

There are few truly international sports that a competitor can enter. Think about it—how many countries have international tennis matches, golf tournaments, football games, and basketball? Soccer is probably the most widely played sport, with only the U.S. and a few other countries not competing in the World Cup that takes place every four years. To most people, Grand Prix racing is the most international form of motorsport, with events taking place in 16 countries around the world each year. However, there are 158 countries in the world, so GP racing is a long way from involving everybody. However stage rallying is a form of motorsport that takes place in nearly every country. The World Rally Championship, like Grand Prix racing, visits numerous countries during the year. Many of the events are well known—the Monte Carlo Rally, the Safari, the RAC Rally of Great Britain, and the Acropolis.

Last month we published a feature on the Safari Rally, the biggest of them all, which takes place over a 3000-mile course in Kenya. Both that event and the RAC Rally in England attract almost 3 million spectators, making them the two largest sporting events in the world. Unfortunately, this country has not hosted a round of the World Rally Championship for a number of years and, consequently, while rallying has become the most popular form of motorsport in most countries it is still in its infancy in the U.S. This is a shame, as it is a sport that uses road cars competing on regular roads, thus bringing the sport directly before the public.

What rallying needs in this country is a long-distance, marathon-type event that can attract foreign interest and help create public awareness of the sport. Last year a group of rally enthusiasts in California set about the mammoth task of organizing just such an event, and we attended the result of their efforts.

The start of the rally was in San Francisco and the scene was just like many of the big events we have been to elsewhere in the world. The 65 competitors lined up along the wayside and were flagged away at one-minute intervals to start four days of rallying over 2000 kilometers of varied terrain in California and Nevada. A helicopter circled overhead making a film of the race for BF Goodrich, one of the major sponsors of the event and rallying in general this year.

After the start, the rally cars wound their way through the streets of San Francisco at non-competing speeds. We talked to a couple of traffic cops on duty and they told us they were disappointed at how slowly the cars were going. When we told them that they couldn't go any faster because the police were standing around, they told us it could be arranged to allow the cars to drive at speed. So don't be surprised if the Golden West 2000 has a special stage in the city center in future years.

Once the competitors were across the Golden Gate bridge, they proceeded to the first stage, a paved road through a forest across a dam and along the side of a lake. Naturally the road was closed to the public. After ten laps around Golden State Raceway (formerly Sears Point) the route took the competitors via a few stages run on dirt roads before reaching Sacramento for a couple of hours rest at midnight. Unfortunately, some of the cars running at the end of the field got stopped by the police in a couple of places where it was claimed the event was running without permission. As far as we could determine, permission had been granted by the police chiefs in the various regions, but for one reason or another the information had not been passed on to the officers on duty at the time.

The first night saw the cars heading up into the Sierra Nevada mountains along some incredibly tight roads that, although they were not competitive stages, were nevertheless great fun to drive. After the breakfast halt the next morning three stages were run in the forests near Foresthill. Despite the fact that this was the middle of May, it was snowing quite hard and was bitterly cold. This really tested the skills of the drivers and several did get stuck.



TOP LEFT, darkhorse winner John Woolf arrived from New Zealand with his own Mazda only days before the event, and then beat all the regulars. TOP RIGHT, Malcolm Smith drove a stock Plymouth Arrow, had the engine blow on the very first stage, and managed to fit a new engine in time to continue the rally on the third day. CENTER, former off-roader Rod Koch drives his Baja Bug through a water splash, somewhere miles from anywhere, on a transit stage in the Sierra mountains. ABOVE, one of the most interesting entries was this Kelmark kit car specially built for stage rallying with a Porsche Type IV engine.

BELOW, Yes, believe it or not, this was California in the middle of May, at least at an altitude of 5000 ft in the Sierra. Nick Van Nugteren, from Singapore, was running in the top three until he fell off the edge of the road on the third day and destroyed his car, fortunately without injury to himself.



Once the crews left the Sierra they headed toward Reno for a well-deserved 24-hour stop in the gambling city. It was here that politics reared its ugly face. NARRA, the sanctioning body for the event, was not too happy with the way things were being run and decided to withdraw its sanction, in effect terminating the event there and then. Several of the drivers got together and voted to continue the event despite NARRA's ruling.

The rally then followed some fabulous stages along dirt roads in the deserts around Reno. One of these stages was 200 km (125 miles) long and was the longest closed stage ever run on an event in the U.S. By midnight the rally was ready to cross the Nevada border back into California, but because of the snow and the fact that NARRA had warned the police that the rally was no longer legal the organizers wisely finished the rally there and headed back to Reno for an official finish.

Of the 40 cars that had started, 21 completed the shortened event and the winning driver was John Woolf, with Grant Whittaker as navigator. The latter recently came over from New Zealand, complete with a right-hand-drive Mazda rally car. All the pre-rally favorites had run into troubles

during the three days and finished behind Woolf. Rod Millen finished second in a Mazda RX7, Hendrik Blok/Clark Bond was third in his Mazda, John Buffum/Doug Shepard was fourth in a Triumph TR8, Dick Turner/Tom Grimshaw was fifth in a Scout and Rod Hall/Cam Warren was sixth in a stock Dodge pickup.

Five VWs started the rally, including Rod Koch/Bill Sturn in a Baja Bug, Wayne Eaton/Carolyn Eaton in a Porsche 911-powered Bug, Eric Ford/Mark Long in a Porsche 914-powered Kelmark, Sammy McSpadden/Rick Lotspeich in a Rabbit and Chris Vaughn/Victor Viets in a Scirocco. Only the Scirocco managed to finish the rally, though, as the others retired at one time or another during the event.

The basic format of the 2000 km rally was excellent, and is just what this country needs to promote the sport. Unfortunately, there were some organizational problems that will have to be rectified before next year's event. But organizing an event of this magnitude is a tremendous undertaking and one has to compliment the organizers for even contemplating it in the first place. Let's hope they have learned by their mistakes, and that politics can be kept from intruding again into the sport.



TOP, stock Rabbit driven by Sammy McSpadden. CENTER, stock Scirocco driven by Chris Vaughn. ABOVE, spectacular Porsche 911-powered Bug driven by Wayne Eaton. RIGHT, Danny Goodwin drives a Saab 99 down Lombard Street near the start in San Francisco.



GOLDEN WEST RALLY

BY JOHN G. RETTIE

A GREAT IDEA THAT CAN WORK