

Santa Barbara Sports Car Club's 16th annual Pan Am rallye to Las Vegas had a TRC team for the first time! Six cars of actual and honorary TRC members took part: Byron Cole with John Getchell of Phoenix, Glenn and Cindy Oliver of Santa Barbara, Russ McHugh with Dave Cotrell of Santa Barbara, Bob Welsh of San Jose with Grady Hamlett of Dallas, Carl Iverson and Steve Walker of Santa Barbara, and Stu Helfer and myself.

Also a first was the offering of an expert class. Starlite has always had two classes, novice and regular running identical routes. The new elective expert class ran a slightly faster and more difficult route. Only 16 of 159 cars entered expert with TRC contributing four of those. TRC was in fact the only club with a majority running expert. The others are such wimps! An amazing 20% of the total field drove rentals (rent-a-racers, as SBSCC calls them).

The weather was consistently bad during the entire rallye with light to moderate rain and fog on every leg. The route was the most interesting and challenging that I can remember. We started South on 101 to Camarillo for the first checkpoint. A compass reading to the flashing light, drawn on the map intersected the road in three places making it a bit tricky. One car seemed to find it extra tricky and landed in a ditch. Leg 2 was the first to require only the experts to find a particular sign, thus requiring a different route. Standoff and checkpoint were near Magic Mountain. Legs 3 and 4 required the experts to do some doubling back, in one case finding a sign at the intersection of Crown Valley and Soledad Canyon roads. Careful though, those roads intersect in two different places. Leg 5 went towards Victorville and missing one turn got us hopelessly lost. Oops. Checkpoint 6 near Barstow, as with most of the checkpoints was ironically made easier by the bad weather. When the checkpoint is not visible from standoff, the approximate location of the checkpoint is disclosed. Next was a breakfast break in Baker and two fast legs in the Mojave. Each of these timed both the front and back wheels, making it impossible to cross the timing line slowly and still zero the checkpoint. The final checkpoint was just outside of Las Vegas. The experts were given the exact checkpoint location, but were required to approach the timing line at no less than 20mph; in other words, run it like a T&D.

We ended up with a 503 (500 for missing checkpoint 5). Leg 1 was thrown as police closed it before all cars went through. The cop was likely upset after a speeding Corvette on the rallye slipped away. The Corvette driver was honored with a jar of Vaseline at the banquet. Other incidents included a VW hitting a cow on leg 7. A bottle of Beefeater rum was awarded. Our own Bob and Grady were given the Press-on-Regardless award. Grady became quite ill before start time, and spent several hours in a Santa Barbara hospital. Upon being released, they hit the road and made it to the last three checkpoints on time (and did not come in last place).

TRC made an impressive debut, taking first (Byron and John), second (Glenn and Cindy), and fourth (us) in the expert class. Everyone agreed that this was among the best Startlites ever. Thanks to rallyemasters Len Everson and Don Leal. Essentially the whole membership of SBSCC contributed to the event: working checkpoints, registration, scoring, setting up accommodations and so on. Except for the long-winded stories and painfully slow distribution of door prizes at the banquet, everything was first rate.