

# "It's Rally Time!"

## Great idea... now how do we do this?

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### THE BACK STORY

We had never done a car event before and certainly not a rally. And we had no one to lean on for help or to answer to our questions. Sound familiar? By way of introduction, Dave Simes and I are members of the Jaguar Car Club of North Florida, in Jacksonville, Florida. Both English car fans, our friendship was formed quickly when we met at a local British car show at the end of the last century. He being a gentle native Floridian and me being a relatively new transplant from New York.

Over the years, we had become a little tired of just the typical club lunch/evening meetings. While those were enjoyable, we were both looking for something that was outside the box... something our members could do to exercise their machines and have a totally different experience in motoring.

We kicked around a few ideas, but we kept coming back to a rally. And we wanted the event to be memorable... something people would talk about doing again. Undaunted, we made a good team, Dave with his engineering background and me with my marketing experience. To cement the bond, we dubbed ourselves "The Lucas Brothers," figuring what's the worst that could happen. The notorious Lucas reputation fits in here, though we hoped to show the bad rep was mostly unjustified in both cases.

### THE GENESIS

We sought to put together a driving event we hoped would be successful and named it "The Great Dixie Brit Car Rallye." By keeping the management of the event to ourselves, we figured we could limit any collateral damage, should things not work out too well! Fast forward to the present day, and we have four successful rallies under our belt. What's more, I am on the JCNA Rally Committee and am writing this to encourage all of JCNA's 60+ clubs to try rallying. In Florida, we're proud to say that the overwhelming majority of the participants would agree that they had a great time and couldn't wait for the next one! And after each event, Dave and I would look at one another and agree it was worth the time and effort, so let's do another.



JCNA has recognized that a reintroduction of the rally event is more appropriate than ever, as it's one of the more fun and participative club activities that can rejuvenate member interest to include drivers of current and classic models, to the benefit of our both – plus of course rallying builds new friendships and enthusiasm for all things Jaguar.

In the May/June 2020 issue, you read about an introduction to rallying, authored by Bill Beible, the chairman of our new JCNA Rally Committee. More recently, you read about how much fun a club rally can be, penned

by committee member John Corey. Now I'd like to share the framework we developed for planning and conducting a rally, including recruiting folks to volunteer their help.

## THE MAIN ELEMENTS

Rather than give you 'instructions,' we'd like to give you an overview of what worked for us. Think of this as a guideline. You can alter/enhance/remove whatever suits your needs as you plan your own event. To help and as a follow-up, at various times throughout the year your JCNA Rally Committee will provide detailed information on the recommended and optional elements you can or should weave into your event, so that you can confidently pull together a successful rally without having to reinvent the wheel – even a sparkling chrome 72-spoke version.

## KEY FEATURES:

- Small management team
- Budget
- Timekeeping
- Rally date & time
- Start and finish locations
- Route development
- Registration process
- Ongoing communications
- Volunteer recruitment & assignments
- Awards & photos

## SMALL MANAGEMENT TEAM

Do it your way, to suit the people you have, but we found that for the ease of planning, implementation and control, keeping this small is usually the best option. We limited management responsibility for our events to just the two of us. That way, thoughts/ideas can be solicited and shared, developed and quickly decided upon. Then we built a team of volunteers to help carry out the plans.

## BUDGET

This can be all over the place, but we've found that to attain that look and feel of a special 'automotive event,' it's worth spending some cash to do it right. Our initial budget was around \$1,800 and included the following: car numbers, banners/signage, start/finish flags, printing and stationery, clipboards and pencils, awards, and miscellaneous set-up expenses.

Our largest expense was getting the "meatball" round static-cling numbers for the rally cars (figure about \$1,300 for 30 cars). You want people to get excited? Put a pair of big, fat period-looking rally numbers (which they get to keep) on their cars. Any food and drink costs were picked up by the entrants.

To help defray the costs, we charged \$35 per car to participate. By limiting the field to 30 cars (more on that later), we generated \$1,050. Contributions from local British car clubs, sponsors and donors added another \$800, bringing our working capital to \$1,850.

Note that these expenses for any of your future rallies will come down if you are able to reuse banners, signage, clipboards and other supplies. Basically, the numbers will be the main repetitive expense. But I can't emphasize enough the impact those numbers have. Note that they simply refer to the departure sequence – they do not signify a car race or 'speed' event and therefore ought not to fall foul of car insurance competition prohibitions.

#### RALLY TIMEKEEPING

Although our rallies met the JCNA requirements for sanctioning, the key to our success here was keeping the process as simple as possible for both the rally teams and the event staff, while allowing for quick collection and processing of the times to determine the winners. All the rally team navigator needed was a watch or handheld phone to help them stay on track. Again, this was all about fun, while adhering to the then-current, official guidelines.

Dave obtained some handheld "atomic clocks" for our early rallies that we used at the starting line, the checkpoints and at the finish line. Now, we just use our phones, where you can display synchronized times in hours, minutes and seconds. Much easier! He also developed a computer spreadsheet where the car times would be entered for their respective start time, checkpoint times and finish time. This allowed for results to be accumulated during the rally and easily processed while folks gathered in the restaurant at the end.

The key here is that none of the rally teams had to submit any times... it was all collected and processed automatically by the rally staff. All they had to do was pay attention to their route driving instructions and directions. We'll be glad to share our system with you!

#### RALLY DATE AND TIME

You'll want to pick a weekend day and time of year when you're not competing with other events that could cut into participation (holidays, football, graduations, etc...) and you'll want to select that date well into the future... at least six to nine months. Depending on where you live, climate and seasons will have an impact. As many of our cars are convertibles... and few like to drive in cold, wet conditions... pick a time of year that is more conducive to an outdoor event. Here in northeast Florida, early November worked well. Early spring also works.

People seem to like an early start to the day, so we usually set up around 7 a.m., begin welcoming drive teams by 8 a.m., and kick-off the rally around 9 a.m. All activities are typically over by 2 p.m. that day.

#### ROUTE DEVELOPMENT:

##### 'THE DRIVE'

This can seem intimidating at first. And again, remember that Dave and I had no experience doing this. But we did our homework, including the review of the historical info JCNA had published about conducting an officially sanctioned Jaguar club rally. Truth be told, those instructions were exhausting to read. But that's because it was a very formal process to hold a true 'Time Speed Distance' rally. Our goal was to have an event that was based on those rules but included a heavy dose of simplification so that folks would be introduced to the concept and not be afraid to organize or drive in one.

We felt that in order to attract a full field of participants, we would need a route that would provide approximately two+ hours of drive time (approx. 75 miles), punctuated with three checkpoints along the way, which could include food and drink and rest stops. Not too long, not too short.

Thanks to rapid advances in technology, planning a driving route has become immensely simplified. By comparison, for our first event, back in 2011, we would think about an area near Jacksonville that would be interesting to drive to/through and then we climbed into my SUV and drove around. We literally spent every Saturday morning for over three months constructing that first route. And we did the same thing for the next two annual rallies we conducted. Not a great use of time... but what alternatives were there?

Now, we have Google Maps (and others) to literally allow us to find interesting roads and topography from the comfort of a chair and desk. So, if anyone looking to plan a rally is even remotely familiar with computers, tablets or the like, you're well on your way with these enormous timesavers.

As you plan your route, select the less traveled, offbeat roads, avoiding highways, busy or difficult intersections and areas that may experience heavy weekend traffic. The object is to enjoy the ride and not get frustrated. Plus, many folks might be discovering new and attractive drives that they can revisit on their own.

The actual driving to test the route is extremely important. And instead of a month of Sundays to accomplish, it should only take about three or four trips to finalize. The first two runs are to make sure what you saw on your computer 'works,' meaning it will be fun yet challenging. The last few runs are used to finalize the route driving directions.

The last test run should be done by someone who has not been involved in the route planning. That way, you'll know if your directions have any confusing instructions or mistakes. Finally, you'll want to do a final run a few days before the rally, to make sure no roads have been closed, traffic signs or speeds changed, etc.

#### START & FINISH LOCATIONS

An integral part of the driving route itself, these locations are the most critical and will set the tone for the entire event.

The starting point: a large parking area, like in a strip mall or similar, and preferably one that had some type of food and/or coffee shop in it, is ideal. It's easy to stage cars in marked parking spaces. Our rallies kicked-off in the early morning, with volunteers arriving around 7 a.m., cars and rally teams (driver and navigator) around 7:30 or 8 a.m. (typically, lots are not busy at that time of day). That's when the 'event experience' begins to take shape. Signage, flags, banners and a few collapsible tents and chairs for the check-in process were strategically placed. Once the team received their car numbers, they were guided to their assigned starting slot.

Cars were 'released' Le Mans style, under a waving green flag, one minute apart, after being staged single file according to their car number. Again,



Matching tires and race number – Dyaarl and Gail Anderson set off in style.

our focus was on the 'fun' quotient, to immerse people in a rally atmosphere. And they loved it.



Finish line: off the main road and well within the parking lot of the restaurant we had chosen and where there would be ample parking for the cars to park together. Marked with banners and flags, we would give the checkered flag to each rally car as it crossed the finish line. We always ended our rally at a good place to eat, where there was some private/dedicated space to comfortably house our group. Once the teams turned in their route docs at the tent, they could hang around and watch other cars come in and/or head to the restaurant to await the start of the luncheon festivities. Inevitably, their talk would center around how they did, what went right/wrong, who may have gotten lost... or who they saw going the wrong way!

#### REGISTRATION PROCESS

Once you know "the when" and "the where," it's time to start thinking about the 'who.' We invited anyone with any make British car, old or new, to participate. And we held the entrant number to 30 cars, on a first-come, first-served basis. As you might expect, the list was dominated by Jaguars. But it did include a '50s era Rolls-Royce, as well as Triumphs, MGs, Austin-Healeys, Minis and even Lotus! Great camaraderie.

The reasons we charged \$35 per car were simple: it helped defray a significant portion of the expenses, and folks would be less likely to drop out or not show up. This last item was more important for our initial rally, but trust me, it makes a difference when people are committed.

I kept a spreadsheet of entrant info, which included the make, model and year of their car, number assignment (for their vinyl car numbers), name of driver and navigator and their contact info, including their email addresses. The email addresses are very important, as they would be receiving valuable info about the rally over the course of a few months. This kept their interest up, answered many of the questions they might have... and added to the anticipation of the event.

On the day of the rally, you simply hand the registration sheet to the volunteers handling the check-in.



## ONGOING COMMUNICATIONS

Which brings me to this very important element. We would begin to talk-up the rally at least six months in advance. We'd approach possible donors and sponsors for financial support. And we'd utilize various social media tools and provide a one-page flyer that was distributed to our local Jag club members, as well as to the other British car clubs in the area.

As registrations came in, we'd send separate emails to them regarding how the rally would work and what to expect, driver and navigator guidelines, important timelines and reminders, etc. All these notices would be well spaced out so as not to bombard folks with info, but to keep up the excitement that they will be participating in a pretty fun, organized, safe, competitive-but-not-stressful event. And of course, each email would be signed by one of the 'Lucas Brothers' for effect!

## VOLUNTEER RECRUITMENT & ASSIGNMENTS

Anyone interested in having fun and participating is invited to help as a volunteer. This group needs to be solidified months before the event, as you will want to make sure of their availability and comfort with their chosen tasks. Club members that are not interested in the drive turn out to be great volunteers, as they may still want to be part of the action. Friends and family (adults) are great sources, too.



Checkpoints were friendly affairs – no red mist here!

For a smooth-running event, 16-20 people are ideal. As Dave and I helped throughout the day in all areas, that meant 14-18 additional folks would be needed to man the activity at the starting line, the three checkpoints we established, and the finish line.

The driving teams will be impressed with the level of organization and will be more at ease with the whole event, especially if they've never run a rally before!

## AWARDS & PHOTOS



Harold Kelly announces results to a happy crowd.

Who doesn't like to get a trophy or have their picture taken? While we don't give out awards just for participation (we provided small "goody bags" at the starting line for that), we do hand out quite a few, with most presented to cars come that come closest to the rally route times we determined. It wasn't about speed... but about who can best follow the route at the designated speeds, while maintaining all rules of the road (read: safety).

We break down the entrants into three classes: Pre-1960, 1960-1980 and 1981 to present. That way, more emphasis is based on the driver and navigator skills and less on the technology/reliability of the car.

Then we organize the route down into two 'legs.' There were first, second and third place trophies awarded for best performance on the first leg, second leg and then for overall winner. Again, this was designed so that more folks had an opportunity to compete for a trophy even if they had bad luck somewhere along the way.

Most fun was the awarding of the 'Lost Cat' trophy... for the team that had the worst overall time of the day. The best part was hearing how they achieved it! Of course, there was the 'Rallyemaster' trophy, given to the team Dave and I chose for whatever reason we felt appropriate. If possible, find someone who is willing to hang around and photograph events of the entire day. Then, the pics can be distributed/posted on the various club websites, etc., so all the rally participants can see themselves at play. Folks love that and it goes a long way in make the rally memorable.



You can award trophies, but it was all for fun really.

#### CONCLUSION

OK, there is a lot of 40,000 foot overview information here – some of it very specific to what Dave and I put together on our own. Hopefully, you're not shaking your head or saying it's too much for you or your club. Remember, if two knuckleheads like Dave and I can pull this off, you certainly can, too!

That's where your JCNA Rally Committee comes in to play. We'll provide you with info and suggestions, along with many of the tools you'll need, based on our individual experiences, to put together a rally that best suits you and your club members. This should be a very different, fun, yearly or more often type of event that will appeal to certain members of your club, and probably help you attract new ones. There's no sense of money being made or wasted or buying success like sometimes in concours. There's no super-complex rule book to try and clamp down on gaming the system – it's all about exercising our cars and our brains and having a ball doing it.

The JCNA Rally Committee is a proactive team that stands ready to help guide you through your first rally... or to provide you with some ideas on how to gear-up or grow your event. You'll be hearing more about our internal resources... and how you can contact members of the Rally Committee for additional help and advice, in the near future and over the coming year. Enjoy yourselves and send your reports and photos to Jaguar Journal.