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COVER
STORY

Conquering the Alcan Rally: My Porsche Cayenne's Journey to the Arctic

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A Sudden Snowbank Encounter

The icy gravel of the remote highway bounced off the road, hitting the windshield and creating metallic pings as it struck the skid plate beneath my Porsche Cayenne. The light, fluffy snow, blowing from behind a semi-truck, clouded our view. Suddenly, the Cayenne in front of us, driven by another Alcan Rally team, disappeared into the snow cloud as they attempted to overtake the truck. As we cautiously followed, we spotted their vehicle stuck in the soft snowbank on the road's shoulder. Without hesitation, we sprang into action, quickly rescuing and towing the other Cayenne, knowing that in these harsh conditions, every moment counted.

The Call of the Alcan Rally

As a passionate motorsports enthusiast and a Porsche Club of America HPDE National Instructor,

I had always dreamed of embarking on a unique rally adventure. When I discovered the Alcan 5000 Rally, I knew it was the perfect opportunity to push myself and my Porsche Cayenne to the limit.

The Alcan 5000 Rally, first held in 1984, is a biennial event that takes participants on an epic journey from Washington state to Alaska, traversing some of the most challenging and remote terrains in North America. Unlike the time attack racing I was accustomed to, the Alcan Rally is a marathon – a grueling test of endurance covering 5,000 miles over 10 days, with each day demanding 10-12 hours behind the wheel in temperatures plummeting to -40°F. With entry limited to just 40 teams, the rally maintains an exclusive and intensely competitive atmosphere. The Alcan Rally truly is the ultimate test of driver and machine.

My journey with the Cayenne began a few years ago when I



purchased it with the goal of having a vehicle that could excel at long road trips in various conditions, while still being sporty and fun to drive. I was inspired by the Transsiberia Rally of 2007-2008, where modified early-generation Cayennes dominated the rugged terrains of Russia and Mongolia. Even before registering for the Alcan, I started modifying my Cayenne with this type of event in mind, aiming to improve its off-road capabilities without compromising comfort or on-road handling.

As the rally drew closer, the reality of the challenge ahead began to sink in. The prospect of navigating treacherous roads in extreme cold for extended periods each day was daunting. I intensified my preparations, focusing on both personal readiness and vehicle modifications. With my trusted friend and navigator, Jesse Coyne, I spent countless hours researching equipment

and logistics, poring over maps, studying the route, and discussing our strategy. As our departure date approached, a mix of excitement and nervous anticipation built, knowing we were about to embark on the adventure of a lifetime.

Gearing Up for the Unknown

As the rally approached, I found myself grappling with numerous concerns. The extreme cold was my primary worry – how would it affect the Cayenne, and was I purchasing the right clothing for the harsh conditions? Living in the Pacific Northwest, I had winter ski gear, but nothing rated for subzero temperatures.

I dove into extensive research on arctic clothing layering systems, eventually investing in heavy boots designed for ice fishing, multiple merino wool base layers, and various mid-layer and exterior jackets. This preparation paid off, as I remained

comfortable throughout the rally, except when I had to remove my heavy gloves to work on the Cayenne.

Food was another concern. While hotels would provide breakfast and dinner, the packed schedule left little time for sit-down lunches, and in some remote areas, restaurants were non-existent. Jesse and I stocked up on easy-to-eat snacks to keep us fueled during the long days on the road.

In the final days leading up to the event, I faced a difficult decision. I discovered an axle boot leaking grease and small coolant and oil leaks that would have required a full engine removal to address. Weighing the risks of introducing new problems against the potential issues these leaks could cause, I chose to proceed without major repairs. It was a calculated risk, but one I felt necessary given the time constraints and potential complications of last-minute major work.



Transforming the Cayenne into an Arctic Explorer

Preparing my 2008 Porsche Cayenne Turbo (957 generation) for the Alcan Rally built upon modifications I'd made since purchasing the vehicle in 2021.

RalleyTuned played a crucial role in the early modifications, installing a

Eurowise lift kit for increased ground clearance, upgrading the suspension with polyurethane bushings, and fitting braided steel brake lines for improved durability. MAXRPM Motorsports performed an ECU tune and secondary cat delete, boosting the Cayenne's power delivery by approximately 100 horsepower and

100 ft-lbs of torque over stock.

I handled several upgrades myself, swapping the factory 21" wheels for smaller 18" alternatives and installing a Eurowise swing-out spare tire carrier. To improve braking performance, I fitted upgraded EBC slotted rotors and more aggressive Porterfield brake pads, enhancing the Cayenne's stopping power to match its increased engine output. I also installed a Porsche Classic (PCCM+) head unit with CarPlay functionality, bringing the navigation and audio systems into the modern age.

As the date of departure approached, I focused on specific preparations for the long expedition. I switched to 265/65R18 Nokian Outpost nAT winter all-terrain tires, chosen for their superior traction and stone-ejecting tread design. I mounted fuel canisters and recovery gear to the spare tire carrier to extend our range and preparedness.

For underbody protection, I swapped the flimsy factory plastic belly pan for a more robust Porsche OEM steel skid plate. I also installed an upgraded polyurethane engine torque mount, an onboard cold weather-rated battery maintainer, and





protective film on the light housings. Sponsor support was invaluable throughout the preparation process. 425 Motorsports repositioned the intercoolers forward to better accommodate the larger tires, while Achtuning performed an alignment to dial in the handling. Motul supplied high-performance fluids, including their 300V low-temperature rally racing engine oil and specialized differential oil, which I used for pre-rally maintenance.

Inside the cabin, I set up modular storage solutions to organize the extensive list of gear outlined in the Alcan Rally regulations, ensuring everything was secure and easily accessible. All items were fastened to prevent them from becoming dangerous projectiles in the event of a crash or emergency braking.

Additional sponsor contributions further enhanced the Cayenne's readiness. JXB Performance provided an upgraded driveshaft center support bearing carrier, addressing a known weak point in early-generation Cayennes. ZOLEO supplied their emergency GPS tracker and messaging device for transmitting real-time location data and communication in remote areas. Rennline's performance ignition coils rounded out the upgrades, boosting the Cayenne's reliability.

This combined effort between wrenching in my home garage, professional shop services, and sponsor support transformed my Cayenne Turbo into a vehicle ready to tackle the extreme challenges of the Alcan Rally.

Battling the Elements and Ourselves

One of the most demanding moments of the rally came as we ventured up the infamous Dalton Highway, determined to reach Coldfoot Camp, the northernmost point of our journey beyond the Arctic Circle. The mixed asphalt, gravel, and ice surface was unforgiving, with massive potholes threatening to derail our progress at every turn. The semi-trucks barreling past at nearly 100 mph to maintain momentum up the steep, slippery hills only added to the intensity.

Navigating these treacherous conditions required every bit of skill I'd developed on the race track in HPDE and time attack events. Techniques like left-foot braking for weight transfer became crucial on the mixed surface roads, allowing for better control and stability. Keeping my vision up and looking far ahead proved invaluable in anticipating and



reacting to sudden changes in road conditions or unexpected obstacles.

As we pushed further north, the landscape transformed into a winter wonderland that defied description. The snow-covered trees in the Arctic looked like soft-serve vanilla ice cream, their branches drooping under the weight of pristine snow. The vast, untouched expanses of white were occasionally broken by the contrast of dark rock faces or the shimmer of frozen lakes, creating a surreal and breathtaking panorama that seemed to stretch endlessly in every direction.

In contrast to this unblemished beauty, we also drove through parts of northern Canada that had been recently devastated by wildfires. It was an eerie sight to see burnt crisps of trees stretching as far as we could see, their charred remains now frozen in the bitter cold. This juxtaposition of fire and ice served as a sobering reminder of the ever-changing and often brutal nature of these remote regions.

Another harrowing experience came as we tiptoed across a mountain pass near Valdez, Alaska, in a complete whiteout blizzard. The pure ice surface tested the limits of our non-studded

Nokian tires, and the visibility was so poor that the taillights of the car ahead would vanish, leaving only snow drifts in our path.

Racing around a snowmobile course on the frozen lake near Yellowknife, Northwest Territories, Canada, was an entirely new test of skill, and highlight of the event. Controlling my tall, heavy Cayenne, with nearly 600 horsepower on tap, and all stability management systems disabled, proved to be a handful on the slick ice surface. As we navigated the course, in the back of my mind I hoped that the ice was truly thick enough to support the over 5,000-pound Porsche.

Throughout the rally, the regular radio chatter from other teams and sweep vehicles provided important updates and a reassuring sense of support. On several occasions, when we needed to make blind passes around trucks, the radio confirmations from other vehicles that the path was clear were music to our ears – easing the game of leapfrog that would have been impossible if traveling alone.

Throughout the entire journey, the ZOLEO GPS device kept us connected. Not only did it provide real-time

location data to the event organizers, but it also allowed my wife, Julia, to view my progress from the comfort of our home in Washington. This gave her peace of mind, even when I had no cell phone access for entire days.

As the rally progressed, and the long days began to blur together, my Cayenne started to exhibit signs of wear. The constant spray of ice and gravel chewed apart the mud flaps, and plastic underbody trays disintegrated and fell off. Towards the end of the event, a check engine light illuminated, accompanied by codes indicating air/fuel ratio issues. This caused a rough idle and partial limp mode, limiting turbo boost. Additionally, after our escape from the Dalton Highway, we experienced a loss of power steering, and the dashboard lit up with every warning imaginable. Fortunately, cycling the ignition and clearing the codes with my scan tool resolved the issue, allowing us to continue and finish the rally. We also encountered minor issues, such as a cracked windshield, frozen washer fluid nozzles, and the Cayenne's dissatisfaction with the poor gas quality.

Other teams' vehicles were not as fortunate. Some suffered minor crashes resulting in bumper and body damage, while others experienced popped tires, cracked wheels, and cooling system failures.

The Importance of Preparation, Teamwork, and Communication

The Alcan Rally taught me the true meaning of Benjamin Franklin's words: "By failing to prepare, you are preparing to fail." Thorough vehicle preparation, diligent maintenance, and well-organized gear were the keys to our success in completing the rally unscathed. Facing frigid weather, rough roads, and thousands of miles was no cakewalk – the intensity of work upfront surpassed even the rigors of building a car for the race track.

Without the support of my sponsors and other rally participants, I would be telling a very different story, if I even had a story to tell at all. In remote areas where outside assistance is scarce, relying on fellow competitors for help, supplies, and advice is essential. The

experience reinforced the importance of collaboration and looking out for one another in difficult situations. By traveling in a group of like-minded people with an organized event structure, everyone was much safer while crossing some of the most desolate and cold regions of North America.

This event was far from a solo endeavor, and I relied heavily on Jesse throughout the long, intense days. His demeanor, communication skills under stress, and attention to detail were key to our success. Although this was his first time as a rally navigator, he quickly adapted to the role. We share a love of Drum & Bass music, which kept us focused and upbeat during the countless hours on the road. Having a solid friend riding shotgun makes a world of difference – choose your Alcan co-pilot wisely.

The Journey of a Lifetime

Completing the Alcan 5000 Rally behind the wheel of my Porsche Cayenne Turbo was a dream come true. The experience challenged me

as a driver, an amateur mechanic, and a human being, pushing me to grow in ways I never thought possible. The breathtaking beauty of the remote landscapes we traversed and the intense focus required to navigate the demanding roads created a sense of deep connection between driver, vehicle, and the environment.

The elements of successful collaboration and teamwork, combined with the awe-inspiring beauty and terror of nature, touched me on a deeply emotional level, and the spell of the Alcan has stayed with me long after the rally ended. As an HPDE instructor, my passion lies in sharing my knowledge and love for motorsports with others. It is my sincere hope that this story inspires fellow Porsche enthusiasts to embrace the spirit of adventure, to hop in their vehicles, and to discover just how far they can push themselves and their machines. The Alcan Rally taught me that the journey itself is the true reward, and what an unforgettable reward it was.

