



THE RALLYING SCHMIDTS OF TAVISTOCK

The war of the sexes is never more bitterly fought than on the highways and driveways of the nation. In some future time, perhaps, victims of nagging female backseat drivers, and of belligerent males who holler "woman driver" indiscriminately, may sue for divorce on grounds of "Automotive Cerebrity".

But there is one couple who is proving that driving down the highway of life together — literally — can be satisfying, rewarding and fun. Of course, Bruce and Betty Schmidt of Tavistock, Ontario, are no ordinary, set of husband and wife Sunday drivers, but a skilled experienced pair of Rallyists.

The sport of Rally driving, as opposed to auto racing, is not highly publicized, and the skills and thrills involved are generally only known to those "afficionados" who involve themselves in it. Automobile races are run on specialized tracks, with a pre-determined number of laps, and the prize goes to the driver completing this course in the fastest time. But rallies are run on regular roads (albeit the more irregular the better), with the contestants expected to drive from one designated point to another in a prescribed length of time. Demerit points are added for every second or minute of early or late arrival, the winner accumulating the least points. Naturally all highways laws are to be observed.

Rallyists start with no previous knowledge of the route or the time limit allowed between the various checkpoints. Courses are laid out for the most part on difficult back concession roads with all the accompanying problems this entails. Mud and dust, snow and glare ice, sleepless nights and meals taken on the run; danger, frus-

tration, exhaustion and car sickness are some of these problems and Bruce says, "Enjoy it. We have a ball."

He has no desire to try racing. "The first time on a road is the best; the second trip around and I'd be scared of what happened the first time." Betty likes the variety too, of different scenery, people, weather, but prefers winter rallying. There is no dust, less traffic, roads are not so rough, and a snowbank is more comfortable to collide with than a rockface.

She only surmises this, because Bruce has never yet smashed a car. The proprietor of "Schmidt's Body Shop" in Tavistock says, "I know how much work it is to flatten out bent metal. I like to stay within my ability. You don't get anything if you don't finish, so we like to finish as many as possible."

It appears from the record his ability suffices. The Schmidts were the 1969 Canadian Rally Champions, 2nd place finishers in 1970, and at present time stand an excellent chance of becoming 1971 winners.

This success is due to many factors: well prepared cars properly equipped, careful pre-planning, and the ability to assess the situation and act instantly. But to a large degree it is because their abilities are so well matched. Time and again Betty mentions what a good driver, Bruce is. He can keep, a driving pattern in his head that enables him to stay on the second in his timing. This is important in rally driving when a 6 second difference in arrival time is considered lenient.

It is Betty's job as navigator to keep him driving to time, and on the right road. She reads the maps, memorizes

the rules and regulations and calculates the speed to the second.

Their careful preparation before each rally is almost as important as their skill in running it. For 4 or 5 days before each event, Betty says she "thinks rally", as she assembles her navigating equipment, pencils, rulers, slide rules, and a Halda Speed Pilot. The most important tools of her trade are a Langwell Odometer, (developed by Frank Langdon and Lloyd Howell), and the Curta, a coffee grinder type of calculating machine. She studies the maps of the area to be driven, trying to determine what roads might be used, and she memorizes the rules and regulations.

Meanwhile, Bruce prepares the car. He takes it out on rough roads "to thrash it around to see what breaks," then strengthens and replaces the weak parts. When the Schmidts enter a rally the car is ready. And they are ready too, with dogged determination to finish well, no matter what the road conditions.

Mud is the worst to drive through, and especially, the oily gumbo kind found on the roads of the Prairies. The only way to get through is to keep the car moving and the wheels revolving. Last year while driving down such a road in Manitoba, during the "Trail of the Bisons", rally, their car swerved sideways, stopped, and became properly mired. Bruce and Betty were shipwrecked on a sea of Prairies mud with no help in sight! After half an hour of winching and shovelling they were able to move one car length. Another 45 minutes and the tires were a muddy 10 inches wide. There was no way to get out at that rate. In the distance

could be seen a few farmhouses, and near one, about 1/4 mile away, a tractor was parked by the road. The enterprising Bruce slogged his way through to it crossed the starting wires and borrowed it to tow the car through the quagmire.

They left the tractor beside the highway with 2 dollars in the toolbox, and finished the rally in 2nd place, in spite of losing nearly 3 hours. It took a good half day to clean the car inside and out, and everything in it. This kind of mud clings like oil when wet, but dries to a cement finish and has to be chiselled off.

So now you know what it takes to beat the Schmidts. Just tremendous

driving skill, organization, courage, intelligence, initiative, a competitive spirit and lots of experience. You say you have all that? Now all you need is a Betty Schmidt, who looks like a school teacher, but is a graduate computer programmer. She worked as a systems analyst before her marriage to Bruce in 1963. By that time they had already been rallying together for 4 years, and if that didn't break them up, it's doubtful anything ever will! When Betty is not preparing for, running in, or recovering from a current rally, she enjoys making wine and cider from the 26 apple trees growing on their Tavistock property. Who says alcohol and gasoline can't mix?

But right now, they are "thinking rally", preparing for the big rally event of the year. This is the 4800 mile British Columbia Centennial '71 Rally, that will start from Ottawa on June 23rd and finish in Victoria B.C. appropriately on July 1st. They will be driving a Fiat 124S, a tough little car that the Schmidts favour. Bruce is preparing the 3 Fiat team cars entered in the event.

Scott Harvey of Dearborn, Mich., winner of the 1968 Shell 4000 Rally, has a favourite expression, "Well we're off, crash, burn, or win." The careful unassuming Schmidts are not likely to crash or burn, but winning is something they do very well.