



Ron Sorem photos

Roger and Kit Toevs wait to start the Blackwater TSD in the sidecar BMW.

Have bike, will travel

2010 Alcan draws twice as many cycles as cars

BY RON SOREM
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KIRKLAND — Seven cars and 14 motorcycles departed Kirkland, in near record high temperature weather, heading north to the border and beyond. Jerry Hines and the Rainier Auto Sports Club presented Alcan 5000.

For 2010, Steve Brown and I had been paired in one of the Legacys, as course marshals. A late change moved Steve to the front of the rally with Jerry. I moved to Sweep 2 with Joe Gardner. “Sweeps” on summer

Alcan are the “backup plan” for the motorcycles — alone, on a bike, in the middle of nowhere, could be trouble with just a minor repair.

The Mosquito Lake TSD was revised this year. The scenic, twisting, narrow drive was lost to easy meanderings to Sumas, then east on Highway 1 to Hope, B.C., and north through the Fraser Canyon. An easy trip to Williams Lake, except for the construction. As Sweep, we did checkpoints then followed the route north, watching every gas station and restaurant for “our” bikes. It became clear with the last road closure

for construction that we weren’t going to make our checkpoint assignment. I called on the radio and had another crew switch location with us. From years of TSD rallies around Williams Lake, I knew the back way into the section and we were in place, with three minutes to spare before first car. It was getting very smoky from nearby forest fires, and by the time we were ready to go, there was ash on the car and the sun was just an orange dot in the sky.

Day Two: Quesnel to Dawson Creek, B.C. Early in the day the smoke was so bad your eyes hurt and



The Toyota FJ Cruiser crew of Texan Jessica Jenkins and Tennesseean Carolyn Garner stop at Worthington Glacier. On their first rally, the “novice rallyists” were first in class.

visibility was about a quarter-mile. Coming into Prince George, one bike developed an oil leak and we stayed with him, and two others, until a dealership was located. The rider elected to try for the dealer, we followed, then handed off to Sweep 1 (with a bike carrier) to wait for repairs. The dealer fixed a cracked oil line with only about a two-hour delay. Somewhere north of Prince George, the skies became noticeably less smoky — pale blue, with small white clouds. Around Rally Mile 765 we crossed Pine Pass with views of huge formations of solid rock, folded here and there by geologic forces, then worn away by past glaciers.

Day Three: Dawson Creek, B.C., to Watson Lake, Yukon Territory — about 620 miles. “Old Alaska Highway” was the first TSD of the day at RM 918. Along the way we crossed the only remaining wood trestle bridge from 1942. A grading crew was working in the TSD — very smooth gravel, somewhat deep in spots — and then there was the grader! Then narrow 6 percent drop, hairpin and a slippery little hillclimb to a

checkpoint. Car 4 was the only “0”.

Back to the “new” highway, into Fort St. John (founded 1792). “Looks like Kansas to me, Toto” was the next TSD, and the rolling hills were a contrast to the previous days mountainous terrain. Onto the Alaska Highway again, more construction and lots of RCMP. North to Fort Nelson, and conversations with eastbound travelers reported the “road covered with hail, safe speed 20 mph,” and to the bikes with us: “Lots of places have closed, and the boys are having a hard time finding gas.” The reply from Tennessee’s Jeff Brisendine: “As long as we stay ahead of that big blue Dodge, we’ll be OK.”

At RM 1,254 we have a view of an unusual rock outcropping, Indian Head Rock, resembling a chief in full headdress, hanging off a replica of Yosemite’s Half Dome. At RM 1,283, in Stone Mountain Park, we pass Summit Lake and the highest pavement on the Alaska Highway, 4,247 feet elevation, with reports of caribou here earlier in the day.

A favorite and sometimes necessary fuel stop is Toad River Lodge, at

RM 1,315, with its collection of pastries and thousands of caps donated by visitors. We are calculating fuel range for the bikes. The KTM is safely 200 miles, the other two with us a bit more. There will be fuel at Northern Rockies Lodge in 81 miles. There might be fuel at Liard River, Coal River and Contact Creek. Our destination of Watson Lake is 200 miles.

RM 1,338 finds a momma moose and calf along the route. In Muncho Lake Park, the bighorn stone sheep are out for most of the rally — hidden from us in the rain. Black bear, a bison herd, with calves just slightly smaller than the bear. Liard Hot Springs is well populated as we reset odometer at the start of a DIY section. Just up the road, bison have blocked the highway, stopping the bikes and cars (seems the pavement holds some daytime heat into the evening).

The photo-op is interrupted by the big highway rigs — exhaust brakes rattling a low staccato, slowing, big bison yielding to the bigger trucks — then all proceed, for now. We’ll have more photo-ops, with solo bulls ignoring traffic, the cows and calves a bit

more wary. At Contact Creek (where northbound bulldozers met southbound, building the Al-Can) we find our three bikes — station closed. “I’ve gone 30 miles with the reserve light on”... It’s 40 more to Watson Lake. All three made it, all with reserve light on for most of the distance.

Day Four: The brief morning Watson Lake TSD, then options: straight to Whitehorse for R&R, with a time penalty, or the Campbell Highway to Ross River, and the South Canol. Nearly all chose the gravel. In Whitehorse, most wished they’d taken the shortcut — tire shops were busy.

Whitehorse brought more choices. The bikes chose the overnight camp on the North Canol to the North West Territories. Bikes can only get to the NWT with the Sweeps for fuel. Both trucks and one staff car made the trek. Dan Watt’s big BMW Paris-Dakar lost its footing and caught a rock with the valve cover. The bike would get a ride on Sweep 1, for parking lot repairs in Whitehorse: A Coca-Cola can, cut to shape, lots of prep work by John Isenburg, and several layers of epoxy produced a new valve cover. Some super glue rebuilt the taillight lens, and Dan was ready to continue.

Cars, and six of the bikes, chose a TSD in Whitehorse, then 340 miles to overnight in Dawson — a bit more plush than Joe’s elegant elk camp on the North Canol. A brief TSD up to Midnight Dome gave a great view of Dawson, the confluence of the Klondike and Yukon rivers, and the Top of the World Highway, which was closed in Alaska, necessitating our detour back to Whitehorse.

In the two days, the separate routes brought ample wildlife sightings: North Canol — grouse, grizzly, porcupine, wolf, wolverine and caribou; Dawson and sidetrips — bear, bobcat, silver fox and grouse or ptarmigan, which prompted two simultaneous renditions of the origin of Chicken Alaska — they couldn’t spell “ptarmigan”...

Day Seven: Whitehorse to Fairbanks, Alaska, 392 miles to Tok Junction and a 2 p.m. TSD. RM 2,950, electrical repair to one of the bikes, then as briskly as the frost heaves would allow to U.S. Customs “Mile 1,222.8 on the Alaska Highway.” The line was just us, and the interview was about 15 seconds.



Sunbeams break through the Alaskan clouds.

The long waits and the pilot cars for paving are cutting into our arrival in Tok. Sweep 2 catches the last bikes after the TSD, 195 miles to Fairbanks. At Delta Junction four bikes fuel up and stretch. Fatigue and boredom are setting in. This will be eased by the gorgeous hotel and dining facilities tonight. West of Delta we get our first view of the Alaska Pipeline, Prudhoe Bay to Valdez.

Day Eight: South from Fairbanks, the morning’s 12-mile TSD overlooks the city before the 150-mile Parks Highway run to Cantwell, passing spectacular scenery, rushing river canyons, then placid pools. Near the Denali Park and Mount McKinley center, the long excursion train clings to the opposite side of the canyon and traverses long wooden trestles.

Alaska Highway 8, the Denali Highway, is a 135-mile east-west connector between Cantwell and Paxson, 110 miles of gravel. We saw one caribou, numerous swans on the tiny reflection lakes along the way. About 90 miles into the gravel, the Maclaren River Lodge, with fuel, food and repairs, followed after a long climb by Maclaren Summit at 4,086 feet, with a sweeping panorama. At pavement we enter the Tangle Lakes Archaeological District — 455,000 acres, covering 400 recorded sites, believed to have seen human occupation 12,000 to 15,000 years ago, sup-

porting the Siberian Land Bridge theory. Nearing Paxson we see a family picking berries — 15 minutes later it is raining so hard I can’t read the road signs for the DIY TSD. Further south, several crews take a break at Worthington Glacier before cresting Thompson Pass and great glacial views dropping toward a Valdez sunset, and the rally’s last night on the road.

Day Nine: Valdez sunrise, over the peaks, slowly illuminating the harbor. Left out of the hotel, the first of three TSDs for the day, with more mountains and glaciers in much better weather. Glenallen TSD, then grand views of Tazlina and Matanuska glaciers. The final TSD covered 6 miles through hayfields, gardens and orchards — temperature at our checkpoint was 66 degrees.

After 4,065 miles or more, the banquet honored all the winners, the workers, and those who have passed. Congratulations to the Arctic Challengers Team of Glenn Wallace-R.Dale Kraushaar-Jenne Pierce for first overall in the Forester. Jeff Brisendine rode his KTM 950 Adventure to first motorcycle and sixth overall. A new first prize went to Kit Toevs, the first motorcycle sidecar rider to complete the Alcan 5000, with her dad Roger. Alcan scored 87 checkpoints and 10 DIY checkpoints.

Results, photos, blogs and archives found at www.alcan5000.com and now www.alcan5000.net (beta).