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Linda Verraster  
San Clemente, CA 92672

Dear Linda:

I am so sorry to hear about John. I ran two Alcan 5000s with him when I was covering the rally for the Chicago Tribune, and he was a delight to be with. A very dry sense of humor and great stories. When you spend 10 days and 5000 miles in a car, you get to know people pretty well. If you get on, it's a terrific adventure.

If you don't... well I can recall the 2003 Winter Alcan when a conversation about our navigator's night driving skills resulted in the temperature in the car dropping to the same as outside. That was the first or second night of the event, and the navigator refused to ride with us thereafter, except when we were doing TSDs!

John and I got off to a good start together on the 2004 Summer Alcan, which had 14 motorcycle riders and six support vehicles. When the mercury hit 95 degrees in Cache Creek B.C. we wondered if we should have ridden ourselves. (Later on, when it started to snow after a thunderous downpour, we congratulated ourselves or our foresight).

What happened next is the kind of thing that ONLY happens on the Alcan. When we got to Fort St. John in northern BC, the driver of our car, and third man in our workers' crew, announced that he had to be back at work in two days! So we had no car. Jerry reacted with his usual enterprise – literally – and said "That's easy, we'll just rent a car at the airport and turn it in when we get to Vancouver BC."

So we picked up a nearly new Pontiac Grand Am, which had no idea what it was getting into. Fog turned into moderate rainfall, then a ferocious storm which lasted 100 miles and drowned the riders. We were grateful we were in a nice new car, though it was quickly looking like a farm truck. We stopped for gas (in Fort Nelson, I think) and the attendant said "Alberta rental car, eh? You must have the exemption for driving on gravel roads..." We just nodded.

About 200 miles further on, I was driving as we neared Watson Lake. The weather was still dreadful but there was no traffic and we were doing 80-85 mph. Ahead of us were three Alaska-sized crows chewing on something in the road. Crows are smart so I kept going and figured they would fly away. One flew left, one flew right and I thought I might have hit the third...

when there was a huge bang and it sounded like all our windows were down. The third crow had planned to fly up the middle and clear the car, but hit our rooftop radio antenna and detached the magnet, which whipped around and smashed the back window.

“Don’t slow down,” said John. “Otherwise we’ll fill up with water. When we get to Watson Lake we’ll find a furniture store and get some plastic. We can tape that on, and get a window in Whitehorse.”

We flip-flapped our way to Whitehorse the next day, sounding like a sailing ship rounding up into the wind, and stopped at an auto glass shop. The guy was most amused. “How the hell did you do that?” he asked, and we all had a good laugh. “Can you get us a window?” He looked it up. “I can,” he said “but it’ll cost you \$1,300.” “WHAT?” we said. “Nobody breaks back windows,” he told us. “Oh well, when can you get it?” “Five days if I’m lucky,” he answered. Since we were leaving town at 8 a.m. the next morning, that was that.

The rest of the rally proceeded as they do. Rider Mike Stram drowned his bike crossing a river, then Michael O’Keefe broke a bone in his foot and had to fly home for surgery. So Stram took over O’Keefe’s bike for the rest of the rally, which stopped at the Teslin Bridge while workers swung out over the 500-foot-deep gorge to effect repairs.

“Does it bother you that they’re welding on the bridge we’re about to drive over?” Said John. The way home took us down the Stikine Gorge (Canada’s Grand Canyon) to the sea at Skagway, and along the Cassiar Highway past a picket fence of 10,000 foot coastal mountains.

The rally ended at Whistler ski resort, north of Vancouver. It’s a movie-set Alpine village with six-foot wide streets and a Disneyland design: beneath it is a cavernous warehouse where semi trucks deliver all the goods to be hoisted in elevators beneath the buildings.

As I recall, John and I shared what looked like suite overlooking the ski slopes. It had a kitchenette, a bathroom, a great view...but where was the bedroom? The answer was a king-size Murphy bed which dropped down, narrowly missing the fireplace and the kitchen and filling every square inch of floor space.

“What are we going to do about the car?” said John. “We can’t take it through a car wash, we’ll be drowned.” He thought for a minute. “I think there are guys in Chinatown who will hand wash it, let’s go there.”

The next day we found the place he was looking for and as we pulled up, a lot of Asian workers looked out the door and started chattering angrily. Their boss said “They don’t want to do it.” John started peeling off \$20 bills, and the grumbling subsided until they were reduced to glares at \$120. It took a while but it didn’t look too bad – from the front.

We drove slowly to the Hilton Hotel on the waterfront where the rental place was based. Luckily for us we ran into Basil Fawlty on the front desk. I was trying to give back the keys while he was on the phone. He was outraged at the interruption. “Look, can’t you see I’m busy!

Drop it on the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor in the basement and leave the keys in it." John gave him the papers and we tiptoed away. "We're supposed to be picked up in about 10 minutes, I hope to Christ he gets here," he said.

We tried to keep an eye on the hotel entrance without actually being visible and finally our ride arrived. "I suppose I'd better tell my insurance agent," said John after we'd all had a laugh. He made the call and I could hear his friend laughing on the other end of the phone. After a brief conversation, John hung up with a grin. "He says he's going to count it as a windshield, I'm covered."

I'm sure John has told these stories many times. I know I have.

Ralph Waldo Emerson said: *"It's not the destination. It's the journey."*

I'd like to add *"It's not just the journey, it's the company."*

Yours sincerely

Paul Duchene

