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HISTORY **Bits**

Nebraska Region Rally Cross Challenges and Championships

Introduction: by Patt Buell, NRSCCA Historian
all photos by Candy Gerber

In 2005 Rally Cross was just coming into it's own when SCCA decided to put on a National Challenge (not a Championship yet) to see how many would participate.

On October 27th and 28th, Nebraska Region hosted the first Rally Cross National Challenge at Motorsports Park Hastings (MPH). Nebraska Region members ran, several worked, and some filled some of the Chief positions.

We had good participation by NRSCCA members. Our winners were; SSR James Wood, SSF Jan Gerber, RSR Dale Lind, RSF Scott Cannon, RM2 Gary Graybill, RP2 Scott Emery, SSA John Kunkle, RP4 Douglas Rand, RM4 Christy Carlson. (more results & photos in the Exhaust Notes, November 2005)



Jan Gerber 1st SSF



Jim Wood 1st RSR



Dale Lind 1st SSR

More NRSCCA Rally Cross Challenges and Championships

In 2006 we hosted another Rally Cross National Challenge. Starting October 14th & 15th we held a "Warm-up" (test & tune) followed by the National Challenge on the 28th & 29th in Hastings.

NRSCCA 2006 winners were: RSF Jan Gerber, RSR James Wood, RSA Christy Carlson, RPR Gary Graybill, RPA Jon Simmons, RM2 Westly Pierce.



More NRSCCA Rally Cross Challenges and Championships con't.

In October 2007 the Rally Cross National Challenge became a National Championship.

Lee Ackerman (a free lance writer for the Omaha World Herald) wrote an article and we had permission to reprint it in the Exhaust Notes (December 2007).

This is a quote from the article: "For the first time in it's history, the Sports Car Club of America (SCCA) will be holding a National Rally Cross Championship. The last two years they have held National Challenges for Rally Cross. The venue for this historic event will be MotorSport Park Hastings.

. The event will take place from October 26 thru 28."

We had two NRSCCA Podium Finishers: Jan Gerber, 1st in RPF and Zack LaGrone, 3rd in RSF.



Jan Gerber 1st Place - 2007



Zack LaGrone 3rd Place - 2007

We have had members run and work the events in 2008, 2009, 2010 and this year we had another Podium Winner. Here is his story.

2011 RallyCross Championship Tulsa, OK

Inside Jan's Helmet by Jan Gerber

On October 7-10th, I competed in the Sports Car Club of America (SCCA) Rallycross National Championships held at Tulsa Raceway Park in Tulsa Oklahoma. With 100 cars split between 8 classes there was very close, hard-fought competition that created some very interesting drama. I was a part of that drama.



Rallycross (RallyX) is a lot like an autocross with one car competing at a time to navigate a course of pylons but with several important differences. The most obvious is that it is held on dirt, gravel, or snow which is a great equalizer for cars that don't have a lot of power. You can't go fast if you can't get the big power to the ground. The other is that every run is scored for a total cumulative time unlike an autocross where you take your one best run. That means that you have to put down good times each and every run if you want to do well. There are penalty times incurred for each pylon hit (2 seconds) and course deviations (10 seconds) Since I don't have a car that is suited to RallyX, I've been lucky to have Steve Duscharme offer to share his 2003 WRX in the Stock All Wheel Drive (SA) class. The car is completely stock other than a set of snow tires, and a set of competition seat belts. We are allowed to disable the ABS for competition.

I had won my class at the two National Challenge events in 2005 and 2006, and then win

ning the Prepared FWD class at the inaugural National Championship event in 2007, all in our 1995 Dodge Neon ACR. I missed 2008 due to shoulder surgery and then the next two due to not having a nationally competitive car after the Neon was destroyed in a traffic accident. The weeks leading up to the event I had been pretty anxious about it. Since 2007, I had only gone to local events here in Nebraska and then the very first Midwest Divisional Championship event in Tulsa, OK this July. I know this was a selfish goal, but I wanted to keep my undefeated record at National competition intact. At the last few local events this year I had started to over drive the courses and had been clipping a few cones which were adding unwanted penalty time to my runs. Those cones had cost me an overall win at the last local Nebraska RallyX and a class and overall win at the Divisional in Tulsa driving Matt Cox's Neon that we entered in the Modified 2wd class. Fortunately, about a week before the event, the anxiousness went away when I realized I just needed to go drive my best and have fun. If I am fortunate enough to do well, great, but if not, just have fun.



A few weeks before the National Championship one of the RallyX Board members had started a thread on the SCCA forums about "Who will win?" at Nationals. In my class he wrote " Stock all: Gary Marascola and Jan Gerber not having a nationally competitive car after the Neon was destroyed in a traffic accident. The weeks leading up to the event I had been pretty anxious about it. Since 2007, I had only gone to local events here in Nebraska and then the very first Midwest Divisional Championship event in Tulsa, OK this July. I know this was a selfish goal, but I wanted to keep my undefeated record at National competition intact. At the last few local events this year I had started to over drive the

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My wife Candy and I got to the National Competition site around 2:45 on Friday afternoon so we could register and I could still have time to do some runs on the practice course. Steve was about a half hour behind us so we had to wait until he got there with his car. After un-

loading his WRX and swapping tires to the snows we got thru tech a little before 4:00 and made our way to the practice course. We purchased a couple of run tickets for each of us (\$5 a run!) and got in line.

We had no opportunity to walk the course and only could watch the cars ahead of us thru the dust to see the course configuration. It was a less than 30 second course and we drove it poorly since we didn't know where it went. I had a low 27 second time on my first and a high 24

second time on my second, naturally, both with cones. After we were done, Steve went to go do his work assignment in Tech and I decided to hang around the practice course and watch the other competitors. During a break I wandered into the timing trailer and asked what the quick times were. To my surprise they said the Mod 4 cars were getting into the mid to high 24 second range. Huh? I thought I did a high 24 in our stock class WRX (we found out later that we hadn't disabled the ABS yet either) I don't know what to think. Did I really see a 24 on the scoreboard after my run? I didn't get to see which of the M4 drivers that did the 24's so I don't know if they were by the "fast guys" or not and if it was the fast guys, were they experimenting with setups or were they going all out? And still, those darn cones still kept jumping out in front of my car. After the practice course comes to a close some of the competitors have gathered and are chatting. A fast M4 competitor from the East coast asks me how my practice times are? "Did you make many practice runs?" Only two runs I tell him. "Did you get into the 27's?" Uh, I had a low 27 with a cone on my first. "Ok, how was your second?" I tell him I think it was a high 24, but dirty as well.... He looks surprised and then changes the subject. I wish them well tomorrow and decide to go get familiar with the course



for the morning and the start of competition.

The site that is hosting the event is huge and the surface is very hard packed dirt and grass with a couple of gravel roads to make things interesting. It will get very dusty as cars make their way thru the courses as Oklahoma has been very dry for several months. The competition for the National Championships will be held over three different courses. One

on Saturday morning for 3 runs, then Saturday afternoon that course with modifications in the opposite direction for 3 runs, and then a completely different one on Sunday morning for a final 3 runs. All nine runs will be timed to the 0.001 second. The first course is designed by fellow Stock All driver Charles Wright. To avoid any advantage of a competitors place in the run order, the order is determined by luck of the draw for the first course. The second course will be that order in reverse. I am one of the last cars in our class to start on Saturday morning, and will be one of the first out on Saturday afternoon.

Saturday morning, the competition starts. The first course was just slow enough that we could keep the car in 1st gear and on boost. This helped us negate the torque and gearing advantage of the Impreza 2.5 RS cars that seem to be the weapon of choice for the class, including the ones being driven by Charles Wright and Cliff Kangas. Fortunately, Steve and I made this discovery just after our first runs where we both commented on how we were down on power and off boost in 2nd gear in a couple of tighter sections. We discussed it and realized that we had a similar situation earlier in the year at a local event where we ended up running the course all in 1st gear. Steve was ahead of me

in the run order and he tried it on his next run. When he returned, he said that it worked much better than 2nd gear and the only place where he ran out of gear was on the last run to the finish and that was no problem to up shift there. We ended up using only 1st gear for all of the rest of the Saturday runs. After the first two runs I quickly found myself down in 10th place of our class of sixteen drivers. I over 6 seconds behind the leader, Charles Wright and 5 seconds behind 2nd place Jason Miller in a 2011 WRX. My raw time on the first run, using 2nd gear, was just under a second slower than Charles' first run, 72.3 to his 71.5, but using only first gear gets me quicker on the second, 70.4 to his 71.1 and Jason's 71.0 ... but I had one cone on the first run and two on the second for a total of six seconds of penalty time. I was having a problem figuring out one corner of the course at speed and it was throwing cones under the front of my car. I really thought I was going to be out of any trophy position not to mention 1st place. How can I gain all that time back on these guys if I'm running basically the same times as they are AND I'm getting penalty time added by hitting cones? I resigned myself to looking for small moral victories.

Maybe I could be the first into the 69's? That didn't work out either as within 30 seconds of me thinking that, Gary Marascola went 69.8 on his third run moving him up to 2nd place in his Outback Sport while Charles turns a solid time of 70.4, matching my best so far.

Fine, I said to myself, let's just get that problem corner done right and see what happens. The whole 3rd run I just kept repeating, "two cones to the left, not just one" until I got to the problem corner and made it thru the way it should have been done the first two times and then stormed for the

finish line. When the time came up on the score board showing a 68.2, I was PUMPED! Not only is it the only 68 second run turned by our group, it was CLEAN! I just got back over 2 seconds of the deficit to first place and have jumped all the way up to 3rd! I'm now only 0.4 seconds ahead of Jason, but exactly 4 seconds behind Charles and 1.575 behind Gary with what I thought was to be 6 more runs remaining. I CAN run with these guys! The door is open to catch them and it's GAME ON!

The Saturday morning runs had taken more time than the organizers had planned so they cut the Saturday afternoon session back to just two runs and then the 3 runs on Sunday. That meant that with only 5 more runs remaining, I will have less opportunity to gain time on the leaders so I will have to charge the course even harder to make up that time. My first afternoon run was the only time in the 74's with a 74.8, but again, with a cone for another two second penalty for total of 76.8. That kept me even with Charles and Gary's times of 76.5 and 76.7, so nothing gained on them. I slowed down on the second runs to a 76.1 but clean, while Charles had one cone added to his 75.4 and Gary holding steady with a 76.6.



That put me 3 seconds behind Charles and just over 1 second behind Gary after five runs, but the three of us have pulled away from Jason and the rest of the class by 5 seconds with the final three runs to come on Sunday. I had been putting down good

enough times to gain on them, but I had to work on being clean.

The course on Sunday is using much more of the gravel access roads than the Saturday courses and the transitions from hard packed

dirt to loose gravel and back may be problematic as the loose gravel does not offer as much grip. It is more wide open in some spots where 2nd gear is required but there is a 180 degree pivot cone that will need to be taken in first as well as two 270 degree loops and it finishes with several switch backs across the gravel road. There is also a section of running on the gravel roads that could probably be done better in 2nd gear, but doing that would require a critical downshift while heavy braking for a turn on the gravel leading into one of the loops. A botched downshift here while under braking on the loose gravel could lead to the turn taken too wide or even a missed gate. Steve and I decide to stay in first for that section unless we have to ride our cars rev limiter too long. We would rather give up a little speed in the faster section for the control we will get in return at the critical corner. I'm nervous as this course may favor the torque and shorter gearing of the Impreza 2.5RS and the Outback Sport that Charles and Gary are driving.

The run order on Sunday was fastest cars in class starting first then down the order by position in class. Charles would be first out, then Gary, then me, followed by Jason and the rest of the class. I was in line to run when I heard the time for Charles (87.2) after he finished his first run of the day. I also saw that he had slipped wide and hit some cones at the corner that transitioned from dirt to the gravel road. He collected three cones in total. That six seconds worth of penalty time is a devastating blow to him this late in the competition, dropping him to third place and putting me tentatively in second depending on what Gary would do. I knew that clean was more important than blazing fast now and I really was cautious in the dirt/gravel transitions and only hammered it where I knew I would be cone free. I matched Charles with an 87.1, but I stayed clean, and Gary only could do an 88.3. After six total runs I am now absolutely amazed to find myself in the class lead, if only by 0.047 seconds ahead of Gary. I knew Charles would have to push HARD to try and get back the 3 seconds that he is now behind us and go for the win,

but that would be risky given all of the cones that were being hit on this course. The seventh runs saw Charles turn a stunning 84.414, the fastest raw time of all SA competitors on this course, but he again tipped 3 cones for another six seconds of penalties. He is now in fourth place behind Jason. Gary comes back two seconds faster than his previous run with an 86.348. I am still being cautious and avoiding cones like the plague and I score an 86.438. That flips Gary to first with me now 0.043 behind him after seven runs and over nine minutes of total time in the competition so far! Jason is just under 6 six seconds behind Gary and I and Charles is 1.3 seconds behind him.

Last runs. It's down to a winner takes all shootout between me and Gary on our final runs.

Jason and Charles will fight it out for 3rd and 4th place as they are too far back to challenge for the lead unless Gary and I hit too many cones or have a course error. I had been too cautious on my 7th run and it bit me by letting Gary sneak in front of me. I need to push the limits more but still be clean. Charles comes back with another fast run of 84.9, but it's not enough. Jason will turn a good enough time of 85.7 to stay ahead of him by 0.492 seconds for the 3rd spot. Again, my starting third today lets me hear Gary's time as I'm in the staging line... he slows a quarter second to an 86.590. I need an 86.546 to take the lead. I know I have run an 86.4 on my previous run, but I can't do a safe run like before. I need a fast run, but how



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much can I push it to be quick enough but still be clean? The starter motions me to the starting position. It's time to put up or shut up. Visualize the run, big breath, focus, attack. Three, two, one, GO! I launch the car HARD and I'm on my way. During the run, the dialogue in my head is constantly switching between, "Be tidy, stay clean, be careful here" and "PUSH, GO, HARDER!" I have to be fast and attack where I can but be careful where I need to be. I grab for as much speed as I can, and get a little loose in the last switch back right at the finish line and the car steps out with the left rear and maybe slides too close to a cone at the edge of the course. The time flashes up on the scoreboard... 84.599, the second quickest run of our group... but what about that slide towards the cone right at the finish? Did I hit it? Did the cones come back to haunt me at yet another event? I wait for the penalty call to come over the PA ...

Wait.

Wait.

No call comes. The cone is untouched and the run was clean!! I finish ahead of Gary by 1.948 seconds! I've come back from oblivion after the second runs on Saturday to Stock All National Champion on Sunday! The rest of the trophy spots go in order to Gary Marascola, Jason Miller, Charles Wright, and Sean Grubb in a 2008 WRX STi. Cliff Kangas finishes in the first spot out of the trophies in 6th.

I really appreciated the other SA competitors who welcomed me as I made my way back to my spot on the grid. The first to my car to congratulate me was Charles and Gary. I didn't know these people 48 hours ago and now they are helping me celebrate. That's what RallyX is all about!

By the way, Gary only had one cone for the whole competition on his very first run on Saturday morning. One single two second penalty. It would have made the difference.

Note: I commented on Jan's helmet (in the photos by Candy Gerber, his wife). His name is in bold letters JAN.

He replied; "We did the helmet markings for Candy and I back when we were racing and sharing our suit. It was too hard to tell who was who when we had almost matching plain white helmets. I actually got the idea from Jerry Doctor who had "DOCTOR" on the sides of his helmet a while ago. Candy has a pair of red lips on the front of hers."

