

Following through snow and ice a banner with a strange device (GAMR), Sports Illustrated's expert discovers

RALLY FEVER

LIKE picking yourself up by the back of the neck and kicking yourself with both feet, the Great American Mountain Rallye, which yearly brings some 60 keen motorists out for a week-end struggle all over New England, demands considerable skill, but it also leaves the competitor open to suspicion of his reason.

The Rallye is not a tempest in a tea shoppe but an automotive event (the only American rally sanctioned by the Fédération Internationale de l'Automobile) during which the driver is asked to propel his beautifully prepared car over the most miserable of roads in atrocious weather.

The co-driver is asked to navigate with such precision that the car will be able to maintain maximum average speeds with bull's-eye accuracy. Then, to finish off, the top 10 drivers are required to negotiate a tricky gymkhana layout, a test as demanding of their sense of precision as the Rallye is of their over-all skill on the road.

Well, let it be said at once that the fourth annual GAMR, held over 1,171-46 miles on Thanksgiving weekend, was won by, of all things, a three-cylinder, two-cycle, 38-horsepower, front-wheel-drive Swedish SAAB—meticulously driven by, of all people, a Volkswagen agency man named Robert Wehman, of Uniondale, N.Y., and navigated cleanly by Louis Braun, of Pompton Lakes, N.J. Second by only 38 penalty points for the Rallye course came Budd Macklay and Graham Locke in a bean-sized 750-cc. Renault, followed closely by Mr. and Mrs. Donald Blackburn of Greenvale, N.Y. in a Jaguar XK140.

Before Thanksgiving it might have seemed remarkable to see that Mrs. Blackburn, after the gymkhana, when she sensed a chance for first place, was shaking uncontrollably from the tension of sweating out the final settling of accounts. Now, however, it is completely understandable. As it happened, I was in the Rallye too. Not having participated in such an event before, I accepted when Rootes Motors in-

vited me to "have a bash at it" in a dual-carburetor 1957 Sunbeam Rapier. An old English hand, Ronald Kessel, who has navigated for Britain's famed Stirling Moss and Sheila Van Damm, came along to tell me where to go.

It was raining hard as the 62 competing cars left Manhattan at two-minute intervals on Thanksgiving Eve (World Champion Driver Juan Fangio started off the first few cars). The weather story was rain and mud the first day, snow and ice the second and subfreezing cold the third. The gymkhana, mercifully, was held indoors.

The GAMR was divided into 46 legs, with a different average speed for each. You did not know when you would come across a control point, at which your time was recorded to the second, so you ordinarily could not afford to exceed the average on good roads, on the theory of having something in hand for the boondocks. The penalty for error was a point for each second early or late (with provision for double penalty under certain conditions). Other penalties could be achieved effortlessly—for such misdemeanors as tampering with the engine, using spare parts, getting lost and so

on, ad infinitum. Getting lost was one of the more frustrating ways, and the instructions were not always easily carried out "At mail box O. G. Brandon on your right," one may read, for example, "turn left onto dirt road." At Bear Brook State Park in New Hampshire many contestants lost quite a few points because a key sign which had been in place when the route was surveyed was missing last week.

Mud and rutted mountain roads kept everyone nicely occupied the first day, which ended in St. Johnsbury, Vt. after an all-night, all-day scramble. And then came snow and ice on the way to Lake Placid, N.Y.

Lincoln Gap and Smuggler's Notch were the critical areas. "Give her bags of urge and blast your way up," advised Kessel, and blast we did—through a blizzard on the Notch in 18 inches of snow, and down the far slope behind a car which locked its wheels and slid ever so gently down the mountain sideways for 100 feet. And bags of urge were needed again at the bottom to get up the icy steep of Lincoln.

Up, down and around, we pressed on (it's amazing, this inclination to press on regardless of conditions, once your blood is up) to Lake Placid, then started back to Manhattan in seven-below weather the next morning. The last day's drive was on good roads. It was primarily a test of navigation and was anticlimactic.

During the gymkhana the Blackburns (and the officials) believed they were in second place, only 14 points behind Wehman. Wehman thereupon stretched his lead to 20 points, so Mrs. Blackburn might as well have left her nails ungnawed, especially since it was discovered six hours later that the eventual second-place Renault had been erroneously penalized 3,600 points during the day.

Only five of the 62 starters failed to finish the route, through mechanical trouble, illness or misadventure—a praiseworthy record. The Rapier pushed on smoothly without a hint of troublemaking, and we finished 32nd, which wasn't bad, considering the fact that we were never able to compensate properly for our Speedpilot (SI, Nov. 5) error (the Speedpilot worked brilliantly for some, less well for others) and that we twice broke chains, got held up by an overturned truck and once nosed into a ditch. Still, we had fastest time in class on the acceleration climb.

If it hadn't been for that bloody bad luck, Mrs. Blackburn (this is the rally of a thousand excuses), we'd have been palpitating beside you. (END)

THE TOP 10

CAR	DRIVER CO-DRIVER	PENALTY POINTS
1. SAAB Sedan	Robert Wehman Louis Braun	1,516
2. Renault 4CV	Budd Macklay Graham Locke	1,554
3. Jaguar XK140	Donald Blackburn Florence Blackburn	1,993
4. Volkswagen	Henry Young III Emile M. Fendler	2,071
5. Triumph TR3	Harold Hurlley Arthur Reider	2,272
6. SAAB Sedan	Rolf Melde Morrow Mushkin	2,277
7. Triumph TR3	Maurice Gatsonides Steward Blodgett	2,325
8. Volkswagen	Fred F. Allen Frances Allen	2,701
9. MG Magnette	Robert Young Capt. H. E. Thomas	3,105
10. Volkswagen	Austin Millard Kenneth Bower	3,185