

STARLITE 83  
review by David Graubart

The 13th annual Santa Barbara Sports Car Club rallye to Las Vegas took place on Dec 2-4. This is a 13 hour Pan Am style event. In a Pan Am or map-type Monte Carlo rallye, contestants are given the exact time due at each checkpoint, but only a vague idea of their location, typically just the street name and the direction each is to be entered. Cars are staggered one minute apart. The exact location of a standoff point for each checkpoint is given and each team determines their own route to the standoff, using the maps provided. From this point, the checkpoint is visible, either as a flashing light or as some other landmark. Once leaving the standoff, stopping is prohibited. The checkpoint rarely stays in view after leaving standoff. Scoring is based on the difference between time arrived and time due, early and late carrying equal penalties.

The field of 150 cars was filled with a variety of coupes, sports cars and of all things, an Excalibur. Many were decked out with exotic navigation equipment and with billions and billions of candlepower aimed down the road.

This was my eighth Starlite, five as a worker and third as a contestant. Even so, there was plenty to be nervous about. My navigator Laureen was a rookie, the weather had been awful, and we were car #133. A high car number means two things. Breakfast and eventually sleep are two hours farther away than for the first cars. Also, any law enforcement type person who has watched two hours of cars parade by at quasi-legal speeds is watching the rest of us very closely.

Well, it's 13 minutes past midnight Saturday morning and we're off, psyched up and only occasionally yawning. We roll into standoff 1, east of Ventura and are told, "Sorry, this one didn't work, go on to number two." What ??? So much for our high energy level. It was a little hazy at standoff 2, northeast of Magic Mountain, and as is the custom when a flashing light isn't visible, the approximate distance to checkpoint is given. They gave a two mile range which in SBSCC rallyes means it's at the farther end of the range. Hey, this is really boring so far. Checkpoint 3 was a bit tricky and caught about 20% of the cars. We were told that the standoff was at a specific point on county road N3, east of Palmdale. The checkpoint was somewhere on Ft. Tejon road and would be visible from standoff. Those that weren't careful, took the shortest route to standoff, down Ft. Tejon road and bumped into the checkpoint first, earning a maximum error (5.00 minutes) on that leg.

My navigator, apparently not used to all night rallyes decided to sleep through leg 4. No problem, it's familiar territory for me, running by George Air Force Base then aiming north towards Barstow. The weather looked crystal clear to me, but standoff again told the distance to checkpoint. It's now my turn for a nap as Laureen takes the wheel on a 70 mile stretch along I-40. Some fun alternating paved and excellent quality dirt lead north



through the Mojave to standoff 5. Once again, the distance estimating skill is eliminated as we're told the distance to checkpoint. There's no excuse this time, it's light and visibility goes forever. We beat a train to a crossing with not a whole lot to spare. A look in my mirror shows two more cars dart across. The engineer looked worried. After checkpoint 5 came some great fast-as-you-want-to-go roads until hitting I-15. Checkpoint 6 was across the state line, a piece of cake along the frontage to the freeway.

It's breakfast time, a 45 minute break to fill the tank and tummy. We're in Vegas but told not to bother trying to check in yet; the rooms aren't ready. That's probably a disappointment for anyone ready to give up. We're running with a .01 minute error so far, but guess that dozens of others also are. The rallye hadn't been particularly interesting or challenging so far compared with past Starlites. Things improved quite a bit after breakfast. Legs 7 and 8 were east of Las Vegas winding around some stunning rock formations. My geologically minded navigator had trouble keeping her eyes on the maps. The legs required some navigation skills as none of the roads were named as on the maps, some distance estimating skills with checkpoint 7 looking a hundred miles away, and some smokey-spotting skills (smile at those radar guns).

Last was checkpoint 9, back in town. A number of contestants blew it, the 13 hours of rallying taking their toll on clear thinking. The checkpoint was right around the corner from the standoff, but going straight in meant going in backwards. The trick was to turn at the one intersection before checkpoint and loop around. Several of those that got that far then proceeded to blow it by going through standoff backwards on the way to the hotel, also worth a maximum error.

Perhaps as a reminder of how nice Mother Nature was all night, we got our first drops of rain during the short drive from checkpoint 9 to the hotel. We're on the top floor of the Marina Hotel, overlooking a parking lot full of rallye cars. The afternoon nap was accompanied by a lullaby of blaring car alarms, triggered by the strong winds.

The cocktail party and banquet were very nice, tarnished a bit by the long-winded presentations. Scores were absurdly low. We weren't the only ones who thought it was far too easy. Twenty-first overall got the Starlite Blackjack award, a free entry to next year's event. They had a .06 minute error. Our .02 earned third overall (tie for second). Two beautiful trophies kept us company on the long ride home.

Mike Pariseau and Mike Mahneke wrote a very good rallye. There were a couple problems in its execution, namely one closed checkpoint and some unnecessary distances to checkpoint given. On the whole, it was a very enjoyable weekend. Registration, scoring, timing, arrangements with the hotel and the like were all flawless. I look forward to an equally fun and a more challenging Starlite 84.