

SHIFTING GEARS - A CAR RALLY- A SHARED EXPERIENCE

Many desires and objectives could be assigned as the reason(s) people go on car rallies. Comradery and the fun of the drive would certainly be high on the list. Sightseeing and experiencing new places and things would be other strong incentives. For those of us with Shifting Gears, there is possibly a more esoteric reason for participating year after year in our rallies.

As we approach our sixth-year rally, I suspect that there is a deeper reason many of us continue to go; that is the enjoyment of the personalities, experiences and the conversations that we receive from each other. The sharing of each other! With a group as diverse as ours this opportunity is huge, entertaining and even sometimes profound.

In terms of diversity, we come from a large cross section of career, family, educational and personal experiences. Sometimes you hear that such a mixture of personalities can result in cliques forming; a hierarchy of groups. These may develop around car types, car values, lines of work or just plain old friendships. One of the grand things about Shifting Gears rallies is that the status structure you sometimes hear about in other rallies does not appear to exist with us. We have million-dollar cars and we have cars that may be worth \$30,000 to \$40,000. We have people with international reputations and people who live quietly and largely unknown. What we have, though, is a passion for our cars and a love for driving them. Add to the mix that we genuinely enjoy being together and you have a formula for a special experience that brings us back each year with an eagerness and anticipation for the 'same old new experience'.

There is another aspect of sharing that is somewhat subtle, but that deserves notice. We drive cars that draw attention and are of interest to others. The very nature of these cars that we call classic, or vintage, or exotic give credence to the question of whether we risk them by driving them about. The dichotomy is; do we risk something of this age or beauty or rarity and value by exposing it to road dirt, possible collision damage or wear and tear or, do you put it away behind wall and glass to be ogled from afar like a Rembrandt or Picasso? Do we you revere our cars like beauty queens to be looked at but not touched? Or, do we drive them as purpose-built machinery to be used as their manufacturers intended? The answer to that question is a resounding, YES, we drive them! And while driving them we are sharing them with others.

This is important because these cars represent an era of American life and culture that is rapidly disappearing. Most of the people owning and driving these cars are older, post 60. Many of the cars require unique skills for driving them that only comes with time and experience. For the most part young people are not getting involved and are not acquiring the skills or the interest necessary to drive them well. So, you might say that through our rallies we are the ambassadors of a car heritage that is a major part of the American experience. Through our good fortune to own and drive our cars we should recognize the importance of the enjoyment we bring to others as they observe us rolling down the roadways.

Ah, rolling down the roadways! That is our ultimate rally payoff. Sunny skies, remote narrow winding roads beckoning us, a sense of freedom, the pleasure of the drive rather than the destination. Eyes feasting on the beauty of the car in front, enjoying the skill of our fellow drivers as they finesse their cars over the hills and around the bends while beautiful views slide by. The excitement of seeing the car

behind charging up in the rear-view mirror as you downshift and brake for the rapidly approaching turn. Coming out of the turn, right foot pouring on the gas, the surge of acceleration on your back, upshifting, the thrill of speed, the sound of the engine, the wind in your hair; 9 parts Carbon, 13 Hydrogen 3, Nitrogen and 3 Oxygen equals a boost of adrenalin which equals energy which translates to fun!

The mid-day lunch at some fascinating place, be it a winery overlooking a vineyard or maybe viewing a classic boat collection or a phenomenal collection of cars, brings a cacophony of chatter reliving the highlights of the morning drive. Some great food, a little wine to lubricate our internal engines and we are off for another couple of hours of exhilarating pleasure at the wheel of our splendid cars.

As the Sun dips to the West, the day's drive over, we gather together to the sounds of ice tinkling in glasses, the pop of a wine cork or the snap of a beer cap, the happy chatter of friends relishing the moments we shared over the roads that day. Friends, replenishing their memories of each other after the year's absence since the last rally. By dinner time we become a raucous lot, almost needing to yell to one another across the tables as our MC for the evening, most likely Geoff or Ken or Charlie, try to gain control of what has now become like a gang of exuberant kids. With their announcements over, we are back at it, "Katie bar the door"!

The night wains away, people trickle off to rest, the sun rises over dewy fields, cars are wiped down, a few announcements that hardly anyone remembers are made, and we are off to carry on our rough duties of motoring the back-country roads. It is tough work, but someone must do it and we are the fortunate few who are called to the line, on this day to be Rally Drivers!

Tom O'Neill