

A day on the stages with Arnie

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Increasingly, in the world of stage rallying in the U.S., an adjunct to the route book is produced. This book, referred to as Course Notes, is a very detailed set of instructions listing each bend, dip and crest in the road. The equipment and methods used to make these instructions are very interesting.

I had the unique opportunity to be a part of the process used in the production of the course notes for the recent Olympus Rally. The man who has developed the equipment and technique is Arnie Johansson. He is from Sweden and has spent much of his life in the sport of rallying. From club level to the world stage, he has had an active role.

The heart of the process is a little box full of magic tricks. Inputs to the box include GPS, odometer and speed. The box, about 18 inches square and 8 inches high, was placed on the floor of the car, a rental Subaru Outback. Data from the box as well as GPS and other inputs were sent to a laptop computer.

Orientation of the box and computer is done at every stage start and at several waypoints along the route as well as the stage finish. The typical routine started with the orientation process.

As we drove the stage, Arnie held a map with the route marked on it across the face of the steering wheel. In his right hand was a keypad of about 12 keys. I read the route book as we drove along and at each junction of roads, no matter how insignificant, Arnie made a notation with his keypad. It was the same for instructions over bridges and those with caution notated in the route book. All of this was happening at a fairly brisk driving speed.

The magic appeared at the end of the stage. After the finish line had been determined and the location of the timing control entered, Arnie would then ask the computer to show a trace of the course we had just driven. Like magic, a thin

black line began to appear on the screen describing the route we had just driven. Pretty darn cool, in my book.

But, the best was yet to come. After we had finished the last stage of the day, Arnie turned the car around facing the stage we had just driven in the reverse direction. With the push of a couple of buttons, the computer was reoriented and then a set of speakers was plugged into the computer. As we began to move, the machine began its co-driver speak, calling out each turn, dip and crest as we drove along. More cool!

I had heard that Stig Blomquist used this method when competing at Pike's Peak. Arnie confirmed as much. As asked, "Swedish or English?" "English, I think. But he could have it in either. Or French, or German or Spanish, or..."

Arnie added, "He can also regulate the speed of the call to match his rate up the mountain, so that it is always an appropriate distance ahead for him." Beyond cool!

So that was it. What a great experience to have had. Arnie's "regular" assistant was to arrive the next day and there would be several more passes of each stage until the final product would be ready for the printer.

The day before the rally, Sue and I had the job of guiding about half of the competitors on a reconnaissance run of all the stages so that they could confirm the notes that Arnie had made and make their own small adjustments to them. Again, another fun and rewarding day.

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No F1 at Indy in '08

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The United States Grand Prix at the Indianapolis Motor Speedway will not be on the 2008 Formula One schedule after eight consecutive annual events since 2000.

After recent meetings, Indianapolis Motor Speedway CEO Tony George and Formula One Management Ltd. CEO Bernie Ecclestone mutually agreed to not schedule Formula One racing in 2008 at Indianapolis.

"After several discussions, Bernie Ecclestone and I were unable to agree how to keep Formula One in Indianapolis for the near term," George said. "However, we have agreed to leave the door open for a potential future date."

The 2007 event was June 17 and was won by British rookie Lewis Hamilton. At the time, George and Ecclestone agreed to a mid-July deadline for a decision about future events.

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