Care and Feeding of the Intermediate Rallyist

Once you have been putting on events for awhile, you start to notice a drop-off in attendance of people who have been to several events. I am going to talk about this and what can be done about it.

First, I am not talking about people who come out once and never return. Many organizers have discovered that a healthy rally program has 1/3 to ½ of the field as first timers. Not everyone is going to like our strange sport. Some are looking for illegal speeds and Smokey and the Bandit stunts. Others like a wide variety of activities and once they have experienced a rally, they are off to the next thrill. I actually worry when the number of first timers drops off. It means there is something wrong with the event, the scheduling or the publicity.

No, I am talking about the folks who have now run 3-5 events and are starting to look a bit bored. They have gotten reasonably good and are trying to get to the next level. These are the people that organizers need to cultivate because in addition to being our core, they are also the future Rallymasters and Organizers. These are the folks we want to join the Club.

My first thought is to mix it up a bit on format. If we keep folks a bit off balance, they don't become overly familiar and every event is a new challenge. If your main format is TSD, try doing some gimmick events. Try some variation of TSD formats, such as Monte Carlo. The Monte Carlo format gives contestants the location and time to be at a control, but does not give them a speed to drive. It requires a whole new strategy to do well at these sorts of events, so your intermediate is learning new techniques in an event that is still friendly to the first timer.

Add some basic traps to the TSD, but be sure to use restraint. It is always easier to write a trap than to try and figure one out. We used to do Friday night events. They were all about the main road rule, and each event would add one determinant. The first event would be a tour. The next would add protection, then ONTO and finally curve arrows.

Eventually the intermediate rallyist is going to look at those crusty old timers with their fancy computers and they are going to want to chase those single digit scores (like zeros). We encourage first timers to throw away apps and concentrate on staying on course. After a couple of events, I introduce the rally GPS odometer. This allows them to have accurate mileages, but still is mostly seat of the pants rallying. Once they get comfortable with the odometer, get them familiar with the applications that do the rally computer. I suggest placing folks who use GPS odometers and calculating or computer apps in the limited class. The odometers are not quite good enough to compete with wheel driven computers, so they need a class where they don't get discouraged.

The big driver here is cost. The National Championship folks frequently use the Timewise 798. It is one heck of a device that is fine-tuned to win National rallys, but it is not cheap. Expect to pay $1600 to over $2000 for a complete Timewise setup. Alfa is available at a somewhat lower cost, but the Alfa boxes are

less capable and not quite as accurate. You will still pay between $900 and $1500 depending on options and sensor configuration.

An App is pretty much free in comparison. Most everyone owns a smartphone and/or a tablet these days. The Apps themselves generally cost between $5-20. You can move into this for very minimal investment. Once you get started, you can buy a dedicated tablet for under $100 which will do it all. There is considerable work being done by the App Developers to make these apps easier to use while still being reliable. Look at Rich Biretta's Simplified Rally Computer App, which is to be reviewed in the February *RReNews*. The final step is to move up to an external GPS receiver. The Dual 160 GPS will improve your accuracy and reduce odometer drift considerably.

The bottom line is still to mix it up. Keep it light hearted, keep it fun. Even if you are primarily a "damned serious" TSD Region, put on the occasional gimmick. Write variations on TSD. And never forget that what we primarily provide is ENTERTAINMENT, not competition.

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