

We probably have it all backwards in my part of the country: Here in the Pacific Northwest, touring rallies, the kind that are relatively easy to understand—and just as easy on fragile relationships—are scarce. The Friday-Nighter Series, on the other hand, hits beginners with the complex, technical version of rallying known as course-following or trap rallies. Not surprisingly, we have trouble keeping the interest of novice rallyists in Portland.

You know the saying: “The beatings will continue until morale improves!” Most beginners don’t understand the many pages of intricate rally rules—and how they work—until after the flogging. True, local clubs in Portland and Seattle usually offer a class at the beginning of the year in an attempt to explain most of the basic course-following concepts. Sadly, however, full comprehension of the voluminous General Instructions comes only after making every mistake—and receiving the appropriate penalty points. It’s like the Japanese game of Go: It

takes about five minutes to get the basic concept, and the rest of your life to get good at it!

A trap rally is something of a mind game you play in your car. Each intersection must be dissected. The correct main road determined. Every sign read carefully. Applicable rules plucked from memory. Prior adventures factored in. Then you look at the route instruction again and decide if it can be properly executed. And of course you have to go through this process quickly, because every second spent thinking and

not moving must be made up before the next checkpoint. The concept at work here must be based on the same dubious logic that prompted me to test relationships early on with a visit to the White Eagle Saloon: A pitcher of beer, dangerous dancing, and the Terry Robb Band cranked up to 11 possess all the charm of a side-facing sign trap.

Especially in trap rallying, choosing the right partner is extremely important. Try to find somebody

who shares the same goals; this means you don’t want a Type B navigator if you’re a Type A driver, and if you are a naturally driven, competitive person, you won’t be too happy teamed up with someone who doesn’t care whether you win or lose or even finish the game. A person capable of making mistakes and quickly and learning from them is desirable, because you will make mistakes, on both sides of the car. But someone so fun to be with that scores don’t matter may be even better.

On the first trap rally that Katy Wood and I did together, we suddenly found ourselves lost when we came to a T intersection at a highway where the route instructions gave us no clue whether to go left or right. Realizing that we must have wandered off course several miles before, I mentally weighed the benefits of finishing the rally against the prospect of going home—alone. I figured we could make up most of our lost time, and perhaps find a checkpoint still patiently waiting for us, but the tension in the car was already approaching first-date-disaster-recovery status. I made a right on the highway and aimed straight for dinner instead. Sometimes you have to scrap a rally to save a relationship!

Usually, however, it’s better to keep going despite your mistakes, because other people are making them, too. On the local level, a blown trap might earn you a quarter or half-minute penalty. On SCCA events, you generally max the leg. If you take up the trap-rally game, you will be applauding the winners for months or years before picking up your own trophy, learning something new at every event. Some people take this novice status better than others. Some get downright angry. If the challenge of competing under terrific mental pressure doesn’t appeal to you, or if you are the kind who just can’t see the positive benefit to be gained from making a mistake and learning from it, then try a touring rally instead. The pressure is entirely different!

Understanding tulip diagrams and a few acronyms from the glossary will get most teams through to the pizza-and-beer part of a touring rally. Winding past the scenery while driving on the happy side of brisk will make any driver glad they chose a BMW to do it in. Find a navigator who understands how to apply some simple math—Distance equals Rate times Time—and the quest for a zero has begun.

Touring rallies come in a variety of flavors in the Northwest, from one-day SCCA events that attract zero heroes from across the country to vintage rallies that bring out some of the finest machinery man has created. And then there’s my favorite: two-day mini-marathons on gravel or ice and snow. Found primarily in British Columbia, these mini-marathons require the most of the

So You Want to Rally?

By Russ Kraushaar

Watch out for the traps if you’re going on tour!

car, the most of the driver, and the most of the navigator—a true test of vehicle preparation, driving skill, communication, and navigation—but no traps!

Even if you prefer the touring-rally route, however, you may be surprised. Some rallymasters go to great lengths to attract the wine-and-cheese crowd with an event that sounds like a tour, but they throw in a few traps for spice. One of the better events I've run lately, the BMW Seattle Classic Motor Rally, struck a grinvoking balance of glorious country asphalt and sinister traps. By the end of the second leg, several teams were wishing they had studied the rules more closely! The Monte Shelton NW Classic Motor Rally, based in Portland, has a similar mean streak. If you're not sure what you're getting into, contact the rallymaster. Most will happily fill you in on every detail of the course, the accommodations, and the menu. But bear in mind that they may just as happily omit the truth!

Still, if you learn a little something in a trap rally or two, you may find yourself at a great advantage in a touring rally that comes equipped with surprises!



Photo: Satch Carlson

Russ Kraushaar has had a major impact on TSD rallying standards and procedures throughout the Pacific Northwest since starting his rally career at age eight in the back seat of his parents' sports car. Rallymaster for innumerable events and former rally chairman of the Cascade Sports Car Club, Kraushaar's rally cars include a 325iX and a vintage Austin Healey, but he is also often found in the navigator's seat for Roundel editor-in-chief Satch Carlson. You may send rally questions to Russ at russ@compassmicro.com.