Hightower and Russ Kraushaar in Greg's red 2.5RS, was my target. Greg and I were tied for Pacific Coast Challenge drivers points coming into Totem, with Eric Horst close behind.

Car 3 was the nearly unbeatable team of John Fouse and Dennis Wende in John's white WRX. That is, white at the start. By the Service Break all the cars were light brown.

Further back in the pack were Novice phenoms Peter and Owen Parsonage, the BC father and son team in a red Impreza 2.5RS pressing all the computer cars. Also present and ever the threat in SOP were Dan and Stuart Fealk, son and father running Paper class; Stuart doing all the speed calcs with just pen and lots of paper, Dan keeping it between the ditches in their red Subaru XT6.

At the driver's meeting, Rally Master Paul Westwick apologized for the lack of snow, explaining one section had been dropped for fear few cars would make it through the mud, and that the "cautions" were to be taken seriously—no trees to slow your decent should you leave the road. Also, hitting any of the cattle would probably do you more harm than to the cattle. We were reminded to be certain to fuel at the Service Breaks, as it would be over 250km without another fuel opportunity.

The first "confidence trap" came on the Odo Check, which ended at a bridge, on the fly, but very near two similar signs. The zero point was at the bridge, not the concrete guardrail where many cars were parked. There aren't supposed to be traps on BC rallies. A quick u-turn to double check we'd correctly read the reference points, and re-zero, and then continue north.

The rally left highway 97 for the 88km Meadow Lake Regularity. This is the surface change test: Dry gravel, wet gravel, occasional puddles and mud, then a glimpse of snow--immediate crest, full snow, medium right off camber, sideways and recover--wide awake now!! I don't know how the icy mud and gravel treated the first couple of cars, but by the time we came through the consistency was similar to brown crushed ice.

A short transit, then due south. The Jesmond Regularity was 55km of 72- and 60-km/h with one caution and one 1/2km at 27k. My speedo barely registers at 27k (16.8mph). Into Clinton and Service, to compare notes and/or rally stories.

North of Clinton the 88km Big Bar Regularity was our first nemesis. I apparently forgot how to drive on loose surfaces. I took a "4" and a "6" along with several real "zeroes", then local traffic came into play just in time for "Caution! through narrow gorge" and hairpin exposures. On-time coming in, late at the hidden control in the middle of the downhill hairpin with a speed change.

At 72.02 "Caution!! 90R, Exposure L"... this is one of the notes from the drivers meeting; past events have seen big "offs" here. 1996 Thunderbird saw a several-hundred-foot skid with no trees to slow the action. There is no snow and it's daylight, but this all looks vaguely familiar. In 1971 on Thunderbird I was being caught through here on every corner, then I could open up on the straights. At 84.72 this must be my corner. It now has a warning sign; the route book says "Caution! Exposure L". In '71 it was snow and ice and pitch dark, and the instruction was "Caution. Blind Crest. Hard Right. Hard Left." I made the blind crest but missed the hard right— This year I was more cautious. We pass the control at Dog Creek Road and end the stage before the Fraser River Suspension Bridge, toward Gang Ranch. In all the years I've rallied up here this will be my first trip through Gang Ranch. It seems my drive has always ended early each time events have used this road.

Gang Ranch stage is 79.87km through one of the largest cattle operations in North America and as we transit through the ranch yard and past pastureland being worked, a BIG farm tractor is parked with headlights toward the road, watching the parade. At 7.93 we are downhill into a "Bridge, Caution! Slippery". What the instruction didn't mention was the big drop-off entering the bridge. Brake hard, nose down, time the rebound, and launch onto the bridge deck. At 12.92 "CG, Caution! Watch for Cows", and sure enough they are everywhere, just room for one car between BIG brown bodies. We later learn that Car 1 has awakened the herd and Car 2, Hightower's RED Impreza has helped to open the path for following competitors. At about 40.00 we find our first really big water splash. The center looks bad, the road has expanded around it on both sides. I take the right side, part road part field. It is still deep wet and rough. I can't imagine which line Car 9, Steve Brown and David Glassman, will take in the Audi S4 Avant.

Riske Creek Transit and Meldrum Regularity are uneventful. Hargreaves Transit back across the Fraser River is normally a regularity but takes us now to Soda Creek, 11.46km to the Williams Lake city limits, and another 11km transit to dinner. We are 5<sup>th</sup> UNL, 6<sup>th</sup> OA with another RX, RJ Carroll and Ren Carroll, close behind.

Day Two promised to be different. Rally Staff were quiet, with knowing smiles when asked about the roads. Different.

Our day started with a mystery—absolutely no electrical power. No ignition, no lights, just the “key-in--door-open” chime. It is still dark. Did I leave a dome light on? A passer-by offers a jump—cables connected, no spark. What the ....? Are the cables broken? I short the ends across—Oh Yeah!! His battery is hot, the cables are hot, and my battery is hot. OK what now. Panic. Go through a mental checklist—fuses, ignition switch—no power. Gather one’s thoughts. Fusible links? There are four; I don’t recall what they protect. Wiggle and prod. A click, another wiggle, and the link disintegrates in my fingers. I get another from the “spares” box. Engine fires off like nothing had happened. Whew!

Breakfast and Route Books and a very brief driver’s meeting with a hint that we may or may not like the roads. Different.

We head out on the opening transit. I remember the first part of the route from 2000 T-Bird. The day should start well. Not so fast... 1/2km before the Regularity we are flashed down by the Parsonages—Owen yells out the window: “You are steaming”. The cloud catches us—it’s not steam. SMOKE! Great – turns out the power steering pipe-to-pump fitting has loosened and is shooting oil all over everything. Tighten the culprit, refill with fluid—no leaks—arrive at the start still smoking but on-time. Steering is heavy but do-able. We will use the Carlos Sainz WRC Focus excuse if needed.

Spokin Lake to Lac La Hache is over 80km of smooth wide gravel with bits and pieces of twisty narrow snow. Yes, the road conditions are different. Lac La Hache through Helena Lake to 100 Mile House is another 58km with snow and mud and locals. We did OK with all three, and arrive at the Service Break with no further problems and carrying low scores.

Leg 4 is to be two Regularities of 91.52 and 80.98 km. Ample opportunity to snatch defeat from the jaws of victory. (We would later learn it wouldn’t matter—Greg and Russ would zero the whole day). We ran through snow and frozen mud—the tracks of hunters and loggers don’t work well for small cars. You are in one rut, straddle another then switch—planned or not. Then sweeping open corners with exposures and a caution: “Car Breaking Cross Ditch” at 20km/h, which might still have been too fast. This was indeed rough. Muddy; slide off to the left, crawl over rocks, recover, then blow the control!

At 47.26 Max reads “Bridge”, then “Do Not Pass”. Well, what I heard was bridge coming up, then do-not-pass. I had just caught local traffic. Pretty slow, pretty wide... What do you mean I can’t pass!? OK, I’ll pass before the do-not-pass section... You know, fatigue does funny things to communication. I passed, got back to on-time, only to see the “Do Not Pass” school bus sign reference. We chuckled about that for a couple of minutes.

“Deadman-Cache Creek Road” is different without snow. Faster. At 73.23 “Caution! (a.k.a. The Yawning Pit of Death)”. Legend is sometimes worse than reality. I had never seen this set of corners, but heard of it in many stories. With snow it would be very different. We were on-time at the top, down six coming out, and still down a little as we passed the last control.

Rally over. We finished 6<sup>th</sup> UNL with 46, our best yet, having been caught by the Carrolls with 35. A great rally, and YES!, I had finished.

1 <sup>st</sup> UNL 1 <sup>st</sup> OA	Greg Hightower/Russ Kraushaar	Subaru 2.5RS	5
2 <sup>nd</sup> UNL 2 <sup>nd</sup> OA	John Fouse/Dennis Wende	Subaru WRX	11
1 <sup>st</sup> NOV 3 <sup>rd</sup> OA	Peter Parsonage/Owen Parsonage	2.5RS	17
1 <sup>st</sup> HIST 9 <sup>th</sup> OA	Gil Stuart/Arnie Lang	Volvo 123GT	105
1 <sup>st</sup> CALC 10 <sup>th</sup> OA	Jeff Vanderwall/Nicole Vanderwall	Colt	111
1 <sup>st</sup> PAPER 15 <sup>th</sup> OA	Dan Fealk/Stuart Fealk	Subaru XT6	149

Thanks to the WCRA and Paul, Tony, Andrew, Bill, Shelly & Fred, and more.

Day Three? We left Cache Creek pre-dawn, having checked the oil, coolant, and power steering. 17km before Boston Bar the motor violently expelled all its coolant and quit. An hour later having found what might be a leak—emphasis on “might”, I had the engine running and a highway department truck blocking my rear bumper. We take off, get five seconds further south and do our best imitation of a steam locomotive. The highway guy radios for help. We are picked up by Boston Bar Towing and delivered to U-Haul in Chilliwack. I trailer home for the second straight Totem. Max may have had the quote of the day—“next time... I’ll bring warmer clothes for Thunderbird”.

We’ll see you next rally.

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