

SHIFTING GEARS – RALLY NUMBER 6

In past articles about our rallies I have written about the relationships, the fun and spirit of the rally participants, about the causes behind the rallies and about the satisfaction that our contributions to worthy organizations give both us and the recipients of our donations. This year's subject is, ROADS.

A very vital aspect of a rally that goes almost unnoticed, taken for granted if you will, is the roads upon which we travel. Yet it is the selection of roads and the meticulous work that goes into determining that they are physically suitable to our needs that really makes the rally successful. Knowing that they are not interrupted by construction or encumbered by some local special event is vital to the pleasant driving experience that the drivers are expecting. The scenic quality and the course of the roads as they meander through the countryside up over hills and down through valleys, switching this way and that around many a bend, is the essence of our enjoyment. Another consideration is that the timing of segments must accommodate restroom breaks, lunch commitments and day ending times. They can't be too long or too short or they cause disruption and frustration. Oh, and let's not forget that the directions need to be clear and accurate so that day's end we won't see critical, possibly even angry, drivers who lost track of the group, went miles out of their way or missed a gathering stop because the directions were not clear. What all this means is that the organizing group of people have spent hours, days and even weeks, researching, calling information resources and driving the entire route of roads, maybe two or three times to ensure the accuracy of directions and the beauty of the route, resulting in the pleasing adventure that we all want. This is not as simple as calling a restaurant or booking a hotel. This is meticulous, painstaking work. Yet as the rally unfolds, we the drivers rip gloriously down the roads with scarcely a thought to how and why we are on a particular road.

HATS OFF TO THE RALLY PLANNERS. Many different members of the Shifting Gears Committee have done this road work over the years. A new group undertook the effort this year. Rather than naming them, let's have the fun for each of you to guess and seek out the planners for this rally. A clue is that they are all "G"ood fellows. At the Thursday night dinner, we will take your guesses and give them their proper recognition.

DAY ONE

This year's rally route will be a totally new experience for our group in that for most of the trip we will be at altitude in the Sierra Mountains, with most of the routes being over 5000 feet and one of the passes tops out at 8911 feet above sea level. The entire routing rolls over roads prominent in the history of California and Nevada. Starting at Folsom, Highway 50 is one of the original East-West passages over the Sierra, a twisting road up and over the mountains. It was a significant pathway for thousands of fortune seekers during the Gold Rush and the route of the Pony Express, later becoming the first designated highway of California in 1895.

From Highway 50 we take a turn south at Placerville onto State Route 5, also known as the Mormon Emigrant Trail. The opening of this trail created in 1848, becoming the first east-west road for wagons in Northern California. Our route planners are excited about this road because it is likely this will be the first time any of us have traversed this spectacular highway. At the mountain village of Corral Flat we join Hwy 88, one of just three east-west roads crossing the Sierra to stay open during the winter. Also known as the Carson Pass Highway, a historic route, named for the famous frontiersman, guide and Indian fighter. Since many of us live in or around San Rafael, it might be interesting to note the inglorious side to Carson's reputation as the man who murdered two

unarmed innocent Mexican brothers named DeHarro at the San Rafael waterfront in 1848. Today, Hwy 88 it is most known as the route to the ski resort at Kirkwood which we will pass by. It is a beautiful road that will make for a terrific drive and will be our first major pass crossing at 8652 feet above sea level.

Having made a turn to the South on Highway 89, our coffee break stop will be at Markleeville. Markleeville, sitting at 5531 feet, is a quaint little town nestled in the bottom end of the Carson Valley. This will be our first coffee, tea, soft drink, wine or whiskey stop. Each to his own. On the road again, we are on a big view downhill run, dropping several thousand feet into the high desert of Nevada, ending at Nevada Highway 395. For my money 395 is one of the finest scenic highways to be found anywhere. The sharp East slope of the Sierra provides stunning escarpment views unlike the gradual rise when coming from the West. And, 395 is a wide open, mostly straight well-paved road that will give us our first chance to stretch our cars out a bit. Driver beware, I certainly wouldn't know from personal experience, but rumor has it that speeds of 100 plus are not unknown.

Lunch, with a taste of Basque cuisine in Gardnerville will prove to be a delight. The gracious family style hospitality of Basque dining is an experience to enjoy. Spanish and French Basque people came into the area as sheep herders beginning in 1898. This lunch stop will give us a leisurely hour and a half or so respite from the drive. On the road again, we will have a leisurely drive, about an hour, up 395 to Highway 50. Over Spooner Pass at 7146 feet, we drop down into the Lake Tahoe basin to finish our drive down the East side of the lake to South Lake Tahoe for check-in at our beautiful lakeside headquarter hotel.

DAY TWO

This day holds a surprise for us and beautiful drives that include our highest point, Mt. Rose at 8911 feet, and the grandeur of Lake Tahoe. The "route boys" have a devilish trick up their sleeves in that they have built in a mini "Great Race" segment that will involve precision driving and tight control of speed and time. This means it is competitive and there will be a winner to be announced, with appropriate fanfare, at our celebration dinner Friday night.

Following the "Great Race" segment we will again put the pedal to the metal and roar up Hwy 395 to the intersection of Highway 431. This route will provide both car and driver with our biggest challenges of the rally. The thin air crossing over Mt. Rose pass will play tricks with our fuel mixture and sap our engines of some strength; more the case with the classic cars than the super-duper cars with computer-controlled fuel injection, electronics ignitions and variable timing. For those drivers who really like to ring out their cars, Hwy 431 will be our tightest turning road, with switchbacks and other interesting challenges that could include ice and snow.

Dropping down into Incline Village, we join Highway 28 for a glorious drive around the North side of the lake. At Tahoe City we turn south down Highway 89, pass the Classic Boat Museum and ramble past Homewood and then on through mostly undeveloped splendor on the nicely curved Route 89. Three quarters of the way down 89 on the west side of the lake we will come to the last and possibly most stunning view of the trip, Emerald Bay. This beautiful bay became the backdrop for the first summer home on Lake Tahoe in 1860. In 1929 one of the finest examples of Scandinavian architecture in the United States was built. Known as Vikingsholm, this unique mansion is the center piece of The Emerald Bay State Park. It is a bit of a hike down to see it, but likely worth the effort to visit this beautiful setting.

After emerald Bay, on to our fine hotel on the beachfront of South Shore and thus ends what might just be our most spectacular rally drive of all! Anyone who doesn't love this day's drive should sell their car and hire Uber.

Enjoy and remember, "Keep the rubber side down".

Tom O'Neill

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