

# The 2000 Alcan Winter Road Rally

An Alaska motor sports competition provided a venue for Chinook's new type C to display its off-road and vehicle assistance capabilities.

By LAZELLE D. JONES

**“Y**ou’ve got to be kidding,” most people will say. “They really entered a motorhome in a winter road rally to Alaska?”

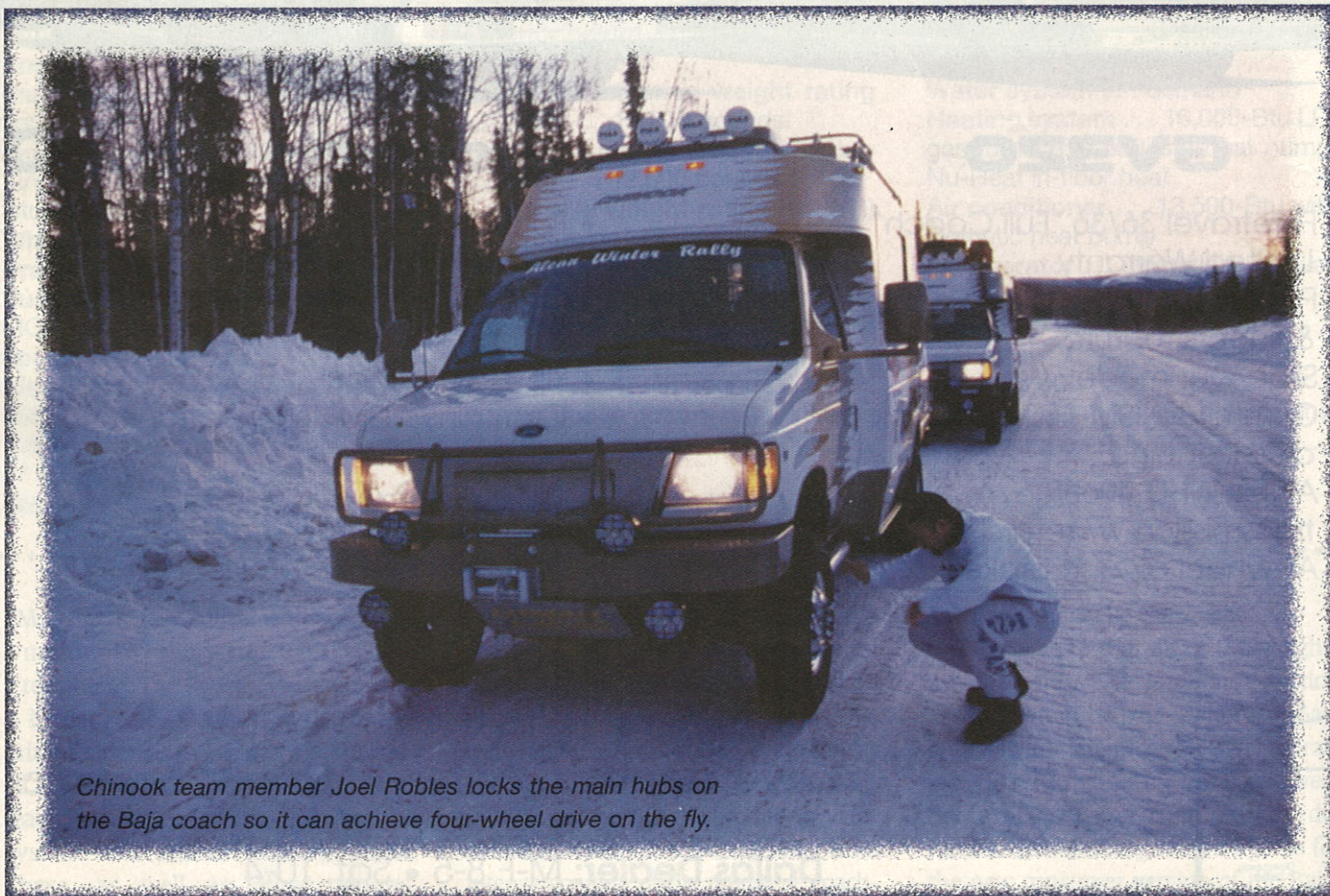
Precisely. Trail Wagons/Chinook of Yakima, Washington, entered two of its all-new Chinook Concourse Baja type C motorhomes in a motor sports competition called the 2000 Alcan Winter Rally, which is held every four years. The company also provided the organizers

ensuring that all participants reached the sanctuary of the night’s lodging).

The 2000 Alcan Winter Rally began on February 11 in Kirkland, Washington, and proceeded north all the way up to Prudhoe Bay, Alaska, on the Arctic Ocean. This little town is the northernmost point in North America that a conventional vehicle can be driven to. From there, the participants returned south to

time/speed/distance (TSD) competitions every day, as well as three ice racing events on frozen lakes and speedways at Quesnel in British Columbia, Whitehorse in Yukon Territory, and at Long Lake near Anchorage. The Alcan name comes from the common term for the Alaska-Canada Highway.

A TSD competition can be run over a distance as short as eight or 10 miles, or can cover 60 miles or more. Each TSD is



*Chinook team member Joel Robles locks the main hubs on the Baja coach so it can achieve four-wheel drive on the fly.*

of the rally with a third motorhome for use as a media base, and as a rescue and “sweep” vehicle (“sweep” meaning it was the last vehicle in at night, after

Anchorage, where the rally ended. The event covered 4,500 miles and took nine days to complete.

The rally included at least two

divided into four segments, sometimes five, with an official timer at the end of each segment. When a team reaches the end of a TSD segment, the timer records



The U.S. Postal Service does seem to be committed to its pledge of "neither rain . . . nor snow . . ."

the exact time of the team's arrival (down to  $\frac{1}{100}$  of a second). The idea is to arrive at the end of each segment right on schedule, not fast, not slow; arriving even a second early or late draws a penalty. If a team arrives six seconds too early, six points are added to its score. If the team arrives six seconds late, six points are added to the score. The team with the *fewest* points at the end of the competition wins.

The travel time between each TSD is called a transit. These are not clocked. However, a team cannot complete a transit and start a TSD early or late, for it will be penalized or given points.

On this trip, the average driving time each day was between eight and 16 hours, with the longest distance covered in a single day being 850 miles, between Fort Nelson, British Columbia, and Whitehorse, Yukon.

In addition to the Baja motorhomes, vehicles entered in the rally included two BMWs, a Dodge Durango, a Ford F-250, an Audi 4000 Quattro, a Toyota Landcruiser, two Jeep Cherokees, three Isuzu SUVs, a Range Rover, an Eagle Talon, and eight Subaru all-wheel-drive vehicles.

**Bajas up to the challenge.** Why were three Chinook Baja motorhomes participating in this winter road rally? Trail Wagons/Chinook president Dan Lukehart has introduced a new product designed to appeal to adventure-driven individuals who want to get into the backcountry, but at the end of the day

also want to enjoy the RV lifestyle. The Baja can venture into off-road areas in all kinds of weather. And at the end of the day, even in the middle of a bliz-



A Baja coach awaits the start of an ice racing competition.

zard or in subzero temperatures, those inside the Baja can enjoy all of the luxuries and comforts motorhome enthusiasts have come to expect.

The Baja features all the appointments of any top-of-the-line type C. But inside the engine compartment, in the drive-train, and underneath where the suspension is, the similarity ends. The Bajas used in the road rally were given various modifications, including a Quigley Motor Company four-wheel-drive front end; a Warn 12,000-pound

electric winch on the front; diamond plate shields to protect the tanks, plumbing, and running gear from road and trail hazards; and an exhaust system augmented with Gale Banks-engineered exhaust components. (For more information about the Baja, see the coach feature that begins on page 86.)

Of the 23 vehicles that entered the 2000 Alcan rally, the blue Baja (called *Suka Tumi*, an American Indian word meaning "fast, speed footprint"), driven by Dan Lukehart and assisted by drivers Mike Quigley and Dave Bergeron, finished 16th overall.

A motorhome crossing over into such a foreign venue as a road rally and finishing ahead of several other competitors could alone be considered newsworthy. But the real untold story is how the organizers of the 2000 Alcan came to depend on the Bajas to assist in getting other vehicles unstuck under miserable, icy, and life-threatening tem-

peratures and other weather conditions.

When the Bajas entered the rally, other competitors moaned, "They'll slow us down. They'll get in our way. This is no place for a publicity stunt." But by the time the awards banquet was held nine days later in Anchorage, the other teams praised the Chinook motorhomes and their teams.

Not only did the Bajas' four-wheel-drive and power winch help retrieve those who had strayed off course, but

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All three Bajas wait to continue the rally while parked 250 miles north of the Arctic Circle.

the mechanical and electrical expertise of the Chinook factory team members became invaluable to those in need. On more than one occasion, when other vehicles experienced mechanical difficulties, the Bajas were there to help. For instance, on day two, Chinook teams provided replacement driving lights to a team that had hit a deer. On day eight, the Lukehart/Bergeron/Quigley team stopped to loan a battery to a vehicle whose alternator had failed. For this cheerful assistance, the Chinook Suka Tumi team was presented the Pirelli Sportsmanship Award.

The brown-and-white Baja, the second team entered by Chinook, driven and navigated by Joel Robles and Jerry Miner, won an award for completing all criteria in the Dalton Class (Touring). Entrants in this class are not scored but must adhere to the same route and schedule as other teams.

**Competitive drive.** The Alcan winter rally is a serious event, not only for the individuals who enter the competition but for the factory-sponsored teams. For example, Johnny Unser and Paul Dallenbach, along with their navigator, Tom Grimshaw (considered one of the top navigators in the world today), competed in a factory Isuzu Rodeo SUV. Team Isuzu, with Dallenbach and Unser, won this competition in 1992 and 1996 and were shooting for a third victory.

Meanwhile, Subaru and Perilli Tire had joined forces in an Outback sedan

driven by Alberto Pirelli (yes, the tire magnate) and Italian driver Tiziano Furlan, a team with European rally experience.



Jerry Miner (left) and Joel Robles teamed together to race one of the Chinook motorhomes.

From the start, the competition was stiff. At the end of the first day, Dallenbach, Unser, and Grimshaw had accumulated the fewest number of points, with Subaru only six points behind (or ahead of) them. By the end of day eight and beginning day nine, .4-point separated these two teams, with Isuzu still leading. Day nine included a TSD and an ice racing competition on an oval track that had been scraped from the frozen surface of

Long Lake. The overall winner was decided during the very last event, with Subaru edging out Isuzu by 4.8 points, with a score of 72.4.

**Seeing white.** The highlight of this road rally was the two-day (up and back) excursion that led up the Dalton Highway to the Arctic Ocean at Prudhoe Bay. This is a 12-hour, 500-mile drive each way, with only one source for fuel along the way, that being at a place called Coldfoot. Coldfoot is located 260 miles north of Fairbanks and 250 miles south of the Arctic Ocean.

The Dalton Highway is a dirt-and-gravel road that was carved across the tundra and through the Brooks Mountains to support the building of the Alaska Pipeline. Only in recent years has the highway been open to the public. In winter, the Atigun Pass in the heart of the Brooks Range and the arctic tundra is the "whitest" place you

will ever see. The annual snowfall on the tundra is only approximately 20 inches, but the fierce winds that blow across this endless expanse churn and shift the snow, causing whiteouts that can occur at any moment.

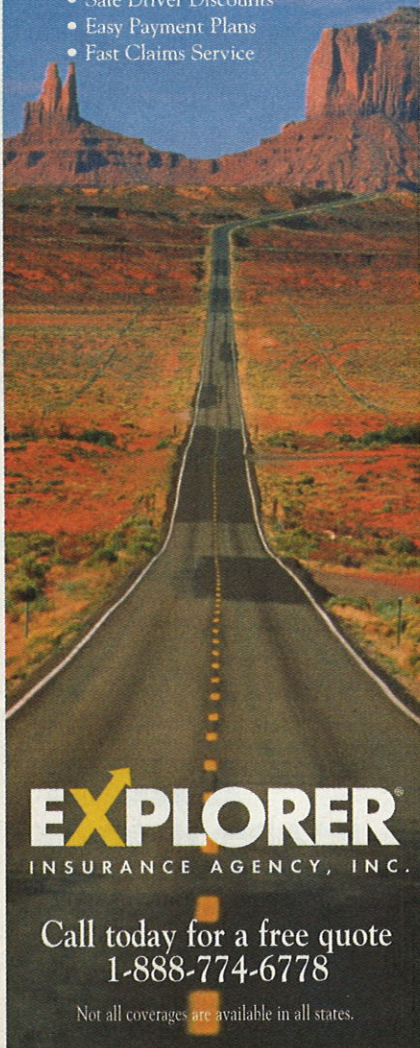
As the rally headed up the Dalton Highway, everyone was prepared for the conditions. From the comfort of the Chinook interior, all that could be seen in every direction was a white land-

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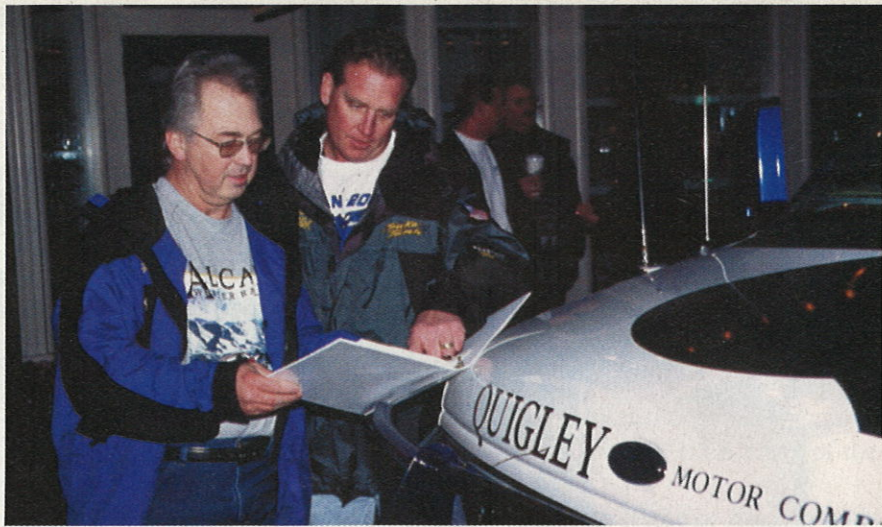


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Mike Quigley (left), owner of Quigley Motor Company, with Dan Lukehart, president of Trail Wagons/Chinook.

scape. The horizon seemed to wrap itself around and back over the top of the vehicles. The outside ambient temperature hovered at 30 degrees below zero Fahrenheit, but with wind gusts up to 50 mph, the windchill factor easily plummeted temperatures to 50 degrees below zero. Temperatures such as these are instantly hazardous to one's health. Even with a light breeze blowing, the forehead, cheeks, and other exposed areas feel as though a blowtorch is being held against the skin. In these circumstances, the rule is that you never pass a vehicle that's stopped, for the people in it may be in trouble.

At Prudhoe Bay, Jerry Hines, the organizer of the rally, had arranged for a guided tour (by vehicle) of the oil fields, with a stop at the shore of the Arctic Ocean. Security at the oil fields is tight. As much as 3.5 million barrels of oil can be piped south each day.

**Hostile conditions.** A trip to Alaska in the middle of February is not recommend as a solo adventure for anyone. Your equipment and gear need to be in tip-top shape and you need to be prepared for any kind of emergency. A vehicle equipped with four-wheel drive is mandatory, as is a power winch and a CB radio. You can't go too lightly on personal gear. Extreme-weather clothing is essential. You have to dress in layers, and be ready to don or remove layers, depending on whether you are inside a vehicle or are getting out of a vehicle. The weather up there is nothing to fool with.

All three of the Chinook Bajas had much on the line in the Alcan Winter Rally. Entry into the event was purposefully undertaken to demonstrate the efficacy of the Baja in hostile and challenging environments. One of the Bajas and only one other team achieved perfect scores of 0,0,0,0 in a TSD.

Among all three Bajas, only one equipment failure occurred — an inside rear tire blew out on one of the coaches. With spare tires lashed to the top platform and an axle jack immediately at hand, Chinook team members were fully prepared for this kind of situation. In fact, from the time the Baja stopped to the time the tire was changed and the coach was again ready to roll, less than 10 minutes had elapsed.

For all the goodwill Chinook spread among the other teams, the help they offered, and the sportsmanlike conduct exhibited by the Chinook people during the competition, all that can be said about this experience is, "Good job, Chinook."

## Futher Info

The next Alcan winter rally will be held in 2004. A summer Alcan is slated for August 2002. For more information, contact:

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