Press on,
press on,
press on regardless!

Counterpoint
Tuesday, November 25, 1975
Press on...

MARQUETTE, Sunday Nov. 9, 1975 — It's 3 a.m. in the absolute middle of nowhere. Stars hang like crystalline eyes over an evergreen forest in Michigan's upper peninsula.

A steam-like miasma rises silently from a long stretch of water covering at least 50 yards of a rough dirt road that winds its way through the untroubled wilderness.

Temperate weather lingers momentarily over the woods before the final onslaught of winter. The air is crisp, the atmosphere expectant.

Suddenly a blinding wall of light accompanied by a fierce mechanical roar shatters the pristine silence. A blurred form bursts through the darkness like a comet. The knife-like specter halves the water with razor-edged precision and disappears into the somber darkness.

"That must have been the Porsche Carrera," someone mutters. "They didn't even slow down."

A quiet of sorts returns to the woods. The few spectators who have found their way to this remote and watery point exchange surprised glances and listen for the approach of the next of a series of automobiles that will brave the flooded section of road which the Porsche so effortlessly traversed.

Most of the cars will make it through this hazard on "special stage 16". A few will not. They will flounder in the unexpected depth of the water that covers hidden ditches at either side of the road.

The drivers and navigators of these hapless vehicles will soon ruefully discover that the terrain chosen for the 27th annual Press On Regardless Rally (POR) is as wickedly treacherous as it was reported to have been before the rally began, many hard hours ago.

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Friday, Nov. 7, 1975, 6 a.m. Darkness still covers the Marquette Holiday Inn, but already a number of rally cars can be seen in the parking lot of the
rally preparations given to the highly skilled rally teams and service crews cannot fend off the mechanical breakdowns and on-the-road mishaps brought about by pushing the vehicles past all limits of moderation.

But such is the undeniable charm and challenge of the POR.

The 1975 POR is the 27th running of the event. For the second year in a row, the rally is being hosted by the city of Marquette. The POR, this year, is the 10th of a series of 12 such events included in the Sports Car Club of America (SCCA) sanctioned Lancia/Wonder Muffler Pro series. Points from the POR will be included toward a series-end championship which, this year, has already been awarded to the popular Vermont team of driver John Buffum and navigator Vicki Dykema, who have won five of the events prior to the POR.

The teams will be competing for a total POR purse of some $11,000. The rugged special stages will be the supreme test of each driver-navigator team. Rally officials, or "control teams," will man the start and finish of each special stage to time the cars and enforce the category's safety. Marshals will close the special stages to public traffic while the rallyists are passing through. The special stages are connected by "transit stages," which are portions of public road. Rally drivers must observe posted speed limits during the transit stages or risk penalties. A specific time is allotted for each special stage and penalty points are assessed for any time over. A lengthy breakdown can knock a team out of the rally.

But despite the substantial proportion of cars that will not finish the rally, the teams eagerly prepare for the POR. It appears to be a hobby for most, if not all of them. Many invest their money in rallying and get nothing in return except enjoyment. That seems to be reward enough.

"These are all normal people, like us. These are not big bucks people," explained John Love, a representative of Chie Racing Lights.

Roger Culbert, of Jackson, a navigator for one of the rally cars, agreed with Love's assessment.

"You make money to spend it on something, so why not rally cars? You get a lot of personal satisfaction out of it," Culbert said.

Culbert, 31, a designer for an engineering firm, has been rallying since 1973 with 20-year-old Wally Wagner of East Lansing, an employee of Lansing's Fisher Body plant. Both had previous rally experience before teaming up.

Their entry in the POR is a 1973 DATSUN 260Z, a vehicle they have guided through a number of other rallies. Earlier this year, the Datsun traversed a short distance in the "20 Stages" rally on its roof and had to be pulled out of deep snow, causing no small amount of damage. The pair have invested quite a bit of time and effort into reconditioning the car. It seems to be in good shape for the POR.

"If you look at it you can see it's a little wavy in spots," Roger said.

They said they have invested in excess of $10,000 in their rally car so far, and have finished no higher than 7th in rallies they have entered. In the POR they will finish 17th, which is a must better performance than many of the highly favored teams will accomplish.

Besides rolling their car in the 20 Stages rally, the starting pair had an unfortunate meeting with a tree. Rallying, they explained, has a rather high accident rate.

"POR is not so bad. All you can do is hit a tree or roll over," Wally said. "If you screw up just a little bit, chances are you will hit something.

"But the whole time I've been rallying, I've only heard of two injuries and they were minor," he added.

Such mishaps come with the territory and should be expected, they seemed to say.

"Rallying is an overall challenge," he continued. "It's a challenge to the crew's preparation of the car over and beyond the obvious mechanical stresses. We've never seen these roads before. The road conditions vary from hour to hour. You really have to be attuned to your car and the type of road conditions you are running. (continued on page 7)
It looked fairly easy. All one had to do to get through the water over the road was to drive straight and fast and sure. It worked for most cars. A few, however, found that prudence might have been a better tactic than iron resolve.

Special Stage 16, Nestoria-Herman Road, became a graveyard of the hopes of at least three POR driver-navigator teams who found the treacherous water-covered road to be more than their vehicles could handle.

Stage 16 soon became a chaos of dumped autos, crews struggling to free their cars, and spectators slogging through the water to offer assistance — plus the added element of further rally cars driving into the area.

But a rally without supreme challenges such as this would not be a rally.

Photographs by Dale Atkins; story by Frank Fox; layout designed by Joe Lippincott.
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under.

But by Friday night, Wagner and Culbert had more on their minds than just road conditions. Rain was raining and rain was falling. If the rain kept up, they said, their car would be at a disadvantage to the trio of four-wheel drive vehicles entered in the POR.

"If things go well, we're in trouble. If it rains, the jeeps are going to run away with this unless they crash and blow up," Culbert joked at the party Friday night.

As it turned out, the weather for the rally was beautiful. It did not rain. Only one of the four-wheel drive vehicles, a Toyota Land Cruiser, finished the rally and it finished several places behind Wagner and Culbert.

The highly publicized Jeep CJ-7, piloted by Gene Henderson and Ken Pogue and the Dodge Ramcharger of Scott Harvey and Wayne Zitkus both dropped out extremely early in the rally due to mechanical difficulties.

While Wagner and Culbert finished the grueling rally, many teams did not. But some teams, like driver Easie Perkins and navigator June McKnight, enjoyed themselves whether they finished or not.

The two Vermont women said they entered the POR without any prior experience in competitive auto racing. Ms. McKnight had purchased her car, a rally-tested 1972 Dodge Colt, through friends. They had driven the car to Marquette from Rochester, Michigan, after picking it up only days before the rally.

"We practiced all the way from Rochester to here," explained Perkins, who raises and trains thoroughbred horses in Vermont.

"We went off on a couple of dirt roads on the way up. That was very successful. The second dirt road we went on, I turned around and immediately got stuck," she said. "But that was good because we got a chance to learn how to use the come-along" (a hand-operated winch-like device with cable for pulling cars out of jams).

Though the pair finished only about half of the rally before engine trouble ended it for them, they still turned in a respectable effort for first-time rallyists.

"We had a little trouble navigating," Perkins said after the rally. "Things either came up slower than we thought or we got muddled completely...

But I think this is a fantastic sport," she said.

Other teams were perhaps less pleased with their ultimate performance in the POR.

The pre-rally favorites seemed to be driven John Buffum and his navigator (and ex-wife) Vicki Dykema. In 1975, the pair expended what was termed the best record ever compiled in a single season of SCCA Pro rallying. Their five Pro series victories this year had already assured them the series championship before the POR even began. And despite rolling their red, white and blue Ford Escort on the early Mount Marquette special stage, the Vermont pair were doing very well until motor mount problems knocked them out a little more than halfway through the rally.

But three-time European Rally Champions, Slobodan Zasada and navigator Wojtek Schramm would have nothing but good fortune on the POR. Sunday morning would see them bringing their Polish LOT Airlines-sponsed Porsche Carrera into the finish at the Holiday Inn some 10 minutes ahead of their nearest competition, Tom Tolles and Virginia Reese, of Ann Arbor, in a Volvo 122S.

But Friday evening, the finish is hundreds of miles distant.

Saturday, Nov. 8, 1975, about 5 p.m. From the top of Mount Marquette one has an absolutely magnificent view of Marquette and its Lake Superior harbor. It is a beautiful spot.

Whether the drivers who must fight the winding dirt trail up and down the mountain will appreciate the scenic majesty of the place is another matter.

The dirt road that snakes up to the peak of the mountain and then back down again is awfully slow to walk up and probably worse to drive upon. Through the forest covering the mountain, the road takes steep inclines, sharp turns and surprising changes that only a mule could love.

The mountain stage is only the third special stage but already a few of the cars appear to be out of the rally.

The slopes of the mountain are littered with spectators. Some are drinking. Some are tossing a football back and forth across the road where the cars will soon struggle and groan. Some have brought their dogs. Some have brought their small children. Some have even come to appreciate the rally.

As the time for the first car approaches, the steep inclines and the rock-strewn dirt road are lined with small groups of spectators. As many of the cars pass, people quickly trot up and down the road to get a better vantage point. As the rallying intensifies, more and more people use the road to move about the mountain. A number of them must quickly leap out of the way as a car comes hurtling up the road. It is a wonder that the drivers are not impeded by carelessness. Perhaps, farther up the mountain, they are.

As each of the cars fights its way up the mountain, it diggs deeper and deeper into the road, making passage all the more difficult for succeeding vehicles. The curves are especially bad and there are many curves. After awhile, one begins to listen for cars to bottom out as they encounter the deep ruts on the curves. One quickly sees the reason for the belly shields with which the cars are fitted.

Sweeping their tires, throwing clouds of red dirt and large rocks in their wake, the cars press on up the unsightly slopes through an increasingly foolishly crowd of onlookers who swarm over the road like so many inconsiderate ants after the passage of most of the cars.

It is surprising, but the spectators pick up their empty beer cans as they leave.

The stage ends as darkness descends upon the mountain. Now, only the dinner halt from around 9 p.m. to midnight at the Holiday Inn and an occasional gas halt will break the desperate pace of the event as the drivers begin to explore the depths of the Northern Michigan forests in earnest.

Saturday, Nov. 8, 8:00 p.m. A neon star flashes on and off in the darkness above the Silver Lake Resort, many miles south-west of Marquette. Spectators huddle together on the porch of the long, low building and watch the rally cars pull in, one after another. The rally teams quickly check in with the control personnel, gas up at the pumps in front of the combination store and restaurant and rush to the far side of the building where their service crews are waiting.

The rally cars pull into a clearing surrounded by trees and the forest night. Service crews are ready with small trucks and vans laden with tools and equipment. Working, as always, against a deadline, they must make any needed repairs quickly before the rally teams depart for more special stages and a dinner break back at the Holiday Inn which will precede the night-long remainder of the rally.

People crowd around John Buffum and Vicki in their battered Ford Escort and gaze at the damaged front fender and roof that the vehicle sustained when it rolled over on Mount Marquette. The pair lost almost 10 minutes on that stage and their car had to be righted by several spectators before it could proceed. Now, Buffum is again pressed for time and he hurries off into the night, leaving the hangers-on still speculating upon his fortunes in (continued on page 8)
of the "dinner finish." The dangers of the pitch-dark forest await while the rally cars finish their cups of coffee.

Sunday, Nov. 9, about 3 a.m.

The rally teams are about to enter special stage 16, which is laughingly called Nestoria-Her-Raven Road. It has down on it to be called a "road." The field of competing cars has dwindled significantly by this point and the treacherous water courses covering sections of this stage will add to the list of casualties.

A beaver's dam is said to be responsible for the unpredicta-
ble areas of water covering parts of this narrow dirt road that winds through a dense forest. Whatever the reason for the water, special stage 16 is probably one of the roughest of the stages. It is the type of merciless place that gives the POR its justly deserved reputa-

tion.

Deep into the woods, near a lengthy water hazard, a few spectators have ventured into the surrounding terrain. They struggle along the thickly over-
grown edges of the road and rush to the muddy dry spots to wait for the cars. Suddenly the Porsche roars through the water as if it were an inch-deep puddle and just as suddenly it is gone. No one can quite believe what they have just seen, or rather, what they haven't seen, for Zasada and Schramm are streaking through the woods as if they were pursued by demons. They are here to win. That is obvious.

A few more cars pass through the water, though not with the speed or confidence of the Porsche. Uneven hazards await the unwary. Then in happens. Car number 16, a Datsun 510 driven by Jim Callon of Sault Ste. Marie and navigated by Roger Dooley, flies into the water and promptly careens over to the left side of the road and gets very, very stuck. Callon and Dooley are in trouble and they know it.

They inspect their predicament and produce flares to warn other teams. All of their efforts to rescue their vehicle will be hampered by the other autos trying to veer around them.

Time sneers at its victims. They are aware that they are rapidly being eliminated. They have come far, only to swamp their car in a god-for-
saken wilderness. There is little dignity to their fate.

Dooley stands on what passes for dry ground across the drowned road from his immobile Datsun. Callon looks at the car and then across to his partner.

"We're going to be over our maximum late minutes soon, Roger," he says.

"There's nothing we can do about it, Jim," Roger replies.

Then, as they must, they continue their efforts despite the odds. By now they are trying to extricate their car with the help of a come-along, the thick cable of which is attached to a tree on the opposite side of the road and to the rear bumper of their car.

Shouts from drunken spectators up the road warn of its approach. The newly-arrived auto creeps between the two downed cars and the flare-like figures that wave it on. By some miracle, just enough room has been left between the disabled pair of vehicles to allow the other cars to pass by.

No one can really believe what is happening. The lights from the flares and the racing lights of the cars that squeeze through are too intense, the clouds of exhaust fumes rising from the Datsun as it struggles to free itself are too thick and the time and place too improba-
ble for anyone to totally accept.

But they are all there, stuck in the middle of the woods. And they are all there by choice. They paid to be there.

"Well, we really bought the biscuit," someone mutters.

As if two cars knocked out of the race at this point were not enough, a third is soon added. Apparently heedless of the possible warning offered by the pair of stranded autos, car 67, a Toyota Celica driven by James Enig of Baltimore, Md. and navigated by George Dorner Jr., passes the desperate scene and promptly deposits itself into the left ditch, perhaps 20 yards down the road.

The left side of the Celica rapidly takes on water. An-
other rally team quickly realizes that they are out of luck.

Amazingly, but too late, the Datsun is finally pulled free and continues down the road — though by now its race is over. The BMW and Celica seem beyond help.

All the cars have passed through now. The woods are silent except for the obscene noises emanating from the ex-
hauast pipe of the Celica which spews its fumes out into the water with a suggestive blub, blub, blubbing. It is a futile attempt. The Celica is going nowhere.

Near the BMW, Foukrod and Shortt stand on a tiny island and ponder the circum-
stances which have removed them from the rally. Their flare goes out and they stand quietly in the dark.

"Well I learned something tonight," Shortt says softly. "What's that?"

"Celica and BMW both make pretty good marine engines."

And down the road, the Celica sits with its left side listing in the ditch. Its crew stands nearby. Water reaches the driver's seat and covers the floor pedals while on the naviga-
gator's side a digital clock continues to click off meaningless ones-hundredths of seconds silently in the forest gloom.