

Basic Rallying

by Peter Gulliver, PMSC

What Is A Rally?

A car rally is a form of motorsport competition that is fun and challenging, while maintaining a high level of safety. A team of two, made up of a navigator and a driver use a set of instructions to follow a specific route. A further complication is that they are required to maintain a specific average speed (always below the posted limit). At intervals along the route, the organizers will have set up secret control locations. When the competitors encounter one of these checkpoints, they will stop, their time will be checked and a score computed based on an ideal or perfect time. They will then proceed along the route to the next checkpoint where the process is repeated. When all these scores are added up at the end of the rally, the team with the lowest score is declared the winner.

Before The Event

On the day of the rally (or before) make sure your car is roadworthy. This is automatic for you - right? You will want to be sure your wipers and washers are functioning properly, (rallies run in all weather), all lights are working, your gas tank is full for the start. It is also a good idea to bring along some scrap paper, a clip-board (of sorts), a selection of pens and pencils, and perhaps a highlighter or two. An accurate watch which shows time of day is also an asset, although not essential for beginners.

Usually the start is at a restaurant (or in close proximity to one) so arrive early (at least an hour). This will ensure that you are not rushed at the last minute. Also, a full tummy is less susceptible to "mal de nav". The navigator may wish to allow an hour for the Graval to "kick in if this is a necessity. Many seasoned navigators would not dream of rallying without Graval.

At Registration

Registration is exactly that. This is where you will sign the entry forms and waivers. This indemnifies the organizers from your mistakes and is common procedure. You will also have to show a valid driver's license, current vehicle insurance, and ownership or permission to use the vehicle. This will be a necessity. The registrars

will assist you with your classification, (likely beginner) and anything else of importance for the start.

The Driver's Meeting

Usually about 15 minutes before the first car starts the rally, there will be a meeting of all the competitors. This is where the organizers will inform everyone of any last minute changes of route or instruction. It is important to attend this and to listen, not only to the organizers talk but also to questions seasoned competitors might have. This could provide hints of what to expect. After the drivers meeting is a good time for those last minute checks. Tank full, bladder empty, etc.

The Start

Your car number also tells you when you start. Take your number, add that many minutes to the start or Car 0 time and that is when you start. If the rally begins at 1:00 pm, you are car 9, you will leave at 1:09. Simple, right! Usually you will be given your instructions one or two minutes before you leave. When your turn comes, off you go with the navigator telling you where to go and how fast to go. Naturally, you have watched the cars leaving in front of you and so you know which way and where to leave.

A couple of other points worth mentioning at this time:

Usually the first section is very simple. This allows you to find your way to a point which is known as an odo check or verification. This gives you a point of comparison between your odometer and the organizer's odo. Using the calculator you brought, you can compute some sort of factor. If you were 5% out at that point, common wisdom would suggest all your distances would be 5% out. This will allow you to locate corners with greater precision. Experienced and well equipped competitors will have an odometer which they can program to exactly match the official mileage.

Also for the first section, and elapsed time is given. This will allow you to get to the odo check in plenty of time to get things organized for the rest of the rally. (In your dreams).

From The Odo Check

The navigator will have been able to figure out what time you should leave the odo check or wherever the elapsed time portion is. When this time arrives, actually about

20 seconds before), it is time to move out and follow the route. For your first few events it is unlikely that your timing will be precise so try to follow the route and drive about 5 to 10 % over the recommended speed. This should keep you not only close enough to the speed limits to avoid tickets, but also close enough to the ideal schedule to avoid excessive penalties. Staying on route is more important than staying on time. "We're lost, but we are making good time will not bring success in rallying. While having fun is the overriding objective, I have three other rules which I have prioritized.

PETER'S RULES OF RALLYING (prioritized)

1. STAY ON THE ROAD
2. STAY ON ROUTE
3. STAY ON TIME

Checkpoints

Before long, assuming you have followed rules one and two, you will come to a checkpoint. You will recognize it because it will be a vehicle parked by the side of the road displaying the same type of checkpoint sign that was displayed at the drivers' meeting. There is a set procedure to be followed at the checkpoints. Most of them are for safety reasons so it is important to know what to do.

1. Drive past the checkpoint vehicle. If you think you are running ahead of ideal time you may slow, but you must not stop.
2. Pull to the right as far as possible and stop. (Not into the ditch, especially in winter!)
3. One of the crew (usually the driver, but not always) walks/runs back to the car to get a sticker showing what time they passed the control board (checkpoint sign). That time sticker will also tell them what time they should leave the control zone. You will have some time here, depending on how many cars arrive close together. Your score for that first segment is now in the books. Whether you were early or late is of little consequence. You cannot make up lost time. This is to prevent speeding or other unsociable behavior.
4. Stick your timing sticker on your route or score card to hand in at the finish.
5. On your out time (or 20 seconds before), you set out again, exactly as from the odo check until you reach the next checkpoint where these steps are repeated.

By now, you should have realized that a rally is really a series of short tests of driving accuracy. It is not a race. The key is to do each portion individually, Leave the overall scoring to the organizers.

End of Section

A rally is often divided into a number of sections. The instructions will tell you where the end of sections are. Many times there will be a change in the type of instruction for a new section. The instructions will inform you of the end of section point and the start of the next section. You will almost always zero your trip odometer for each new section but your running time will continue. These ends of sections are different from checkpoints as you have no idea where checkpoints are located.

End of the Rally

The rally will often end at the same place as it began. The usual procedure is for you to go to the final checkpoint and ask for your time in. To help you compute this there will have been a point near the end of the rally where you are given a specific time to complete the rest of the rally. Note your time at that point, add the given times, and compute your finish time. It will usually be after you arrive so you may actually finish at 4:12, but ask for a 4:17 finish time.

Hand in your score card, join in the discussion, and await the official posting of the results. This may take half an hour or more, depending on the complexity of the rally.

Concluding Remarks

After the results are announced and you have collected your trophy for winning the beginners' class, take some time to talk to other competitors. Find out when the next rally is. Make arrangements to go to the next club meeting. Meet some new faces. Congratulate the overall winners. Ask them how they did it. There is a worldwide community of rallying.