

Rally New York USA 2006

Report by the Clerk of the Course

This report is somewhat unusual in that it has been precipitated by a lot of speculation and sensational writing on Specialstage.com.

Under the circumstances, the purpose of this report is to give an account, as complete as possible, of the events, lessons we learned and changes we are planning for the future.

Toward that end, dozens of people were interviewed for this report. Individuals with additional constructive comments are invited to contact the undersigned.

Running of the rally

There were no serious accidents and no injuries. The attrition rate was low and was lower than at a typical gravel event.

This was the first all-tarmac national championship rally in the US and both the competitors and the organizers can learn some lessons from it. (The distinction of organizing the very first regional championship tarmac rally in the US belongs to our friends in Tennessee - Rally Tennessee took place last September with twelve entries.)

132.5 stage miles in 16 special stages were scheduled and 111 stage miles were run. The rally ran on time for 1 and ½ days with the exception of SS 3 that was canceled because of delays on SS 2 with a resident who did not want to have her driveway taped. SS 11 was not scored because of non-rally traffic.

The event was conducted according to the safety plan that has been held by NASA Rally Sport as one of the best in the sport. The safety radio net worked flawlessly and seamlessly covered the area of the rally. The radio points within the stages were located at one to three mile intervals.

Five designated spectator areas equipped with fencing, limited access and separate access roads offered excellent spectator control and safety.

The first two crews in 4WD sent their representatives to the drivers briefing, some of them did not attend the announcing of the results at the Ceremonial Finish and skipped the awards ceremony. We would have liked them to participate and would have expected them to be there as common courtesy.

Speeds and stages

The official published results for all 16 special stages show the following speeds in miles per hour: 73.87, 67.41, canceled, 71.23, 69.29, 72.85, 80.11, 73.54, 83.18, 74.61, canceled, 60.32, 74.38, 80.53, 75.63, 81.30.

In summary

- Only two stages (83.18 and 81.30) slightly exceeded the FIA recommended maximum of 80.78 MPH (130 km/h) for gravel stages
- Only two stages (80.11 and 80.53) were below but close to 80.78 MPH with the rest of the stages significantly below 80.78 MPH.

Only for tarmac stages in the WRC, the FIA recommends 68.36 MPH (110 km/h) maximum. We also understand the argument about the higher commitment on tarmac stages in the WRC.

However, the 68.36 MPH maximum is routinely exceeded on WRC events, last time in Catalunya, because on many stages it may not be possible to keep the speeds below 68.36 MPH.

Finally, in our case, we are not talking about a WRC event. Motorsport Ireland, which has vast experience with tarmac rallying that is prevalent in Ireland, recommends the FIA gravel maximum as the maximum for Motorsport Ireland tarmac rallies. This recommendation is codified in the Motorsport Ireland Specimen Safety Plan for Tarmac Stage Rallies, the 2005 Edition.

We used all these stages before with speeds significantly below 80 MPH with the same field of competitors. This time, we added stretches of main roads to gain more stage mileage. This resulted in the two instances described above in speeds in excess of the recommended maximum of 80.78 MPH. If we run these stages again, we would remove the sections of the main roads. This would drop the average winning speed to 75 – 76 MPH on the Blind Pond stage and to 71.5 – 73.5 MPH on the Benton Hollow stage. These speeds would be significantly below the maximum recommended by Motorsport Ireland for international rallies.

Chicanes

We must have chicanes on these roads to slow the cars down.

Leading teams submitted inquiries claiming that the chicanes were not placed according to the Route Book. This prompted an inspection by Stewards that verified the chicanes were placed according to the Route Book at specific physical landmarks such as a numbered telephone pole, a mailbox with a street number or an intersection of roads. In addition, it is possible that some teams saw supplies for chicanes during the reconnaissance and mistakenly thought that that was the location of the chicanes.

Per a written notice given to competitors at the start of the Benton Hollow stage, the chicane at mile 13.56 was removed during the first running of the stage. We did not get a marshal to that location on time and removed the chicane in order not to delay the start.

There was an extra chicane during a single run of East Hill stage that was placed in error. The chicanes were different for the running of the stage in the opposite direction the following day. Materials for the chicanes were stored on the side of the road. By mistake, the stage crew set up and staffed an extra chicane that was supposed to be used only the next day.

The penalties and video records show that the top two cars were not slowing down sufficiently to negotiate the chicanes properly. The top two cars had 9 and 10 chicane penalties, the third

car had 4 penalties, the fourth 3 penalties and the fifth only 1 penalty. 37 competitors incurred 4 chicane penalties or less.

Two chicanes on the Blind Pond stage, which we have been running with these chicanes for years, as well as the new chicane on the Benton Hollow stage will be moved to make them visible at a greater distance like all the rest of the chicanes.

There were some concerns about the width of the road at the exit of some chicanes. That is sometimes unavoidable if we need to slow the cars down at a specific location. However, the two DNFs at the chicanes took place on a wide piece of road.

Reconnaissance and Course Notes

We consider reconnaissance to be a safety factor as per the FIA guidelines.

The time scheduled for reconnaissance allowed for at least two passes over each stage. Few rallies have two passes if they supply notes. Rally New York USA competitors got both.

Several events of the United States Rally Championship are exploring alternative sources of course notes. Toward that end, we sought and received offers from providers of course notes. In the end, we decided to prepare the notes ourselves as we had previous experience in this area.

Feedback from experienced competitors shows that our course notes were well prepared and were entirely satisfactory.

Marshals

Safety is very important with the right people in the right places. Each half a day, we operated the maximum of two special stages of the maximum total length of 21.50 stage miles plus the central service area with two time controls.

To accomplish these tasks, Rally New York USA uses the following personnel:

- 140 marshals, radio people and officials – most radio operators are trained as marshals
- 23 fire department personnel manning spectator areas
- two New York State Department of Environmental Conservation police officers on ATVs
- three New York State Troopers and
- two Sheriff's Deputies

We do need more people and are constantly recruiting and training new marshals. This month, after the rally, at a meeting of an organization called Sullivan First, we were offered 60 new people to be trained as marshals on the same basis as it is in Mexico – as community service.

We want to appeal to local rally groups to train and provide additional marshals for Rally New York events.

Before the last event, we started a campaign of recruiting local residents as marshals. We had some success and local marshals were on stages. This program will continue as part of the Town effort with the intention to have residents marshal houses in their neighborhood.

Many rallies run successfully through towns and villages. One does not have to go farther than Targa Newfoundland in Canada. The same is true for countless European rallies.

We had intermediate radio points with operators and marshals inside the stages no more than three miles apart and frequently only one mile apart. In addition, there were chicanes with marshals. Our goal is to marshal clusters of houses within the special stages.

Here is a description of the crew at the intersection of Benton Hollow and Elk Point Road: This was not even a main road – it was a little bit of overkill:

- Two radio operators trained and acting also as marshals
- An excellent Polish Rally Club group of three, one of them a New York City policeman
- A New York State Trooper

Marshal training: Over the last 24 months, we had a series of all-day marshal training sessions. The last session took place on March 25th and was attended by 50 people. One session took place 150 miles away at the Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, a leading engineering school in the country. Members of RPI Rally are an important part of our team and we helped them to organize their first rallycross last fall.

We also have an excellent crew from the Lincoln Academy Motor Club in Maine. They took a marshalling course at the Tim O'Neal Rally School and we also met them in Mexico.

Rally New York Marshal Manual and Stage Commander's Handbook is available online.

Our marshals and radio operators receive the following benefits:

- We give them training
- We are the only event in the US that provides lodging in motels for all the marshals
- We are the only event in the US that provides the second day – Saturday – breakfast, delivers lunch to stages and gives a ticket for the awards dinner to all marshals
- As a reward, they get an event t-shirt and there is a drawing for a \$100 gift certificate for marshals and a radio set for radio operators

Marshals had been trained to report incidents and safety concerns without delay. We have now defined specific procedures for marshals for logging and reporting on regular basis and in a timely manner.

Publicity and resident notification program

The publicity and resident notification program included:

- o A series of Town Board meetings with residents in attendance
- o Weekly articles in local newspapers during the four weeks preceding the rally
- o 300 color 19 by 22 inch posters distributed throughout the County
- o 15 10-foot banners placed at gas stations and other establishments throughout the County
- o 20-foot banners flying over main streets in Narrowsburg, Liberty and Monticello
- o Thousands of letters mailed to residents in two separate rounds
- o Personal visits by rally staff to residents' homes
- o Telephone contacts with residents and arrangements for special situations

- o Daily advertisements and announcements broadcast daily during the two weeks preceding the event and live broadcasts during the event by Rally Radio Thunder 102 on its seven radio stations
- o 2,000 copies of Rally New York News – The Official Spectator Guide were distributed to regular retail news outlets throughout the County with 1,000 copies available at the event

The Town of Liberty is a new town for Rally New York events. What we have here is a problem of educating the public, as there is no public awareness of the sport of rallying in the US. This is the legacy of many years of hiding in the woods out of the eye of the public and the media. There was a meeting of the Town Board with residents of the Town of Liberty on Monday night following the rally in which residents voiced considerable opposition to the rally. Given the composition of the opposing group and its location, the Supervisor of the Town of Liberty advised after the meeting that the Town is determined more than ever to have another tarmac rally in twelve months. Toward that end, a massive PR campaign is planned by the Town to educate, inform, satisfy and persuade the residents.

There is also considerable support for the rally from other resident groups and local civic and business organizations. As an example, here is a message from a resident of Benton Hollow Road, forwarded to us by Herb Clark, Vice President for Marketing and Sales, Sullivan County Visitors Association:

Subject: FW: Just a Thanks
Date: 5/1/2006 10:16:52 AM Eastern Standard Time
From: Herb.Clark@co.sullivan.ny.us
To: Eurorally@aol.com

Sent from the Internet ([Details](#))

Thought you might like a positive comment

From: [Address on file]
Sent: Saturday, April 29, 2006 5:04 PM
To: hcc@scva.net
Subject: Just a Thanks

I wanted to get back to you on the recent races, it is kind of hard to contact the officials that put together these events. So a little searching I found you. All we want to do is thank you for the wonderful day we had, a little nippy. But watch those beautiful cars and the talented drivers was a true thrill. I just hope everyone enjoyed it as well as we did. It is a nice way to promote our wonderful area and see what others can offer us and enjoy the experience together. "Kudos" to who ever managed to arrange it, a day to be enjoyed by all. Thank you for the hard work that was involved. Our home enjoyed the beauty of it. [Name on file] and families on Benton Hollow L.M. [address on file], 3 families. Hope to have another soon!

It is not going to do US rallying any good to shy away from confronting the problem of low public awareness of rally and again retreat into the woods. In addition, it has become increasingly clear that obtaining special use road permits for roads under the control of the state and federal forest authorities has become next to impossible in our area and some choice special stages are no longer available to us. This is likely going to become a trend, as it is now easier to obtain permits for roads under the sole jurisdiction of the municipalities.

Hundreds of people attended the Ceremonial Finish on the North Main Street in Liberty with music, live radio broadcast and fireworks. Dignitaries were present both at the Ceremonial Finish and at the Ceremonial Start in front of the Government Center in Monticello. We had hundreds of paying spectators in each of the five spectator areas.

Two weeks ago, we received a special use road permit for roads in the Town of Freemont in the northwest corner of the County. This is the site of the 1953 road race that subsequently moved to Watkins Glen. The legal basis for the special use road permit is New York Vehicle & Traffic Law 1182. During the period of road closure, the traffic laws are suspended, we “own” the road and any use of the road by unauthorized persons constitutes trespassing.

Where do we go from here? We happen to think that the US has excellent conditions for an explosive growth of the sport of rallying: We have the roads, low population density even in the vicinity of the major population centers, population crazy about cars and the young generation for whom Lancer and more so WRX have become cult cars. The influence of NASCAR now extends all the way to New York and NASCAR fans here have embraced us. Some of them are on our organizing committee or are in the decision-making capacities approving our roads and funding. They like anything with motors and wheels and they like rally as soon as they become acquainted with it. There is no contradiction between rally and NASCAR, a misguided notion sometimes propounded here and in Europe.

The only way we can grow is to make rallying more popular, gain more spectator interest, media interest and the sponsorship financial support will follow. This is the goal we set out to achieve and we have been fairly successful in this regard: We have more and more spectators from event to event, we have excellent support from the local and County governments – they want us here for economic reasons. In fact, the idea of having two Rally New York events per year was originally advanced by the County Supervisor and the Sheriff. There is a plan under way to submit a bill in the New York State legislature for the funding of our event to make it a true international event.

Safety

Safety is of greatest concern to us as it is to everybody else.

We had five course cars preceding the competitors at short intervals according to a precise time schedule published in the safety plan.

We had intermediate radio points with operators and marshals inside the stages no more than three miles apart and frequently only one mile apart.

We said during the drivers briefing that we had never had an intrusion on the stages by non-rally traffic from the outside of the stages before (meaning through an intersection of roads or at the start or the finish of the stage) because of the way we block the intersections and also the start and the finish of the stages. We box the intersections with a several hundred feet deep safety zone and block the roads with cars according to the diagrams in the safety plan. (It is also impossible for rally cars to get off the stage and again on the stage, sometimes against rally traffic. Neither it is possible for hunters, hikers or ATVs to get on the stages without knowing about the rally like in wilderness where there is no feasible way of notifying them over a large area.) It was important to understand that because there was a rumor to the contrary, which was baseless. We also explained that

- Any problems we had in the past were deliberate intrusions by residents within the stages who were well informed of the rally and knew full well what they were doing and did it on purpose. This was also important to understand because doubts were expressed about proper notification of residents.

- We never had a problem in Narrowsburg before where we had been running for several years.
- We had deliberate intrusions in Liberty last September when we were running there for the first time. This caused us to cancel stages.

We reported at the stewards meeting on Saturday night on the two intrusions that took place on Saturday morning:

- At the start of the Mathias Weiden stage, 1/10th of a mile up the road in full view of the start control, a resident ducked out of his driveways in the minute between the cars and left through the start. (This is our former local marshal who got disenchanted with us for something the Town allegedly did to him and did this on purpose.) We sent a State Trooper there and that was the end of it. This person knew full well what he was doing and attempted to deliberately disrupt the rally.
- At the finish of Blind Pond stage on Crystal Lake Road: This was a misunderstanding. The trooper blocking the entrance to the Crystal Lake Road was instructed to allow people into the Scout Camp. The entrance to the Camp was between the roadblock and the other roadblock at the STOP control. A car came, the driver said he was going to the camp, was let in, but preceded on the stage past the STOP control allegedly to another entrance to the Camp. We immediately stopped the stage at two intermediate radio points within this five-mile stage. A marshal at a chicane stopped the car after it met two rally cars in the stage. The State Trooper and the Deputy Clerk of the Course apprehended the driver. The rules require certain action to be taken by competitors in this case. The competitors and the marshals handled the incident expertly and in an appropriate manner according to the procedures required by the rules.

As a result of further investigation, two additional intrusions by non-rally traffic that took place on Friday afternoon in Liberty came to light during the week after the rally:

- In the first incident, the last car in the field was 15 to 20 minutes behind the car in front of it. The driver of the rally car reported that he overtook non-rally traffic driving in the direction of rally traffic 1 and ½ mile into the stage, 1 and ½ mile before the first intersection. He also reported two cars at the intersection being directed under the tape and off the course by marshals also in the direction of rally traffic. The driver of the non-rally car apparently thought that the stage was over because of the long period of inaction and did not wait for the checkered flag car with green light as instructed in a letter sent to all residents. The car never came out of the stage at any point so it must have been driven from one house to another. In these instances, we may have to assign a nominal time to a straggling competitor and not let him start at speed.
- In the second instance, during a four-minute gap toward the end of the field, a resident apparently drove a short distance from his house to an intersection, was intercepted by marshals and directed off the stage. Both competitors bracketing the four-minute time period deny ever seeing non-rally traffic even though the car was parked at the far side of the intersection beyond the grassy triangle when the second rally car went through.

We never saw or spoke to the first driver. The other drivers were properly notified and knew full well what they were doing. The marshals took proper action. We have a license plate of the second car and it is being traced to ascertain the address for the future.

There were also two cases of teenagers on ATVs reported in Liberty.

- One caused a rally car to slow down and he is being traced through the neighborhood.
- The other was apparently the son of the Hoteling family, which had those nasty signs in their driveway, who tried to race a rally car. A State Trooper saw the incident and followed the ATV off the stage.

In both instances, this was a deliberate action by the drivers. It is illegal in New York to drive an ATV on the road particularly by a teenager.

As explained repeatedly, we did not have intrusions **from the outside** onto the stages, apart from the above-described misunderstanding between the police officer and the driver. All problems and intrusions came from within the stages from people who were fully informed about the rally and either knew full well what they were doing or tried deliberately to disrupt the event. **This should be clear once for all.** It is clear to the Town and to us that we must work on this problem with the residents.

It should be noted that before the last two or three course cars went through, we allowed residents and even school buses, as previously scheduled, to enter the stage and we escorted them and watched them to their destination.

We also want to point out that Jose Vincente's post on Special Stage that started the thread Rally New York Beef is a fabrication and it is denied by the excellent crew at the intersection of Benton Hollow and Elk Point, which is described in the foregoing. Vincente modified the facts to suit his purpose ("I pulled out my watch and in six minutes the first rally car arrived"). The stage crew reports that the two civilian vehicles arrived along the stage to their post just at the end of the period the road was open to regular traffic when they were renewing the caution tapes for the next running of the stage. Furthermore, Vincente had no business of being at that intersection at all. The access road was boxed with caution tape and blocked with vehicles as far as one could see. Vincente's outrage about the resident who ordered them off her lawn is misplaced. This was not a spectator point; their stepping on the private property constituted trespassing and behavior like this does not endear us to the residents. In addition, this particular resident is one of the most vocal opponents of our being there. Jose Vincente did disservice to the rally in every respect.

Scoring

The scoring was contracted to RallyScoring.com that has been scoring our events expertly for years.

However, the provisional classification announced at the Ceremonial Finish was incorrect. A close inspection of the final results shows errors in class placements for ESRC and in the application of Super Rally rules, problems in the application of penalties and missing corrections that resulted from inquiries that were approved by the scoring and posted on the bulletin board but were never implemented.

While the results are final and cannot be changed, we will request that championship points be awarded on the basis of corrected results.

Budget

Some competitors asked the following questions:

- Why the entry form states that the course notes and two awards dinner tickets were included free of charge when it appeared that competitors were paying for these items?
- Why are the entry fees so high?
- Where does the money go when the event is collecting so much money in entry fees?

The following information will provide some answers:

The cost of an event of this size is typically \$65,000 to \$75,000. This time, we collected the entry fees in the amount of \$46,000. It is very difficult to close such a large budget gap and at times it becomes impossible.

Ivan Orisek
Clerk of the Course
Rally New York USA
April 27, 2006