

STELLAR LUMINESCENCE, NOV. 30 – DEC. 1, 2007
RALLYEMASTERS' CRITIQUE OF THE COURSE

Sunday, Dec. 2, 2007 was a really beautiful day. After being up for about 40 hours, I had slept like a rock the night before. Sliding out of bed about 10am, I packed up and hit the road. The 15 south from Vegas was busy, but running free. Glad I wasn't northbound, where some kind of closure had shut the freeway, and the frontage road was backed up all the way from Vegas into California. I got in the left lane southbound, and found out I had to crank it up to about 90 to keep from pissing off the locals. I was thankful to have new tires instead of what I had on the rally.

You see, coming out of In 3, I had picked up a piece of shrapnel in my left rear. By the time I got to In 5, I had used 2 cans of fix-a-flat, to no effect. At In 5 I borrowed Marvin's portable tireflator and got some air in it. I left the tireflator with Marvin. Big mistake. I would make it about 20 miles before the tire was flat again.

I stopped on CA SR 178 in Onyx. It was about 3 in the morning, and they had taken the air hose inside for the night before they locked up. I used my last can of fix-a-flat while a bunch of very large men with mullets smoked a joint at the edge of the parking lot. One of them lived at the small house adjacent the lot, and had I watched as his mom threw them out, forcing them to smoke their evil weed outside her domain.

The fix-a-flat got me to In 7, which was the only checkpoint I had to work. Once set up there, David showed up, and I took his tireflator with me. His was a really good one, so I just stopped every 20 miles or so and filled the tire up. After the Zabriskie Point Course Control, I used the driver's side mirror to watch the tire, and discovered that, at speeds over 85, the tire's rotation kept it close to full diameter, even though it had literally no air pressure.

After we got to finish, I found a local tire shop and threw on a set of 4 new Bridgestones before the banquet. So my ride home was much less eventful.

As I got off 15 in Barstow and began to take the back roads over to Palmdale, breathing in the cool, clear air, the satisfaction of the weekend finally hit me. All those hours of solitude over the previous months, looking at all the back roads, and then running the course over and over, had all paid off. All the smiling faces, good friends, and good conversation at the finish let us know it was all worth it.

David Budlong and I had set up a course, with much help from Larry Scholnick and the rest of the ITN gang that proved to be just about right. Not too slow, not too fast. Not too hard, nor too easy. A brisk drive on some of the best roads anywhere. The rain had gone through earlier Friday, one of the first winter storms of the season, and the air was crisp. We only got a few drops of rain

during the rally itself, but there were some low clouds in spots on the course, so a few of our best lights would not be visible from their standoffs.

But the views once we got to Death Valley made it worthwhile. It was one of maybe 2 or 3 days each year with a dramatic, cloudy sky, instead of the standard cloudless monotony. It was really quite something. I could have spent hours on photography, had I not been rushing to my last assignment, a situation I heard echoed by many of the entrants.

Anyway, many thanks to all who ran and worked this rally. On to a look at the course, and what we expected you to do.

Leg 1, was designed to be simple, fun, quick, and get the oil and tires warmed up. Old San Marcos Pass road is good for this. If you ran The Warmup, you knew where this one was. It's a great spot for a light and a level Inmarker.

Maybe you thought the Inmarker was on Painted Cave, but the flashing light was right at the intersection with CA SR 154, so, logically, you still would want to search Old San Marcos on your way there.

Leg 2 was for Experts only. What would a rally be without some expert only legs? David found this one on the map when he noticed Casitas Pass Road made a 90 degree turn at Foothill, giving you two options. The within 1 mile limit was to contain the search area if you went the wrong way, you would have enough time to turn around and get to the other section of the road.

The Course Control (2) for the rest of the rally, was to have them take the slower section of road to make up for the difference in time the experts took for the Inmarker, since they would have to continue south from In 2 and take the 101 to the 150.

Course Control 3: The tiebreaker, this control should have been answered before you even packed the car to leave for Santa Barbara. We tried this quiz on The Warmup, and no entry got the right answer, even with the clue of a huge writing area for the answer on the control card. The question was and is how fast should you be going? According to California Vehicle Code, the speed limit sign is not the final word on the matter. According to the California Vehicle Code:

22350. No person shall drive a vehicle upon a highway at a speed greater than is reasonable or prudent having due regard for weather, visibility, the traffic on, and the surface and width of, the highway, and in no event at a speed which endangers the safety of persons or property.

This course control was also used to get you on Rice Rd., the preferred route.

Leg 3, This Inmarker was discussed and in the books before we even drove the route. We had discussed several options on getting to the restart, but going down

33 to 166 and back up Cerro Noroeste was just too long, and would have left the thirsty cars starving for fuel about 50 miles away from any gas station. We would have really liked to have both Lockwood Valley road and Cerro Noroeste on the route, especially with one of them being driven a second time with familiarity as your friend, but it was just too far between gas breaks.

With the flashing light heading and time remaining, you only had one choice for which route to go, Lockwood Valley Rd.

Leg 4, What is an all night rally without Caliente Bodfish Road? On a clear night, which was our hope, the light was just about 35 miles, as the crow flies, away. Of course, there was a cloud clinging to hill just in front of the Checkpoint, so the light wasn't visible from Standoff. To make matters worse, there was a mistake on the emergency handout (it said 4 miles when it should have said 5), and the leg had to be thrown.

Course Control 4 and 5 were for route preference only. 5 was in order to split Experts from Regulars, et al. 4 was to keep everybody off the freeway. Of course 5 had a trap, with an identical sign coming about a mile early, with a wrong letter naturally. Experts had to reject that sign, and continue to the sign at the correct mileage.

Leg 5. Expert only. Evans Rd. and Wofford Heights Rd. are both known as CA SR 155 at times, but the Inmarker is not on either of these roads when they are labeled as CA SR 155. By taking a compass heading to the light, one should be able to see that the bearing takes you over the water, which therefore eliminates Evans Rd. to the west of the intersection. So now you have only Evans Rd. to the east of Wofford Heights. Again, there was a 1 mile callback mileage to prevent those with bad compass headings from going too far east before returning.

Leg 6. Pretty straight forward, compass bearing and time puts the Inmarker on the other side of the lake and there is only one road over there that will get you out of Kernville and on your way to CC 6 in the time allotted.

Course Control 6 is there to buy a little time for the crews to jump ahead, and how can you not go through this area without a little Kelso in your step?

Leg 7. Thank you highway department for this flashing light. This light indicates that Randsburg – Inyokern Rd. is the only possible road that can be reached in the time allowed on that heading. For some rally cars, creeping up until the last 100 yards and then punching it is no problem to be at 30 mph before the hose, yet for others, a little more planning is required. This one helps keep both the navigator and the driver awake. Were you tired yet?

Leg 8, Our favorite time of the day. This was intended to be the last flashing light of the rally, but there was too much haze to see the light. Since roads are scarce

out here, there are not a lot of choices, but we gave you a handout anyway. Truly, Death Valley at dawn is just spectacular!

Although we warned you that there was a bit of rough road after In 8, nobody doubled back. And we heard of no problems. The road over Emigrant Pass was worth it regardless. Few (no) trees meant great visibility around the turns, and the road offered a wide variety of challenges, from a twisty climb up the bluff, to some perfect esses along a ridge, to the fast sweepers and long straights as you came down to the main road.

Course Control 7. Time to get out of the car, smell the fresh morning air, catch your second wind, and stretch a little.

Leg 9. Once you get your compass heading here, the road choice is made for you. Now the trick is to get there on time and zero the leg. We have told you that the hose is 3.5 miles from the intersection and that you must be going at least 45 mph when crossing the hose. You must also consider other traffic and that the speed limit is 55 mph. What to do? Wake the navigator up and have them calculate the time needed for the speed you want to travel. At 55, 3.5 miles would take 3.82 minutes. At 45, it would take 4.67 minutes. We imposed a minimum speed violation penalty for cars that turned onto the Checkpoint road with 5.00 or more minutes remaining to their in time, as that would necessitate their travelling below 45 to get there at the right time.

Leg 10. Are you tired yet? Yeah, us too, but that's part of the point. The all night run can get to you, but it's what helps make this such an epic experience. It's not an adventure if you don't have to slay a few dragons, right?

Since there was a ditch and fence between Standoff 10 and NV SR 160, we worded the Standoff instructions to bring you in via Tecopa Hot Springs Rd. After checkout, we changed it to make it even more definitive. We NEVER expected anyone to actually come in from the far south end of the road, via Shoshone. Certainly not half the rally.

My favorite comment was from the Alcan 5000-winning car and team of Jones and Deno, when Brian related that about halfway to Shoshone he asked, "did anyone work the mileage on this leg?" If you did, it came out like this. Once you knew In 9 was on State Line Rd., you also knew it was 3.5 miles in. You further knew that In 10 had to be on a road intersecting NV SR 159, so the intersection of NV SR 160 and NV SR 159 was the closest point for the Checkpoint. Working the distance between those two points gave you the following. You had 83 minutes driving time on the leg, after subtracting the break, standoff and previous inmarker allowances. To go the long route through Shoshone would run 113 miles. Even at 70 mph, which admittedly is the speed limit on some of these back road 2 lanes, it would take 97 minutes to cover that distance, which is the MINIMUM for the Checkpoint. To make the distance in the time allowed would

require an AVERAGE of 81.7 mph, well over the posted limits, and not allowing for the reduced speed limits in Pahrump and Shoshone. This could not have been the preferred route.

Since no direction was specified, you could turn onto Spanish Trail from NV SR 160 to enter Standoff, (just not enter the Standoff DIRECTLY from NV SR 160) and then exit the same way you came in.

Did anyone get any fresh jerky from the jerky guy? Is "fresh jerky" a good thing?

When the Checkpoint for this leg was first scouted, it was 11 at night and NV SR 159 was as quiet as a Prius on start up. On checkout, we got there around rally time of day, and guess what, cars, trucks, boats, pedestrians, bicycles, and dogs are all out for their Saturday morning recreation. Well, the first choice for the leg had to be rejected. We had to come up with something, and we really wanted you near NV SR 159, because the Red Rock Bluffs are something to see. So we came up with a simple Checkpoint placement, and went so far as to allow you to wait off extra time on NV SR 159 without penalty before turning into the Checkpoint.

We had a sublime time putting the event together. We sincerely hope you had a great time, and that we will see you again next year.