

Rally for Champions a great hit Special Olympians the winners in inaugural event

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The MCL Motor Cars' first Rally for Champions made a champion out of everyone that took part last weekend.

Race Day was Saturday, but the starter's gun really sounded at a Thursday evening briefing from West Coast Rally Association representatives, who quickly disabused us of any notion that the first past the post wins.

Winning actually boils down to a series of mathematical calculations, communication with your navigator, map-reading skills and, above all, patience and adhering to the posted speeds. Within an hour, most of us were very confused, trying to calculate to the second where we should be at any given time.

Too early on Saturday, we dragged ourselves to MCL's Jaguar dealership in the Northshore Auto Mall, where we were awakened by countless volunteers and a very cheerful and enthusiastic team of athletes from the B.C. Special Olympics, beneficiaries of the cash raised by the rally. Although only the event's first year, it brought in \$40,000.

The Province and Driving.ca entered two vehicles. My wife Yoki joined me as navigator in a magnificent 1969 Morgan Plus 8, generously loaned by avid Morgan collectors Ken and Pat Miles.

The other car, a Ford Mustang, was driven by Les and Rena Hayes, of Victoria, winners of an online Driving.ca contest.

Perusing the row of vehicles, I began to feel at a slight disadvantage -- a Maserati, two Mercedes-Benz, one of which was a Mercedes-Benz SLR McLaren, three Land/Range Rovers, five Porsches, one of which was a Carrera GT, two Bentleys and one Toyota.

There was also a collector-plated 1952 Cadillac driven by Jason Bosa -- at last, another vehicle with a speedo that read in miles per hour and was probably lacking the all-important trip meter than one can set to zero.

We followed the directions to the first timed section of the day, which was at the east end of the Pitt River Bridge. We thought things were going so well and were having great fun and then it happened -- we were hopelessly lost.

We went around in circles for an hour and experienced the first and only bout of frayed tempers.

To be honest, I said: "Oh to heck with it. Let's just proceed to Harrison for lunch." She who must be obeyed had a different idea.

Eventually, by backtracking, we were back on course and heading for 256th Street and Dewdney Trunk Road for the next staged event.

Most of us live a hectic life and normally travel from point A to point B, so the opportunity to get off the beaten path and travel these country lanes was a real treat. In the back of my mind, I was wondering how the Carrera GT, Mercedes-Benz SLR and the other cars with GPS navigation and all of the other luxury creature comforts were managing.

I was having a serious workout. The Morgan is fitted with a Moss crash gearbox. This means that you have to double-clutch between every shift and have an arm like Popeye to move the shift lever.

The Morgan also lacks power steering as it is fitted with Arm-strong steering -- an old automotive joke.

It also lacks a roof, which made it quite chilly in the tree-shaded avenues. However, neither of us would have wanted to travel in anything different though.

Just seeing the smiles on people's faces when they spotted the Morgan gave me as much joy as seeing the smiles on the faces of the Special Olympians throughout the day.

This is certainly not the first rally in which the Morgan has participated. It has been involved in events in Canada, U.S. and even as far away as New Zealand.

The Miles' next big Morgan trip with one of their cars will take place in 2009, when Morgan celebrates its 100th

anniversary in England.

Part of the rally took us over the Ruskin Dam, through farming country in the Mission area and, before we knew it, we had arrived in Harrison Hot Springs for a one-hour lunch break and a chance to stretch the legs and rest the rear end.

The Morgan was parked alongside the Porsche Carrera GT and the Mercedes-Benz SLR McLaren super cars. However, it seemed to get all of the attention from the spectators.

It was soon time to head back to the city. Two more timed stages took us through the Sumas Mountain area and another through the Mount Lehman farming district.

In the rally, the total distance travelled was 251 kilometres, out of which 80 kms were timed stages. The only vehicle that did not make it home under its own power was the 1952 [Cadillac](#), which retired suffering from mechanical problems.

The event concluded at the Waterfront Hotel in Vancouver, where the organizers had already tabulated the results.

We had finished last, accumulating a grand total of 2,540 penalty points, out of a maximum 3,000. I suspect missing some of the checkpoints on the first stage in conjunction with numerous infractions for exceeding the posted 45 km/h had something to do with it.

Trying to convert from m.p.h. to km/h did not help. Well, that is my excuse and I'm sticking to it. I know better than to blame the navigator.

The winner of the rally was a [Toyota](#) Yaris driven by Dean Carratt with navigator Chris Donald. The joke at the evening social was that is certainly was the [car](#) that got the best gas mileage!

What happened to Driving.ca winners Rena and Les Hayes? Well, they had a great time.

Unfortunately, the navigator, who is constantly looking up and down at a map and reading instructions, can fall victim to motion sickness. Rena was the navigator and even large quantities of Gravol did not do the trick.

All in a good cause, though.

The 3,500 Special Olympic athletes in this province face great challenges on a daily basis. The sports programs and competitions offered by the Special Olympics folks provide them with more than improved health and athletic ability-- they also help them develop social skills and new friendships.

The Rally for Champions can accommodate 40 vehicles, with 18 taking part this year.

I urge you to step up to the plate and start planning for next year's event. With luck and determination, you have time to raise the \$5,000 required to enter the event with your [car](#) and have a very rewarding day out.

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