

Thunderbird Rally 2007

Ron Sorem © 2-19-2007

February 17-18, 2007. Merritt to Vernon to Merritt, British Columbia.

This was the **50th Anniversary Thunderbird Winter Rally**, presented by the West Coast Rally Association, continuing the event originated by the University of British Columbia Sports Car Club, whose mascot is the namesake for the rally. The 2007 event also marked the 20th Anniversary of the “modern” Thunderbird, and for Rallymaster Paul Westwick, who brought back Thunderbird in 1987 after its TSD retirement in 1973. Paul has been the only Rallymaster since the 1987 return.

Merritt in 2007 was far different than 2006. Warmer temperature (shirt sleeve weather) and very little snow pack. Friday afternoon's Novice workshop was well attended, and the evening hours brought a near continuous influx of competitors and workers. Tech Inspection saw nearly all of the entrants on Friday night, then workers and competitors alike celebrated the camaraderie that abounds in this hobby.

Saturday morning dawned with broken overcast skies, moderate temperatures and no new snow. Tech Inspection processed the remaining few entrants. Novice Driver Meeting, then Driver Meeting, prepared 48 cars for their two-day adventure on gravel, wet gravel, mud, frozen mud, snow over mud, and some deep snow. Also present, especially on Day Two, was the ever-increasing possibility of deep water!

Saturday's Odo Check ran south on Highway 5A, toward Aspen Grove. The 17-km **Kentucky-Alleyne Regularity** traveled eastward through the Provincial Park. Last year this section (running reverse course) saw deep snow, cars “off”, and a moose. This year's running was uneventful as to wildlife encounters. Most of the snowbanks survived unharmed as well.

A short freeway transit (relative term for all BC events) brought the Sunset Main exit and **Marsh Lake Regularity**. **Marsh Lake** was a great mix of road surfaces over its 66.5-km (longest of the event). Starting on Sunset FSR, at 55 km/h, with wet gravel in bright sunlight, every shaded corner presented frozen surfaces on the wide main logging route. Turning North under the freeway onto Bear Creek FSR, now 65 km/h, crews found a mix of bare gravel and frozen mud. Minor excursions onto the narrow little bypasses presented pure white snow. Then Pennask Lake Road, 60 km/h for the first 3-km, dropping to 50 km/h -- no salt melt, no gravel for traction, no mud showing through -- simply white, tree lined, and not much wider than the mirrors in places. Max Vaysburd and I were “Checkpoint Crew G”, and able to run ahead of most of the event. Our first CP assignment in this Regularity was in the middle of a left-right into downhill. We were instructed to park in a plowed out area. Assessing the parking situation, and finding no safe place to avoid any errant cars, I set out to find our alternate assigned spot. Location number two was in the middle of a dropping right-hander in another plowed out corner. Not having immediate access to said plow, the side road that was intended as our cover was itself covered so deeply that we would be what stopped any cars failing to negotiate the twisting, slippery (but beautiful) downhill. Having an accurate odometer, and HAM radio contact, a compromise was made. An impromptu CP at a convenient cattle guard became our **Marsh Lake** location. The road opened up

considerably here and speed increased as well. The first few Unlimited cars were right on the money. On Time All The Time. Our timing point was just out of the shadows into the bright sunlight. Our white car was nearly camouflaged by snow, a bit up the road in the shade. It was amusing to hear the exhaust notes of most of the field rising and falling, trying to adjust a second (or more) at a time to be just perfect as they passed our car, only to find later that they'd been timed seconds earlier at the cattle guard. **Marsh Lake** beyond our CP returned to twisting and narrow through the forest, then wider, softer, muddier, and river-like as the route emerged onto the rolling range land. Drivers found the deep mud disconcerting, as entry to a corner might well be determined more by the track of the previous car than the set-up by each driver. Having the car drift suddenly half-a-car wide to the outside is both a rush and a panic, depending on the velocity involved. More than one competitor, and one checkpoint crew (me) found the soft snow along the narrow track and "field tested" our tow straps. Thank you Sweep! Further into the section was our first really big water splash, in full view of a checkpoint. The remainder of the Regularity followed the wide FSR and ranch access down through the big hairpins to Nicola Lake.

The brief transit along Nicola Lake, and climb up the plateau again on Douglas Lake Road, brought the rally to Lauder Road and the **Peter Hope Regularity**. Lauder was smooth and 72 km/h for the early part of the route, slowing for houses, an acute left, and later in the section, for hairpins and exposures. The 31.27-km regularity was an interesting twisting climb through the forest and scenic drop down to the highway near Stump Lake.

Kamloops was the fuel and lunch stop, allowing teams to gossip and relax, or search for a tire shop, while workers prepared to leap-frog ahead and reset for their next Regularity. Checkpoint crews either followed the transit past Pinantan Lake into the 48.6-km **Loakin-Bear Regularity**, or followed the Trans Canada Highway to intercept the rally. Competitors negotiated the route (for the most part) at up to 72 km/h. At about the midpoint of the Regularity, one CP crew, entering from the TCH, and Car 1 played follow-the-leader to a checkpoint location, fortunately the CP crew arrived just-in-time for timing. After **Loakin-Bear**, about half the workers "short cut the course" by traveling Highway 97 through Salmon Arm to Vernon, a mere 2 hour detour.

The final test of Day One took the cars south from Turtle Valley, along the **China Creek Regularity**, 58.79km to Falkland, and the transit into Vernon.

Impressing the entire field, Satch Carlson and Russ Kraushaar in the 1969 Saab Sonett led at Vernon with 10 points, followed by a tie, at 16, with brothers Lee and Rod Sorenson, and father-son Peter and Timothy Ryce. Not that 10 points (or 16 for that matter) is not impressive in and of itself, the little red Sonett had dislodged a bolt in the suspension causing a scary tendency to turn without the driver wanting to turn, although the Saab managed to out drive the two AWD cars, and everyone else.

Day Two started from Vernon, south then east, climbing into fresh snow. **Beaver Lake Regularity** quickly changed from bare pavement to snow covered gravel, to having oncoming traffic -- including the snowplow, followed by deep snow broken only by the early checkpoint crews -- the first cars over the course that morning. Several

tight hairpins greeted the rally in the deep snow sections, followed by a twisting descent toward Lumby, ending at 52.55-km in bare gravel.

The rally traveled north through **Trinity Valley Regularity**, sparsely covered by snow, but with some “interesting” corners of black ice (properly brown ice), in the shaded sections. Speeds varied from the early 72 km/h down to 65 and 60 to finish its 36-km run at the Shuswap River.

Competitors and Check-Pointers alike met at the fuel stop in Falkland, where rally cars had a few minutes to relax and workers just enough time to gas and go, to their next locations.

Twig Creek Regularity covered 55.59-km, of wet gravel, then frozen snow-covered gravel, a big snowy hairpin left followed by last year's BIG hairpin right, along Monte Creek FSR. **Twig Creek** continued under light snow, through muddy roads into Douglas Ranch.

The final regularity of the rally had been a topic of discussion for much of both days. **Minnie Lake Regularity** has been a favorite section in all types of conditions. One year, nearly dry roads and fairly rough. The next, wet with big water splashes... “How deep was it?” “Not nearly as deep as a Sonett windshield”. And in many cases the mini lakes were frozen, presenting smooth level ice sections, connecting undulating snowy roads. The 2007 version of the mini lakes proved too deep, too muddy, too doubtful for completion. The last regularity was scrubbed and the rally transited to Merritt for awards.

Satch and Russ accumulated only 3 points and held the Overall lead, and First Historic, at 13 (having repaired the suspension, with scavenged parts, late into the night). Peter and Timothy Ryce fought the clock tenaciously, taking only an additional 4 points to shake off the Day One tie, at 20, for First Unlimited/Second Overall. Lee and Rod Sorenson held off the rest of the field, with a 10 for Day Two, finishing in Second Unlimited/Third Overall with 26. Taking First Calculator/Eighth Overall, were Josh Keatly and Leanne Junnila with 51 points, holding off Martin Chung and Christa Monasch by one second, for Second Calc/Ninth Overall. Steve Perret and Kathryn Hansen took First Paper with 118. James and Cindy Alison (Alberta) took First Novice with 255.

Thunderbird 2007 covered 792.25 km (492.28 miles), scored 49 checkpoints in 16 hours 40 minutes, and 46 cars officially “finished”. One car withdrew with a nagging and worsening noise in the front suspension. The other car suffered maximum lateness on Day One due to two flat tires, but returned to do well on Day Two. Several cars, including a rather long excursion by a CP crew, required tow strap “field testing” by other rally cars, other check-pointers, or one of the two big silver 4x4 pickups.

Satch Carlson and Russ Kraushaar's victory in a Historic car has been called a fitting finish to the historic 50th Anniversary Thunderbird.

Complete results and photos at www.rallybc.com