

1960 SPORTS CAR SHOW

BRANDYWINE MOTORSPORT CLUB

The first sports cars in this country began to trickle off the docks in the late forties, and they were such a departure from Detroit norm that anyone with the temerity to be seen in one was considered, at best, a misguided eccentric.

By 1952, the trickle had strengthened to a lively freshet, but sports cars were still so scarce that when a group of enthusiasts incorporated a Wilmington chapter of the M.G.Car Club, they were able to round up only a handful of members. Interest continued to grow, however, and as the number of makes of cars in the area began to increase, the group found it appropriate to reorganize as the independent Brandywine Motorsport Club, with the stated purpose of promoting the sport and pastime of motoring.

The novelty of sports cars has, by now, largely worn off, and yet participation in motorsport activities continues to show phenomenal growth. This upsurge is reflected in the Club's present membership of nearly three hundred. We believe that, in turn, the appearance of motorsport clubs, with the activities they provide, has played a significant part in stimulating interest in sports cars.

Just what is Brandywine Motorsport Club? Let us examine a typical member. He is perhaps best characterized by the fact that he likes to drive for the fun of it. This being the case, he selects the kind of car which is the most fun to drive-the sports car. He offers no apology if his car carries only two people and very little luggage. He is unperturbed by the possibility that a V-S sedan with powerpack might be able to out-accelerate him. He has learned that for sheer fun, born of compact size, superb roadworthiness, and effortless but taut and accurate handling, the sports car has it made by a country mile.

Let us not confuse the sports car with the hot rod, which has a very different appeal. As a parallel, let us consider the true-blue sailboat devotee, who thrills to the challenge of the elements, and glories in the perfect set of jib and mainsail. He recognizes that a hydroplane racer derives an equal pleasure from extracting the last knot of speed from his high-strung craft, but he does not necessarily share that interest. Just so does a motor sportsman regard his contemporary, the hot rodder, whose interest is less in driving for fun than in rebuilding an engine to blast out power far beyond its original capacity, and then housing it in a vehicle built strictly for straight-line acceleration and speed. Most sports car owners (except for the relatively small percentage of race drivers) are content to maintain their cars in top shape and let it go at that; they don't want the next rallye, autocross, or gymkhana to catch them with their oil pans down.

And so we have Brandywine Motorsport Club: a fellowship of likeminded enthusiasts, who find in organized competitive events a safe and rewarding outlet for their love of driving for its own sake. In all its events, BMCs emphasis is on safety-and safety means abiding by the rules. The BMC member willingly submits to these rules, because his greatest satisfaction lies in excelling in orderly competition. Undisciplined showing off and taking unnecessary chances hold no appeal.

Brandywine Motorsport Club leaves car-for-car track racing to the national organizations which are geared to handle the special problems involved. In those BMC events where speed is featured, the courses are off the public highways, and only one car is running on the course at a time. In rallies (the only events run on public roads), strict observance of legal speed limits and traffic laws is part of the rules; violators are disqualified.

Today you are watching a sports car gymkhana-a test of driving skill. Drivers from BMC and many other sports car clubs in the Middle Atlantic area are competing against each other; each will drive, in turn, through two series of complicated maneuvers, trying to complete each trial in the shortest time and with the fewest mistakes. As in most such competitions, the various cars are classified according to size and type, to insure that the contest is primarily one of precision driving technique.

Throughout the year, several other kinds of events are regularly scheduled on the BMC calendar. Hill Climbs and Autocrosses are, like gymkhanas, tests of the drivers' ability to complete a designated run in the shortest time. In the Hill Climb, the course is a tortuous road to the summit of a hill. Driver skill wins here, too, but only when teamed with a steed which is in top-notch shape, able to deliver a powerful wallop to its drive wheels; able to brake down for a tight corner, from full bore to a crawl in a matter of a few feet.

In a somewhat lighter vein is the Autocross. A twisty, tricky course is laid out in a large field. Maneuvers (and mistakes!) which would be wildly dangerous in other circumstances may be executed here with complete abandon. Dust flies. Power slides and spinouts are commonplace. However, the surface of the field offers such poor purchase for the wheels that everything comes out in slow motion; sometimes there will be a grade that you are lucky if your car will climb at all. The man who takes home the trophy is the one with the sensitive hands on the wheel and a delicate touch on the throttle; who can keep the wheels pulling just enough, without wasteful bursts which break traction.

Rallies-the most popular events of all-are altogether different, and deserve a story to themselves.

THE SPORTS CAR RALLYE

If your home lies on one of the rural by-ways, and you happen to glance toward the road at the right time, you may observe a strange variation in the pattern of passing cars. The first sign will be the approach of a sports car, with two intent-looking people in it (often man and wife). The driver may slow up, to give the passenger a chance to read the name on your mailbox, or he may drive steadily past, while the passenger, head down, scribbles furiously on a scratch pad. In case you don't notice this first car, approximately each minute thereafter the same thing will happen again, and yet again, until thirty to sixty cars have dribbled past, in about as many minutes. You will then have seen about all there is for a stationary spectator to see of a sports car rallye.

Setting the stage began some weeks earlier, when a member of a local motorsport club, officially known as the Rallye Master (and after his rallye, often, as '~That Fiend'), mapped out an involved, winding route, zigging and zagging aimlessly over forty to some hundreds of miles of back roads. Next, he made several runs around the course, slowly, with many pauses to record landmarks, check road conditions, and adjust the route to avoid dangerous intersections or congested areas. Maybe you saw him at this stage, and wondered what he was up to.

After the route was firmed up, he or his helpers made other runs at deliberate, safe, and legal speeds, to determine the proper running time and the exact mileage of the course. Finally, detailed sheets of instructions were printed, to guide contestants through the rallye, and average speeds for different sections were calculated. This is very important, as we shall see.

Finally the day of the rallye arrives. Let's recruit the wife, best girl, or friend as our navigator, climb into our sports car, and get the picture from the contestants' point of view.

This rallye leaves from a shopping center parking lot. Car no. 1 is scheduled to pull out at exactly 1:01 P.M., car no. 2 at 1:02, and so on. Although we arrive on the scene at about half-past twelve, we find several eager beavers here ahead of us, clustered around the card-table headquarters. We pay our entry fee, sign in, are assigned car no. 7 (which, of course, sets our departure time at 1:07), and are handed a score sheet, instruction sheets, and a "panic envelope". (This is to be opened only if we get hopelessly lost-it will tell us where the end is, but we will be disqualified automatically if 'it is opened.) And now that we have these items in hand, let's take a break to explain what this is all about. .

The object of the rallye is to find your way through a designated course, and maintain a designated average speed throughout the run. Scoring *systems* are applied by which a car incurs penalty points for going off course or for going too slow *or fast*. The car finishing the run with the fewest points is the winner. The methods by which the Rallye Master finds out who is doing the best job are interesting, and add considerable zest to the contest. Let's get back to our typical rallye and see how they operate.

As we wait in line for our turn to leave, our navigator enters certain information into the proper spaces on our score sheet, including our car number, our starting time, and the miles reading on the odometer (the distance recording part of our speedometer). Then we turn to the instructions.

The first sheet is entitled "BMC General Rallye Rules", and begins with a paragraph: "You are expected to drive safely, obey all traffic laws, avoid being a nuisance, and generally use your head to keep rallyes fun. You must show consideration for rallye route residents, other traffic, and bystanders. We will watch you and will penalize you for any violation of these general principles." The general instructions go on to give definitions of terms used in the route instructions, and set forth other information which applies to all BMC rallyes. Having digested them, we go on to the route instructions, which are peculiar to this rallye, the first instruction reads:

1. Right out of parking lot. Average speed 26.4

The first part is common to most BMC rallyes, which leave with a right turn to avoid crossing the flow of traffic. The rest of the instruction starts the navigator into a mad scramble to get set up in her scheme for keeping track of our progress. Maintaining average speed is a job for the navigator, not the driver; the "Average speed 26.4" does *not* signify that we should try to drive with our speedometer needle hovering between 26 and 27 miles per hour all the time. With traffic signals, turns, and landmark hunting, this is completely out of the question, and such a system couldn't provide the overall accuracy we require. Instead, our navigator divides 60 minutes by 26.4 miles, and finds that we should use up 2.273 minutes for each mile we travel on the rallye course,

A great many different systems and instruments may be pressed into service to assist the navigator in her duties; these range all the way from just a wrist watch and scratch pad, to special computing devices, connected to the speedometer cable, which practically do the job for you, although, as is frequently heard in the post-mortems after the rallye, "they haven't invented a gadget yet to keep you from getting lost!").

As each car leaves, we move up a notch. Now, it's our turn! When the starting official gives us the countdown "five-four-three-two--one~GO!" our navigator starts her stop watch, and at the first break in the traffic, we swing onto the road. With the highway speed limit at 45, we make no attempt to hold rallye speed, which would be dangerously slow here. We know that the organizers have taken such things into account, and expect cars to depart temporarily from the designated speed where conditions require it. Later, we can slow up enough to get back on schedule. Our next instruction:

2. Right at 5th traffic light

No problem here; just count 'em. We turn off the divided highway onto a secondary road; now we're heading for rallye country.

3. Left just after TP 27

Now we must cock a sharp eye at any telephone poles situated a short distance to the near side of any possible left turns. When we find the pole with the right number, we take the next road to the left.

And so it goes. As soon as we can, we try to adjust our speed to bring our miles travelled and minutes spent into agreement, as calculated by our navigator.

23. Right at "hairy ears"

These words on a Burma Shave signlet lead us over a hill, round a bend, and face to face with a big sign and a group of Brandywiners, off on the shoulder. We've come across the first Check Point, and have thereby finished leg no. 1. As we roll to a standstill in front of the sign, a timekeeper records the exact time, which is entered on our score sheet under "Time at end of leg I". We copy these figures into another box labeled "Time at start of leg 2", are handed a slip of paper reading "change average speed to 24.S", and move on.

Check points are the means for determining how well the cars are adhering to the average speed. They are dotted around the course at measured distances, their locations unknown to the contestants. This one was 22.2 miles from the start, and it should have taken us 50.45 minutes to get here. Our time at the check point is registered as 1:56.9 we went a little too fast on the last stretch before the check point and got caught over half a minute early. Too bad we might have guessed this would be a likely place for a check point, but there's no telling for sure. Better luck next leg.

Our change to a slower average speed is an indication that the clues will be more obscure, or the roads poorer. We are not long in finding that at least the first is true. Instruction 24, the one we were looking for when we stumbled onto the check point, says "Bear Left after passing apple tree." We come upon a road that bears left, but since neither of us has yet seen an apple tree, we pass it up. Suddenly, we come to another Brandywiner, standing near a small sign reading "Control". We stop, and he silently hands us a slip of paper which tells us "You are off course. Penalty 100 points". He takes our score sheet, perforates it with a hand punch, and waves us off.

Glumly, we turn around, jot down our odometer reading, and leave this "off course" control point. Obviously, we are now behind schedule, but the BMC rallye rules are set up to thwart attempts to make up time by speeding. One of the general instructions says "If you go off course, travel 30 MPH for all extra miles." At the end of the rallye, our odometer will be read, and our mileage at the start subtracted, showing how far we have traveled. Each extra mile over the official mileage for the course should be represented by two extra minutes of running time.

We know, of course, that the road we passed earlier had to be our "bear left". On our way back to it, we meet car no. 10, making the same mistake we did. Although we feel a pang of sympathy for the couple, we keep our lips buttoned-it's every man for himself. On reaching the road, we take note of the mileage again, so we will know how far we traveled off course and how many minutes we should add to our schedule. (Where was the apple tree? Right across the road from the check point, where we were too preoccupied to notice it. Just one of the Rallye Master's ghoulish little schemes.)

Seventeen miles farther on, we ease into Check Point no. 2 with our time right on the nose, taking the off-course run into consideration. In the third leg, we just happen to catch, out of the corner of our eye, the name "Anderson" scribbled on a bridge. This lets us know that we are to

take the next turn to the right-we nearly missed it. Just beyond the turn there is a crossroads with a "Stop" sign facing our way. We obey the sign, move on, and immediately run into an "on course" control, hidden behind a billboard. We stop to let the official punch our score sheet, and learn later that we would have been penalized 100 points if we had /ot come this way, and would have been disqualified if we had failed to halt at the stop sign.

The next check point is the end of the rallye, and here we turn in our score sheet and the unopened panic envelope. The odometer mileage is noted, and we are waved on. There are still some instructions left on the sheet, which serve to direct us to a restaurant, our "rallying point".

In the room reserved for BMC, we find the crews of cars 2, 3, and 4 already hard at it, laughing and commiserating over missed clues-to some people, this is more fun than' the rallye itself. Presumably, cars 1, 5, and 6 are still floundering around in the wilds somewhere. But as we order our dinner, more and more rallyists arrive, and the conversations get increasingly animated.

Meanwhile, while the hungry contestants are stuffing themselves, a group of harassed and equally hungry scoring officials are closeted in a little room by themselves, huddled over reams of score sheets-no meal for these until the last contestant's sheet has been checked, and each one's position determined.

At long last, the Rallye Master pops into the dining room and is greeted by loud applause, both for the rallye and the fact that he is finally going to tell us how we made out. He starts with the car in last place, and as he works his way up to the fifth-place car, we still have not been mentioned. Our hearts beat a little harder-the first three drivers and navigators receive trophies. Maybe-? Then we hear the Rallye Master: "and in fourth place, with 156 points, car no. 7!" That's us-just out of the silver. If only we hadn't missed that apple tree!

Just the same, we feel pretty good about it. This one was pretty tough, and fourth is \lathing to be ashamed of. As we applaud the smiling winners, the Rallye Master, and his helpers. We agree that this was one of the best rallyes yet.