

# WCRA Teams take on Targa = 2004

## Targa Newfoundland Rally

**VANCOUVER** – At the time, the call seemed to come out of nowhere: two Toyota Corolla's from Vancouver were heading to the 2004 Targa Newfoundland Rally with two drivers, but just one co-driver; did I want to help complete the picture by becoming the second co-driver? Well, a question like that only comes along once in a lifetime, so what choice does one have but to graciously accept before whooping for joy once the phone is hung up!



Bill Westhead and Christian Chia at Targa Newfoundland

For me, the word "Targa" has always conjured up the image of classic sports cars of the 1950's and 60's racing on winding public roads. Many years of open road rallies held in the mountains Sicily have instilled myth-like qualities to this otherwise strange Italian word for "plate". Here is why you too would have whooped like I did upon hearing the word in this context...

Since 2002, the Targa Newfoundland Rally has worked to become the ultimate North American tarmac rally. After competing in the 2004 edition of the rally, with driver Christian Chia in the Open Road Toyota 1985 Corolla GTS, I can attest to the fact that the organizers are well on their way to meeting this lofty objective! Christian and I joined Bob and Adam Trinder of Vancouver in their 1986 Toyota Corolla GTS for a two-car, BC invasion of Targa Newfoundland at the place they call "the rock".

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The format for Targa Newfoundland combines the thrill of rally with the speeds and grip of circuit racing. This unique rally event challenges crews to set consistently quick times without competing for all out terminal velocity. Each competitive section has an assigned "Base Time", which must be beaten to avoid the accumulation of penalty points. Base times tighten up as the event progresses and no one has ever finished without getting at least a few seconds worth of penalties over the week-long event. Vehicles are grouped together in age and displacement classes to compete for trophies. There are no overall event winners (in theory at least), and the challenge of just completing a 2 200 km long rally is reward enough for most.

The event began with two days of relaxed preparations – from registration, to scrutineering, to official welcomes – the highlight of which were nightly "car shows" where the people of St. John's got to meet the competitors and their cars. However, once the rally got properly underway the crews settled into a



Christian Chia signing autographs for some school children

brisk pace designed to "separate the wheat from the chafe" and test the endurance of both man and machine. This is where good car preparation and experienced competitors would prove their worth.

There followed five more days of combined Targa and transit stages, covering some 2 200 kilometers. We touched on three separate

coasts of the wonderful Newfoundland countryside and went through countless small fishing out ports where locals and their kids waved at every opportunity. Yes, this is the stuff rally dreams are made of – where else in the world can you speed between clipboard seaside bungalows while being cheered on by the owner? Rest stops and lunch breaks were intelligently spaced and timed to connect with everyone: from overwhelmed school-age children, to grizzled veterans of a life spent earning a living from the sea. It seemed everywhere we went the people of Newfoundland welcomed us with big hearts, warm words and a charming curiosity in all things Targa. What a pleasure it was to feel genuinely at home on the far side of the continent and at the other end of the country.



Group 2 finishes - Christian Chia, Bob Trinder and Adam Trinder

In retrospect, seeing the fleet of Targa competitors in their Austin Healey's, Ford Mustang's, Porsche 911's, BMW's, Volvo's, Toyota's, Corvette's, etc winding their way through some of Canada's most spectacular seaside roads has got to rank as one of the most inspiring visions of rallying in this country. Meanwhile the camaraderie amongst the competitors from all corners of North America, plus Australia and the UK, was only matched by the openness with which we were all welcomed by the people of Newfoundland. And, in the true spirit of rallying, everyone went out of their way to ensure the vehicles were kept in the running – which was good thing too, as that Darrian T9 needed a TIG welder on more than one occasion!

So, if you ever thought that spending your vacation competing in five straight days of back-to-back tarmac rallies on some of Canada's best roads was a good idea, then start the planning now to make Targa Newfoundland one of your life objectives – you won't be disappointed. With thanks to Christian Chia, Open Road Toyota, Bridgestone, Steve Nayler, Bob and Adam Trinder, Tom Lambert, Peter Keel and Brian Curd.

by Bill Westhead