

a tough one

Tough, rugged and even torturous are all valid words as a competitor uses them to describe highlights of the recent Shell 4000 Centennial Car Rally.

by Don Grey

It was called North America's toughest car rally, with 'more entrants, more miles and more days to celebrate Canada's hundredth birthday.' The Shell Centennial 4000 Rally was all that - but by an ironic twist, it was also the first in the rally's seven-year history in which Canadian crews failed to shut out the European opposition.

For the first time, too, rallyists and cars 'swam' part of the way. It was hardly the first time, though, that gooey mud, blinding dust, pelting rain, clinging snow and indescribable roads combined to put crews through the wringer and over the rack.

The man who ended the Canadian domination, crack English rally driver Roger

Clark, paired with Toronto navigator Jim Peters to bring a factory-entered Ford Cortina Lotus to the finish in Montreal's Expo '67 Autostade with the loss of just 44 points. It was Clark's first victory in a major international rally - he was third overall last year - and it gave Ford its second consecutive win.

Appropriately enough in Canada's Centennial year, there were exactly 100 cars entered in this year's rally - the largest total since the inaugural year in 1961 when the rally was sponsored but not organized by Shell. Ninety-three actually left the starting ramp in Vancouver on May 3 and 50 of those were scattered across the country

before the 43 survivors of the eight-day, 4,500-mile event staggered in to the finish in a rainstorm at Expo on May 10.

This year's route was two days and 500 miles longer than in 1966 and included overnight stops at Kelowna, B.C., Red Deer, Alta., Saskatoon, Sask., Brandon, Man., Fort William, Ont., North Bay, Ont., and Kingston, Ont. The rally also visited the provincial capitals of Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba and Ontario, as well as the nation's capital, Ottawa, where special Centennial ceremonies took place.

ROADS ATROCIOUS

The 'Shell,' as the participants know the



Dust and mud were two of the obstacles crews faced in the 1967 Shell 4000 Centennial Car Rally. But there were many more . . .



Winner's trophy is accepted by Roger Clark at Expo finish line as his navigator, Jim Peters, accepts congratulations from R. J. C. Pringle, vice-president, Corporate Relations.

event, is one of the few North American rallies designed to put the squeeze on the car and its driver rather than on the time-keeping expertise of the navigator, and over the years rally organizers Jim Gunn and Peter Bone have logged more than 50,000 miles sleuthing out the roughest backwater roads in Canada. Just to make things tougher, all engines (including the cylinder head and oil pan), transmissions, drive axle assemblies and generators were sealed before the start with heavy penalties imposed if seals were not intact at the finish.

With the atrocious roads providing the real test, timing at road controls was to the nearest minute, 10 points being lost for every minute early or late at over 100 secret controls. (The crews receive their route instructions only minutes before beginning each day's run. It is then the navigator's job to find the route and the driver's job to keep the car on the road and maintain the exact average speed specified in the instructions.)

MORE CLOSED SECTIONS

To add spice to the proceedings there were also 12 closed sections – up from the eight of last year – that included mountain tracks and logging roads, the sand and gravel wastes of military camps and three racing circuits. The closed sections were all on roads closed to the public and ranged in length from six to 37 miles, with a total of

over 250 miles, spread along the route from Westwood, a few minutes from Vancouver, to St. Jovite, 75 miles north of Montreal.

Racing against the clock, the competitors lost one point for every 20 seconds they were slower than the target times set for each of six engine capacity classes.

Despite the addition of two days and 500 miles, competitors faced their most challenging assignments in the mountains of British Columbia and Alberta on the first two days and on the backwoods rural roads of Ontario and Quebec on the last three days. The middle three legs, over the vast Prairies, present an almost impossible challenge, even to the most ingenious of rally organizers and Jim Gunn and Peter Bone are the most experienced in the business.

Leaving Vancouver on the first day, however, the cars were in action within 25 miles when they tackled a special stage over 10 laps of the 1.8-mile Westwood racing circuit. Impassable roads in the B.C. interior later eliminated part of that day's route, but a generous slice of other logging and ranch roads gave the cars the first of their many poundings.

Running true to form, it was the 1966 winners MacLennan and Wilson who took command after their Cortina dropped only two points at Westwood and turned in a clean sheet on the road.

Private entrants John Smith, of Kingston, and John Catto, of Ottawa, in a Lotus

Cortina were in second place when they dropped five points at Westwood although Smith had never driven on a race track before and was directed by Catto, who had. 'I thought I was over my head,' Smith said, 'but John told me to go, so I went.'

In a three-way battle for the Coupe des Dames, the Rosemary Smith/Ann Coombe Sunbeam Imp had already opened up a margin over English racing driver Anita Taylor and her Montreal navigator Terry Gillies, in one of the Ford team cars, and the Diana Carter-Polivka/Barbara Jean Jack team in one of the three works Ramlers.

As attractive as they were competent at the wheel, the girls were the stars at the overnight stops, where the cars were impounded every night. Each crew had 15 minutes to work on their car and it was a sight for the sore eyes of a mere male motorist to see two stunning girls whip through two tire changes, check the oil and perhaps change an air cleaner or fix an exhaust pipe – all in a quarter hour.

TEN DOWN

Ten cars were eliminated in the first day's shakedown and another 15 succumbed on the second and longest day's run to Red Deer. Ranging from the Columbia River Valley on the B.C.-U.S. border to the glacier country north of Banff, the 820-mile route ran the gamut from pot-holed logging roads and mountain trails to gravel, mud, ice, snow and choking dust.

Keeping the pot boiling were three closed sections – 37.7 miles over the Cascades in southern B.C., and then runs of 37 miles and 17 miles over a forestry road and the appropriately named Corkscrew Mountain in Alberta.

The roads were unbelievable, even to a journalist who has covered every Shell 400 on the ground since the rally's inception. Strapped into the navigator's seat of an Anglia entered in the newly instituted press category, the ride felt like a combination of a square-wheeled roller-coaster and the wall of death at a fun fair. Don Newlands, Photo and Feature Editor of the Canadian Magazine, who was in the driver's seat, was so busy at the wheel through one series of chuck holes that he hardly flinched when my Curta calculator flew off my clipboard and whizzed past his ear into the back seat.

DROPOUTS

But while the crews sweated, it was the cars that took the real beating. Some rolled or took to ditches and some simply expired as rocks and boulders ripped off brake lines and punched holes right through protective

plates installed to shield the engines.

One car staggered out of the wilderness with a piece of wood propping up the front suspension and another was hauled from a muddy quagmire by a mine rescue squad.

Our own Anglia made a brief excursion down some railway tracks (it was the quickest way back to the road). The next day, after alternately slithering through mud, plunging over blocks of ice and choking dust, the car finally died in the Rockies when the engine shifted forward and the fan drilled a hole in the radiator. (We might have fixed it if we had been anywhere near civilization, but the nearest community was 30 miles ahead and was a mining ghost town, turned into a penitentiary!)

By the third day, however, the rally was into the Prairies and the pressure eased. Only four cars retired and for three days the top six cars remained the same.

HOLIDAY ENDS

The holiday ended on the sixth day when the rally entered Ontario and returned to serious business. And although that day was the second longest of the rally - 780 miles - it was a short stretch of little more than 100 feet where the chances of several competitors were, literally, drowned.

While the local radio stations warned of

flood conditions in the Espanola area west of Sudbury the unforgiving rally organizers assured the competitors 'the roads were passable.' They were passable all right - by submarine. The water was only 18 inches deep when the course opening car, driven by Peter Bone, went through, but deepened as the day progressed.

Some cars sank to their headlights and beyond, some plowed through with a bow wave breaking over the roof, and others floated across with their snow-tired rear wheels propelling them like paddle steamers. More than one navigator had to swim when the ground gave way beneath him as he reconnoitered the depths for his driver.

It was a flood of despair for the Citroens, whose almost faultless team performance came to an end when the car driven by Keith Ronald and John Medwell became irretrievably mired despite the best efforts of teammates Ogier/Pointet to free them. The Smith/Coombe Imp also sank into the water - 'just like a frog jumping off a lily-pad,' as one driver remarked. Other competitors pushed the Imp clear (they had to because it blocked the only navigable passage) and although the girls dropped to 17th place, they retained their hold on the Coupe des Dames.

Thirteen cars were swallowed by the

combination of mud and water, and for the first time since leaving Vancouver five days earlier, McLennan and Wilson dropped points on the road. They pulled into the overnight stop at North Bay with a 22-point total, a lead of only one over teammates Clark and Peters. Ford's hopes were high with cars running first and second. But these hopes were short-lived.

HOME STRETCH

Launching into the seventh day and the maze of twisting hump-backed roads of the Ontario cottage country, the Anita Taylor/Terry Gillies Cortina Lotus was eliminated when the girls failed to follow mandatory alternate instructions and bogged down in a mudhole on the original, impassable route. Shortly afterwards the MacLennan/Wilson car clouted a sandbank on a closed section in Camp Borden and deranged the Cortina's suspension. Later that day they were to lose both the clutch and third gear - and it says a lot for this crew that they still managed to nurse the car more than 500 miles to a fourth-place finish.

With the last and shortest day ahead of them (370 miles), the one thought of the survivors was to reach Expo. Despite their caution, however, the finishing order was almost entirely changed from the order of the previous day.

Of the top six cars the day before, only Roger Clark and Jim Peters failed to change position at the finish, and their Cortina Lotus held the one position that mattered - First.

The Shell 4000 is one of five events counting toward the Royal Automobile Club of England's world rally championship and Clark's performance gave a boost to the rally's international reputation. Other foreign cars and drivers also performed well. Former U.S. rally champion Scott Harvey and Toronto navigator Mike Kerry finished second overall in a Plymouth Barracuda, while a Japanese Datsun crewed by Karl Schulz and Paul Manson, of Toronto, nailed down third place.

Rosemary Smith, the chic Irish dress designer, stole the fashion show and with navigator Ann Coombe also won the Coupe des Dames for the second year in a row. They were 13th overall.

With the elimination of one car from each of the Ford and Citroen teams, it was the Datsuns which took the manufacturers team award.

Only 43 of the original 93 starters were counted among the winners - a survival rate that stands as its own testimony to the torturous, demanding route laid out by rally organizers Jim Gunn and Peter Bone.



Congratulations are hearty as Coupe des Dames winners Ann Coombe, centre, and Rosemary Smith receive trophies from Gerry Marchesseau who, as manager of Special Services, Head Office Advertising, is in charge of the rally.