San Diego SCCA's Road to a Road Rally
It Was a Pie Run!

On September 26th, 2020, the San Diego Region of the Sports Car Club of America (SCCA) hosted its first Road Rally in decades. "It's a Pie Run!" used a Monte Carlo format covering nearly 80 miles, with two 15-minute stops en route, taking approximately 2.5 hours. It indeed ended at a pie shop, because who doesn't like pie?

Why did we decide to do this, and how did we do it? Well, it wasn't a response to COVID and had been in the works for some time, but it worked out even better and at the right time as a result.

Like many regions, we had been heading toward the inevitable and now the actual loss of our primary autocross site. Our site was twenty-five glorious acres of open parking that has hosted many memorable National Events and typically 15 or more regional autocrosses, novice driver schools, and Street Survival events annually. With our alternate site being smaller, further away, and less available, we wanted more "fun with cars" for our members.

In late 2019, we set a goal to host a road rally and a track day in 2020. We were starting from scratch for both. One Board member took the lead for each event to develop a team and gain the knowledge and resources to move us forward. We turned first to the SCCA website for information and contacts for both programs. After that, our first big leap forward was the SCCA National Convention. Three of our Board members attended, and we picked sessions that focused on road rally, track days, and everything registration and administration, even all that fun talk about waivers! Hearing first-hand how others succeeded, and what worked and what didn't, was invaluable.

2020 started as usual with our autocross schedule, and then...COVID hit. The stadium turned into a COVID test site before being demolished. Our alternate site became and remained a COVID test site to this day. Between health order changes, state, city and local permitting requirements, and the test-site operations, we will not run an autocross for the rest of 2020.

Time to get road rally started! Early in the year, we were admittedly a bit skeptical about pulling it off and how much of a success it would be. We started looking at the Richta GPS Checkpoints App we learned about at the convention: tag some checkpoints, no need to staff them, everything is run off a phone with GPS. Easy peasy, right? We reached out to Rich Bireta anyway, the App developer, to learn more and work with him in setting up events. Rich set up a test event for us, and we laid out a simple route using flying starts and a handful of checkpoints. It took all of half an hour for a few of our Board members to drive the route as their first-ever "road rally." We all came away excited and energized! It was challenging, fun, and we were out with our friends and cars, even if socially distanced, with no end-of-drive gathering. The good news was the App worked as advertised, and no one got (very) lost! Testing was a success, and we found this to be an excellent process to learn about road rally and the App before hosting an event.

Time to make this into an event! With COVID, we wanted to be as contact-free as possible, even the day of the event. We challenged ourselves to use this as a springboard to make our Region's event registration and coordination better than before. We were already using MotorsportReg (MSR) for online registration. We had been monitoring Speed Waivers and decided now was the time to jump on board for our road rally. While it took some manual

intervention to reconcile between MSR and Speed Waivers, we could complete all of our registration and check-in tasks before the actual event.

We realized we needed a way to get people familiar with road rally and run the event's driver meetings. We revamped our website and expanded it to include road rally before we'd had an event. We advertised that and drew people in to get their attention and generate interest. We expanded our Google Meet footprint, currently used for online Region Board meetings, to a Google Gsuite account. This gave us access to Meet, Sheets, Docs, Slides, and Drive to share in the development of event supplementals (supps), route instructions, COVID guidelines, etc. We also developed the capability to host Webinars using OBS and YouTube Live to stream events, including our Road Rally novice meeting and pre-event driver meeting. We are fortunate to have some tech-savvy folks to set this up, but now have all of the tools available for anything we do. Participants could also go back and watch at any time they wanted as a refresher, or if they could not attend.

We opened up event registration on MSR in July and reached out to our Divisional Road Rally Stewards, Larry Scholnick and Jeanne English. Nothing like adding and advertising an event to create a deadline and make it happen! The event was live on MSR, and entries were coming in faster than we expected. We set what we thought was a relatively low turnout for the first event at 50 cars, only to learn later that's not a small rally. We were inundated with entries and had inquiries from out-of-state rallyists looking for co-drives, and we drew entries from the local membership and surrounding Regions. We had to close registration early as the waitlist was getting so long. It looks like road rally is really a thing, and our events will be growing!

We should probably develop a course! Other than the idea of ending up at the pie shop, we didn't have an actual route or instructions. We went with scenic mountain and backcountry roads to get there and wrote some generic route instructions. They were a bit boring and looked like a map route list.

NRI#	Mileage	Key Time	Route Instruction	
10	3.4	9:22:00	Left at Bandy Canyon Road	CP5
11	5	9:27:00	Right at Highland Valley Road	CP6

Enter Jim Crittenden, the SCCA RoadRally Board Chair, that Rich Bireta had put us in contact with to assist with our first rally. Jim took our route instructions and made them more interesting and challenging by removing street names and replacing them with street signs, call boxes, mile markers, and other visual cues along the way. He made them safe by ensuring each checkpoint was located in an area with space to pull over and wait near the checkpoint. Our boring route instructions now looked like this!

NRI#	Mileage	Key Time	Route Instruction	
10	3.4		Left towards 78	
11	3.6	9:22:20	Checkpoint at ⬅ (sign on your right)	CP5
12	5.1	9:24:40	Checkpoint at "Ysabel Creek Rd". (on your left)	CP6

We kept in constant contact with our SCCA Divisional RoadRally Steward, Larry Scholnick, informing him of our progress. His feedback, help, and willingness to answer all of our questions and teach us how to run a successful road rally was vital. When we felt the course was ready (we had probably gone over it nearly a dozen times mapping it out), Larry and Jeanne drove the course, completing the safety run and providing corrections. On the day of the event, they both came down to help make sure the event started smoothly.

The event date was closing rapidly. Our "It's a Pie Run" was the first road rally for 86% of contestants, and 98% had competed in less than five road rallies. We had to ensure that each of the drivers had a navigator and completed their online waivers. We did this through a series of e-mail reminders and set up a Road Rally Novice (basically everyone!) Meeting webinar a week ahead of the event. We prepared a slide presentation for all the basics - what a TSD rally is, how starts, restarts and checkpoints work, example instructions and how to read them, how the Richta GPS Checkpoints App works and where to download it. Leaving the Novice webinar, our goal was to ensure they were registered with a navigator, waivers were completed, and they knew how to how to download the Richta GPS Checkpoints App and log into our event to ensure it was operating. Teams completing these steps then received their car number, route instructions, and an invitation to the Driver Meeting. The Driver Meeting was another webinar the night before the event. We answered questions as a follow-up to the Novice meeting, and we went over the event start and how the day should go.

On the day of the event, cars arrived on a "just-in-time" basis, no more than 15 minutes before their start time. Everyone had tested their App and was ready; we just verified that they had triggered a restart we had set prior to the departure point and that they had a GPS signal. The contestants were fired up with that first-time novice feeling and everyone on a level playing field. Not one car had an issue, and before we knew it, 50 minutes had passed, and everyone had departed on one-minute intervals. We were happy and relieved it was working so far, yet this felt strange, as the event was now "out of our control" with the rally on autopilot until the finish. We streamed the Richta Rally Master App and kept tabs on cars and scores in real-time. We greeted them as they drove into the finish location where the pie was waiting. Across 26 timed checkpoints, our expert entrant achieved a score of 44, and our best first-time entrant scored 51. The energy was back, the competition was fierce, and everyone walked away with smiles.

After the event, we surveyed our contestants through MSR. The feedback was overwhelmingly positive. Contestants were gracious in working with us on technical webinar glitches, a checkpoint or two that was perhaps a bit off, and a handful of to be expected minor glitches. The most common feedback was, "When is the next event, and how can I help you organize it?" We love to hear those words because to make this a long-term success, we need a committee and help, and we're on our way.

What did we learn about hosting a first road rally?

- Start planning early, commit to dates and deadlines
- You'll spend far more time organizing and running the event before it happens, not the day of the road rally
- Course mapping is quite a bit of work if you've never done it before
- Support your event lead, ask what help they need, not if they need any
- Enlist the help of your Divisional RoadRally Steward
- Ask the SCCA RoadRally Chair for advice
- Innovate, take advantage of technology, be persistent
- Enjoy the pie!