

## Nocturnal ½ Returns Rally

| Navigational (Nav) Class      |                                 | Leg 1        | Leg 2        | Leg 3         | Leg 4         | Leg 5         | Leg 6         | Leg 7         |
|-------------------------------|---------------------------------|--------------|--------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|
| <b>1<sup>st</sup> &amp;</b>   | <b>Jim Koltz/Jonathan Flora</b> | 0/0          | 10/44        | 10/24         | 10/76         | 10/16         | 1/1           | 10/32         |
| <b>1<sup>st</sup> Overall</b> | <b>Cumulative Score</b>         | <b>0/0</b>   | <b>10/44</b> | <b>20/68</b>  | <b>30/144</b> | <b>40/160</b> | <b>41/161</b> | <b>51/193</b> |
| 2 <sup>nd</sup>               | Russ Bedford/Joe Siedenburg     | 10/19        | 10/72        | 10/71         | 10/73         | 10/72         | 10/100        | 10/96         |
|                               | <b>Cumulative Score</b>         | <b>10/19</b> | <b>20/91</b> | <b>30/162</b> | <b>40/235</b> | <b>50/307</b> | <b>60/407</b> | <b>70/503</b> |
| Seat of Pants (SOP) Class     |                                 |              |              |               |               |               |               |               |
| <b>1<sup>st</sup></b>         | <b>Tony Grilo/Tony Grilo</b>    | 50           | 55           | 45            | 59            | 14            | 55            | 100           |
|                               | <b>Cumulative Score</b>         | <b>50</b>    | <b>105</b>   | <b>150</b>    | <b>209</b>    | <b>223</b>    | <b>278</b>    | <b>378</b>    |
| 2 <sup>nd</sup>               | Mike Blackwelder/Jim Hamilton   | 22           | 29           | 59            | 77            | 100           | 100           | 94            |
|                               | <b>Cumulative Score</b>         | <b>22</b>    | <b>51</b>    | <b>110</b>    | <b>187</b>    | <b>287</b>    | <b>387</b>    | <b>481</b>    |
| 3 <sup>rd</sup>               | Brian Grable/Sandy Grable       | 88           | 74           | 100           | 100           | 100           | 100           | 100           |
|                               | <b>Cumulative Score</b>         | <b>88</b>    | <b>162</b>   | <b>262</b>    | <b>362</b>    | <b>462</b>    | <b>562</b>    | <b>662</b>    |
| 4 <sup>th</sup>               | John Li/Eric Conzemius          | 100          | 100          | 100           | 100           | 100           | 100           | 100           |
|                               | <b>Cumulative Score</b>         | <b>100</b>   | <b>200</b>   | <b>300</b>    | <b>400</b>    | <b>500</b>    | <b>600</b>    | <b>700</b>    |

The concept of this rally was to bring back a bit of the old Nocturnal Diffusion rally series from many years ago. Nocturnal Diffusion was an all night rally that would begin at 8:00 PM on a Saturday night in November and finish after the sun came up around 6:00 AM on Sunday. The rally was usually around 250 to 300 miles long so there were lots of opportunities for legends to be born. I even included tidbits about some of those legends at the appropriate places in this year's route instructions. In addition to being a brisk Time-Speed-Distance (TSD) rally with lots of twisty winding back roads (including gravel and sometimes dirt ones) the Nocturnal Diffusion rallies also featured numerous special stages. These stages were usually farm field roads, closed race tracks, grassy waterways through fields, new roads in subdivisions where there weren't any houses yet, etc. Stage "roads" were closed to the public and to win the special stages portion of the rally you had to run through them in less combined time than anyone else. Helmets were required for those running the stages competitively but ralliists who wanted to compete only in the normal TSD part of the rally were also allowed to go ahead and drive through them.

Although Nocturnal ½ Returns didn't include any stage sections it was brisk and did feature lots of gravel back roads. Some of them were very soft due to recent rains and all of the freezing and thawing over the winter. The rally was also laid out to include three fords but unfortunately two of them had to be routed around so only one remained for the entrants to splash through. One of the fords that was bypassed was normally a dry "low water bridge" but due to rain on the Thursday night before the rally water was actually flowing about 6 to 8 inches above the driving surface of the "bridge." The water was passable but the road leaving the bridge was so soft in one place that it was too soft to be traversed by most cars without help from a tractor with a tow chain. (Thanks Tom and Norma.) In spite of that, there was evidence that high ground clearance four wheel drive vehicles were getting through it just fine.

As you can see from the results six cars started the rally. What you can't see is that only one car dropped out before the end. Surprisingly that was the Grables in their Ford Explorer and they dropped out just before the third checkpoint and rest break because they thought they were hopelessly lost. They now know that they were just six miles north of the course and could have easily rejoined the rally at the rest break if they had had a map (or had stopped in Westville and asked for directions to Georgetown). Amazingly they still didn't finish in last place as John Li and his navigator didn't take advantage of the opportunities they had from the rest break on to get less than the maximum score on any legs. The maximum leg scores I give are 10 hundredths of a minute for the Navigational class teams for scoring within their class and 100 points (1 minute) for the Seat Of Pants (SOP) and Novice class rally teams. To be able to evaluate how the Navigational class teams do overall against the other classes they are additionally also scored using the 100 point maximum so there are two scores above for each leg for them.

John and Eric missed the first three checkpoints by inventing a left at side road turn when they were supposed to continue straight there and to only change average speeds. They still managed to get to the rest break (with a little cell phone help) and run the remainder of the rally from it. They said that they tried that same trick two more times during the night but caught themselves both times. Give them a lot of credit for even running the rally though as Miata's aren't exactly the best choice of cars for this type of event. Subaru's are much better but even so Jim Koltz kept coming into the checkpoints saying "my car hates you" even though he had a huge grin on his face. He said that his Subaru XT6 seemed to be developing additional squeaks, rattles and clicks by the leg. On my minivan I separated my exhaust system between the catalytic converter and the muffler on one of the roads while pre-checking the rally during the day Saturday. Fortunately it appears that this was mostly due to the clamp at the front of the muffler having never been tightened. I was fairly easily able to slide the connection back together when I got to the next hard surfaced road. There I could sidle under the van far enough to push the muffler back against its hangers with one foot while, with a gloved hand, I raised the catalytic converter back up into position and reinserted the pipe from it into the muffler connection. Come to think of it I still need to tighten that clamp!

Other than Joe's Cadillac CTS-V needing a jump start to get going at the start of the rally I'm not familiar with any other mechanical difficulties during the night. I can report though that Mike's Focus didn't repeat the development of the "Check Engine" light coming on

during the rally like it had when I used his car and rally odometer to initially mileage the rally last fall. Mike said that it turned out that some sensor had failed and it was covered under the warranty. I do know that at least four vehicle owners took my recommendation regarding driving lights seriously and that the two that actually ran the rally were glad they had the extra lights. Joe simply put higher wattage Xenon bulbs in his headlamps. Unfortunately Russ and Joe still kept missing side roads and even some signs. I know my halogen headlamps on my minivan tend to wash out some of the old county road signs that predate halogen car headlights so I'm wondering if the even newer Xenon lights might create a similar situation. This leads me to think that perhaps having a mixture of types of lighting for challenging night rallies would be something worth keeping in the back of everyone's minds for future reference.

Missing things wasn't Joe and Russ's only concern though as you'll notice that (except for leg six where they got off course and ended up with a maximum score because they miss guessed or miscalculated their delay) their leg scores are very consistent. They also correlate nicely with the number of leg miles traveled at a prescribed average speed so I'm wondering if they either weren't taking odometer error into consideration or worse were figuring it backwards. Although Joe and Russ and Jim and Jon were competing in the navigational class neither team was using the normal hundredths reading correctable odometers and rally calculation computers that my 10 point navigational class maximum score was actually designed for so that maximum appears like it might be a little shaky in some situations in identifying the navigational class winner. While both the CTS's built in average speed calculator and Jon's GPS unit are clearly capable of being more consistent than SOP driving the GPS unit seems to have an advantage since it automatically uses real 1 for 1 miles instead of having to be corrected for the vehicle's odometer error.

Jim and Jon were using an interesting technique where they ran over the prescribed average speed from one speed change to the next, then waited at the new speed change location until the GPS's average speed calculator ticked down to the exact average speed they had just finished. At that instant they hit the reset button and off they went again to the next speed change point where they repeated the process. The down side of this technique is that it doesn't take into consideration the rallymaster's judgment in setting safe average speeds. In at least one case Jim was running just a little too hot going over a hill only to discover a grassy delta at a T coming up a little quicker than was comfortable. Was it two or four wheels that were on the grass when you made that turn Jim?

Another down side to this technique is for the following car if it doesn't understand what you're doing and tries to hack off of you in between the times you start out from the average speed change points. Doing this will end up getting the hackers into the next checkpoint too early. That was probably the case with the father and son team of Tony and Tony in their Subaru RS when they were more than a minute early on the last leg of the rally and ended up with a score of 100. At least I didn't disqualify them for reckless driving at 1:30 in the morning when they pulled out in front of me from a stop sign as I was trying to beat them and the car (that was supposed to be two minutes) ahead of them to the last checkpoint. That extra hustle needed on my part is what I get for not pre-checking my routes between checkpoints. A road that I had counted on, and that was clearly shown on the map, turned out to be a mile long dead end into a farmers circle drive. Had I had a working van in the weeks leading up to the rally I would have done a leisurely pre-check and instruction write-up of my between checkpoint routes but that wasn't to be.

Instead I was out on the course the Saturday of the rally in a just fixed van in order to obtain a few mileages where the reroutes had to be done for the fords. I was also checking that I had made all of the updates that had been found during the cold run the day before. One exception was that I was still holding out (futilely it turns out) that the ford on the odometer comparison section would be open by Saturday night so I (foolishly) hadn't made those major changes to the route instructions yet. Just to have the van out on the course at all though was quite a relief as I'd been trying off and on for almost a month to diagnose a rough running problem with it. I had finally concluded that its 20 year old fuel injector was letting too much gas through. Fortunately I'd found that an injector was available in Danville. Since that was practically on the rally route my cold run driver, Barry Rowe, ran me by the store to pick it up during a break in the cold run.

In my recheck and re-mileaging of the course I fortunately (or unfortunately depending on how you look at it) discovered several additional route instruction errors that we had missed on Friday. First, we missed a classic "1. CAST at STOP, 2. Right at CROSSROAD" type of situation where the first crossroad is the one a few feet beyond the stop sign. In this case it was a bit more subtle since it was a side road situation and the next turn was specified to be at a side road. I fixed the problem by quoting a sign at the correct side road. If I had to bet on it I'd bet that only a couple of ralliests would have caught and taken the wrong turn while most wouldn't have even given it a thought.

At another place we were looking for a side road one direction after a side road the opposite direction and missed the very first side road in the opposite direction. I ended up just quoting the green road sign at the correct intersection. A similar situation was on a road into Indianola where the reference was to find a curve arrow one direction and then take a side road in the other direction. Either we missed the first curve arrow or they put one up Saturday morning. Again, I changed the instruction to just quoting the green sign at the correct intersection.

Another miss was even more subtle since the instruction was a simple Right at T where it turned out that before the correct T there was a "forced" right where a driveway went to the left. Since I was telling folks that when they came to a landmark that looked like what was called for they were to execute the instruction that might have fouled some of them up. My solution was to quote the road sign at the intersection where the turn was supposed to be made. That wasn't too great a solution since it forced everyone to figure out when they got to the false "T" that the road to the left was a drive but I don't know that anyone had any trouble with it.

I also rerouted the course at a troublesome spot just north of Indianola where a crossroad between two houses was so hidden that we were afraid that both it and the sign for it would be missed in the dark. Just before the next intersection up the road there was a very obvious "GEORGETOWN 4" sign that I used to turn the route east and rejoin the original course.

Unfortunately by the time I got home from the muffler separation, re-mileaging and rechecking it was 4:00 in the afternoon so there wasn't enough time to do both the course changes to the instructions and to also integrate the updated mileages into my rally calculations. If just inserting the mileages had been all that had been necessary I probably would have had time for that but my Saturday re-mileaging was done with my old van's odometer rather than Mike's rally odometer so my van's mileages also had to be translated into the equivalent of an odometer that reads 10 miles in 10 interstate miles. I ended up doing just the course corrections so the rally could be run even though it meant that I wouldn't be able to do the scoring until after I got home from the rally. Even with taking that shortcut I knew I'd be running late getting back to Oakwood so I left messages for Joe to let folks know I'd be along as soon as I could.

In all the rush it turned out that I still made a couple of goofs in the checkpoint slips where I forgot to expand a couple of rows to show multiple lines of text. Fortunately it wasn't critical text in either case since it was information about the transits to the section end points that were also mentioned in the route instructions. In addition there was one route instruction in which I had put a reference to an upcoming route instruction by number and I didn't get that number updated after adding and removing instructions to accommodate the reroutes. Since that was a reference to the ending point of the transit zone back out into the country after the rest break I was able to score the leg for each rally team based on their interpretation of how they were supposed to run the transit zone and where they were supposed end it. This turned out to be the only mistake that caused anyone to want a leg to be thrown but as you can see above I kept it. Mostly this is because I was able to score it all three ways people interpreted running it but ultimately it is because the teams that had the difficulties on it would have been hurt by throwing it because they had the best scores for it. Adding insult to injury somehow doesn't seem proper to me.

Anyhow, with the hot off the press instructions, I arrived at the Oakwood Truck Plaza at a quarter to eight and there didn't appear to be any ralliests there so I started to walk around the building just to be sure and found them all "hiding" on the back side of it. Instead of the early start I had hoped for we postponed the start to 8:20 PM. We also had a bit of a holdup at the rest break while we waited for John Li to catch back up with the rally after having gotten lost on the first leg as I explained above. Even after combining those two holdups all the finishers were done with the 175 miles of rally before 2:00 AM. Jim Hamilton unfortunately didn't make it home until 3:30 AM and I until 4:30 AM but those are other stories. In any case whether you call the rally Nocturnal ½ Returns because it only went half the night or because it didn't include special stages (or both) the goal of the rally was to generate a few more stories that will be around for a long time. In spite of a few difficulties I think I succeeded in that in spades as both the folks that finished and those that didn't all said they had a great time and thoroughly enjoyed the roads. I'll try to do my part better on the next "Nocturnal" coming up in December. I hope to see you there.

Jerry White, Rallymaster