

Storm the Island and more...

The RallyBC site is part of my morning web-surfing routine so it's always thrilling when someone posts new TSD results, images, or stories. Here's my first contribution:

Storm the Island 2007 (Vancouver Island, BC), organized by the Island Rally Club, was last Saturday night (Jan. 20). It was my fourth TSD.

- The first was the 2005 TBird and my wife Heidi was driving our AWD minivan. We finished third from last, but had a great time. On the first day I was expecting the WRC-style 5-4-3-2-1-go at the start... Needless to say, we lost a lot of points right off the bat and we accumulated thousands before the end.
- The second event was the 2006 TBird and I was navigating in my 1988 German Ford (Merkur) Scorpio with brother-in-law Steve at the wheel. New Pirelli "Winter Carving" (studded) snow tires were a revelation. But, we flatlined on the second regularity, skipped the third to get the studded tire repaired, and then destroyed the transmission on the fourth regularity while climbing as fast as we could out of Okanagan Falls - a disappointing DNF.
- Heart of darkness was number three. Here, we started each regularity using the second hand on my wristwatch to measure rally time and a stop-watched zeroed at each start to keep track of checkpoints along the way. By now I had a Helius odometer. But, the Scorpio transmission seems to put out a lot more pulses per rotation than most others. I know that now. Not knowing that then meant that the odo reset itself (pulse count returned to zero) several times during the odo-calibration in the first transit. With a inaccurate odo and imprecise estimate of rally time, we finished a bit closer to the back of the pack than to the front.

But, it all came together last weekend at STi! My friend and neighbour Paul Johnston and I left Victoria at about noon on the Saturday. Using my old TBird route-books as a guide, I showed him the calculations on the three-hour drive to Port Alberni. We had a properly calibrated odo and a digital watch to keep track of rally time. I'd also mounted Hella 500 auxilliary lights during the week leading up to the event, but left the studded snow tires at home. Seven teams participated - a small group, but a typical diversity of cars: Subarus, a new AWD Saab/Subaru, a Neon, a Toyota Corolla from Washington with a roll cage but no heater, a 1968 Volvo, and my Merkur (sorry if I missed anyone).

This was my first time driving and I felt some guilt as Paul worked through the calculations. I'd have helped, but we brought only one calculator. I pointed out to Paul that he could jump to points where the speed changes, but the first regularity was loaded with 10-second pauses, so a lot of math was necessary in a very short time. In the first regularity we missed a right turn within a quick succession of instructions, noticed it right away, but lost us about 90 seconds over the next three hidden checkpoints. In the end, that cost us second place overall. It rained and briefly snowed throughout the event, which included some lively driving at 72 km/h on highway #4 just before Ucluelet. There was fresh snow at higher elevations on the return trip across the island. Careful not to spin the wheels (and mess up the odo), we climbed at about 50 km/h (when we should have been doing 64 Km/Hr) and then had multiple ABS moments on the way down at about 85 Km/Hr. I anticipated Paul's precision, but not his competitiveness. During the last two regularities he was calculating split times for almost every kilometer! We knew we were within a few seconds of zero - this was a new experience for me (and for him as it was his first rally). Fatigue was beginning to set in, but with an 'it's ours to lose' attitude, we kept at it. With the knowledge that some teams manage to complete TBird with less than 20 seconds in penalties, I knew that the 'ours-to-lose' confidence was off the mark, but why discourage the navigator?!

It's seems so obvious, but TSDs go much better when the clock in your car is set at exactly rally time and your odometer is measuring (within a few tens of meters) rally distances and speeds. We accumulated 141 points, and finished 3rd overall. The top three cars were the Neon, the 1968 Volvo, and our 1988 Merkur. I've got nothing against AWD or Subarus, but this was strangely satisfying.

There must have been as many people involved in running the rally as there were participants. Many thanks to Brian Carriere, his team of workers, and the other competitors.

John Taylor
Driver-Car 5

(PS. I've already booked rooms for the Tbird)!