

Rolls-Royce Owners' Club of Australia

Rallying

By William (Bill). G. R. Fleming, 1974

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The very essence of rallying is cheating; Cheating is the pre-requisite to success. There is nothing unfair or unsporting in this. Rather it is but the Intelligent Man's rendering of assistance to Lady Luck. Some do: Some don't. Some do and get caught (and serve them right too). Some do and don't get caught, but they or their car or their Navigator are so hopeless anyway that it's of no use. But the accomplished rallyer uses cheating like any other aid - like a stop watch, a thermos flask or a map light. It is not an end in itself. He never cheats for cheating's sake, but on the other hand in this competitive age, he never, never forgets the maxim, "If you cheat you may win: if you don't you won't."

Good, wholesome, honest-to-goodness rally cheating has been going on since the year dot. Although more commonly resorted to in horse-racing nowadays than in car-rallying, doping gets an early mention in the literature, with Romeo and Juliet making an amateurish botch of the whole affair. Substitution likewise has been known for many years and Cinderella used it to good effect, cleverly arranging for a golden coach to appear at the appropriate stage. Of course, not all people take cheating in good part, in fact, it is recorded that, following one particularly clever rallying ploy that left him floundering up countless dead-end wadis in swirling seas of Sinai dust, Moses was "sore perplexed and fearsome wrath". But then he could hardly complain because he was well in front as a result of taking a short cut across the Red Sea where he had had the satisfaction of watching the other chaps who weren't so wide awake becoming bogged to the axle-trees.

Yet perfidious Albion was where the real refinements were put into the art. Ben Hur's attempts at whipping the other fellow's horse when he wasn't watching pale into insignificance against Boadicea's techniques. Her most memorable device allowed her to chop her opponent's spokes away just before entering the home straight, which gave her a considerable advantage. It is said that Ace Wheel Disks evolved as a counter to this ploy. A variation of this, assuming her rival refused to give up, had her pit-crew pouring boiling porridge over the luckless fellow while attempting a wheel change.

Tactics were further refined in Regency times. In fact, my grandfather used to speak of an old-timer he knew who could recall when Beau Brummel paid a certain Farmer Giles to jam

his cart across a bridge on the Great South Road just in time to catch the Prince Regent's four-in-hand flying up from Brighton. The fact that the Beau made five thousand guineas in wagers just adds to the joke, and the other joke is Prinny's cryptic aside to his Coachman "The Brummel pay for this!", while Farmer Giles had a whip laid across his shoulders for luck.

The ultimate of course, in rally cheating is where the opponent can be tricked into defeating himself. This leaves not the slightest stain on the scutcheon of the rally cheater. It is recorded at the Battle of Bannockburn the English Lord slyly rallied his troops with his family name. His opponent, the simple Earl of Home, seeing how effective this seemed to be, was inspired to reciprocate, and was somewhat distressed to discover that at his stentorian cry of "Home! Home!", his army melted away. You will note that to this day, Sir Alec Douglas-Home pronounces his name "Hume".

So, you see, cheating in rallying is a time-honoured practice. And in Rolls-Royce rallying (normally abbreviated to R-R-R) it is not only time honoured, but (as one would expect) has most distinguished patronage. No less a personage than the late Lord Hives is the first recorded proponent of this ancient art while seated on a Royce and he has been followed by an endless stream of noble and exalted personages. Perhaps to use the word "cheat" in this company and context is rather coarse. It may be more appropriate to state that they extracted optimum performance from their cars by a certain entirely admirable originality of thought. In Lord Hives's case (referred to in our researches as H 1/11, being the first known Hives cheating in 1911; although other sources quote it as RRR1, being the first recorded case of Rolls-Royce rally cheating anywhere) he managed to extract 24.32 miles per gallon out of a Silver Ghost with four up between London and Edinburgh, a total distance of 1000 miles, in fourth gear only and at an average speed of 20 mph. Now anyone who has driven a Silver Ghost - or more to the point, paid for its petrol - knows this is nonsense; 14½ mpg is good, 15½ is superb. And these are good solid imperial gallons too, I might add, none of your cheap pint-sized republican ones such as they use in the US of A. And as for 20 mpg for 1000 miles in top gear at the same time - you try it! How then was it done?

Here there is no speculation, for Lord Hives, no doubt as part of that general stocktaking of soul and airing of skeletal cupboards one goes on with in ones declining years, has let out the whole splendid secret. Observe closely the contemporary photograph of the adventurers about to start on their epic journey. Note the reluctance of the young Hives at the wheel to meet the camera's piercing eyes.' See the ancient Ron seated alongside him as RAC Observer - already nodding in his seat and only waiting for the end of the cold and wintry ordeal to when he can get back to his loving Eth, his pipe. his slippers and the warmth of his hearth. Think of the Prestige and Sales that would accrue from success. Think of the ignominy of failure (and the boost to Napiers). The stage is set for H 1/11!

And so off they go. A sly shift of those secretive Hives eyes (now further screened by goggles) to the left flank shortly discloses that our Ron is dozing. An inadvertent pothole only shakes forth a wheezing snore. The conspirators exchange their agreed signal. The car begins

a long descent. The navigator gives a position report. All is matter of fact. And no one hears the tiny snick as the driver's right elbow exerts just enough pressure to slip the gear lever into neutral. They proceed silently (and economically) to the bottom, those secretive eyes meanwhile constantly observing the observer. The bottom is reached, and the car begins to slow. The engine speed has already been picked up with the hand governor, and so all that is required is the tiniest bit of sleight of hand to get back into gear, any resultant noise and hand movement being easily masked by simultaneous honking of the bulb horn, and both the driver and navigator loudly exclaiming "Stupid oaf! Don't you know how to drive a horse and cart!" or words to that effect.)

A fine example, H 1/11, you must admit, which should be the envy of all modern-day aspirants to rallying success. Rarely is one vouchsafed an insight into the great achievements of mankind. Normally one asks these great men "Why?" and they cryptically reply "Because it's there," never daunted, one then asks "How?" and they smile enigmatically and turn away. But here is a great man explaining how, and in some detail - truly those who denigrate the teaching of history do a terrible disservice.

But how to apply this knowledge you ask?. Clearly once these ploys have been tried and are then recorded and known there is no sense in trying them again? Poor innocent, just like throws in Ju-Jitsu, there are only a limited number of basic rallying ploys - six, in fact. Due to the unclassified nature of this publication, I am not at liberty to disclose them in any detail here, but at least I can give you the broad outlines. Take my word for it - rally cheating, whether vintage, sports car, single make, or Rolls-Royce is instantly classifiable into one of these six categories:

1. False information,
2. Improvements to one's own vehicle,
3. Immobilisation of the enemy's machine,
4. Bribery and corruption,
5. Adjustments to the route, and
6. Attacking the enemy driver.

There is of course, much secret information on these ploys in our archives at the RRRCC that I can't disclose here, but a few general words about each will do no harm:

1. FALSE INFORMATION

Anyone of course, can turn signposts around, arrange for detour signs or "2 mph max. wt 1 ton" notices on bridges or even arrange for the printing of a completely new set of instructions handed out from a seemingly 'official' check point along the route, thereby ensuring that the opposition goes trundling off down some goat track. An appropriate Rolls-Royce variation [first used by Meek in 1958] is the El Dorado ploy. This necessitates some

means of stopping the other cars - a flock of sheep or perhaps a strategically stalled car on an impassable bend. This affords our accomplice the chance of engaging the enemy in conversation, "Sorry about the hold-up mate - I guess you're in a hurry to get down to 'Inglebungyl'. I 'ear that now the property's been sold, all them old Rolls-Royces are goin' for a song."

Sometimes the enemy can resist this attack and drive on, but never for long - eventually the car stops, occupants look at each other unspeaking, salivating tongues lick back and forth, the gears are engaged and around they go, disappearing in a cloud of dust to El Dorado.

2. VEHICLE IMPROVEMENTS

It may be thought that with Rolls-Royces this is impossible and that to put a PIII engine in a Twenty would be unsporting. I just point to the example of the Hon. C.S. Rolls himself who, not satisfied with the standard Silver Ghost, first had the horsepower increased from 48 to 70, and then for those difficult segments of rally routes such as the famed and dreaded Katchberg equipped the car with a standard Short Bros man-carrying observation balloon. And, of course, nearer to home, the famous Sol Green increased the range of his Silver Ghost between pit stops by installation of a sterling silver Chamber Pot.

3. IMMOBILISATION OF ENEMY VEHICLES

This can be done by means of our friendly drover with his mob of sheep, or in the ultimate (as once happened to Hal Venables) by having the opposition sold water with their petrol. But by far the most refined way for a Silver Ghost owner (who obviously would be in front) is to stop on a strategically positioned corner and check the oil level by means of the overflow tap. The resultant pond of oil, coupled with an amount of centrifugal force, will be quite capable of sending a succession of following cars off the road tangential to the curve of motion.

4. BRIBERY AND CORRUPTION

Prince Borghese, in winning the Peking To Paris race of 1908, used this ploy extensively, besides employing on occasions a labour line of some five hundred coolies. Our officials of course are incorruptible but with Club Members in the Judiciary, at the Bar, in the House, and even in the Police Force itself, it is quite possible to encourage some officials to take certain action. In fact, this ploy is commonly associated with the sixth -

5. ATTACKING THE ENEMY DRIVER

"Certain information provided" can ensure that such and such a car is caught for speeding (particularly if action has been taken in accordance with another ploy to ensure the enemy is running well behind time). A trophy given into the safe-keeping of one's main opponent for presentation at the conclusion of the rally can turn out at the border to contain that most horrifying of Victorian imports - fruit. And of course, for concours etc., where extra marks are allotted for distance travelled it is perfectly acceptable to name one's house or property

in appropriate fashion. So when asked how far one has travelled you simply say with a disarming smile "Oh my dear chap, I've no idea - we've just got in from *Cairns*, how far is that?".

And surely one of the most refined attacks an enemy driver must be that carried out by Strachan and Fleming in the Alvis Commemorative Run of '61. The victim was plied with copious drafts of liquor the night before (at the Alvis Club's expense) and then subjected in a very fast but very open and small Alvis 12/50 to a hurtling run down the Bulli Pass sandwiched between a Silver Ghost RR in front back-firing in great full-throated roars at regular thirty second intervals, and a Twenty close enough behind to allow no withdrawal.

That leaves us with

6. ADJUSTMENTS TO THE ROUTE

The setting of bushfires, although effective, is no longer approved by the RRRCC, nor is the breaching of dams or tampering with bridges, although these have been very usefully used in the past.

Nowadays in these automated times, even the closing of rail gates on following cars is rarely possible, although when travelling through tick-gate country a spare chain and padlock should always be carried, just in case.

Sadly, this ploy now is almost exclusively used in conjunction with bribery of officials, and I regret to state that with inflation as it is today, the going rate for a grader driver to make a country road impassable for a half hour period, is such that its likely that it will shortly become extinct altogether.

Well, so much for this very brief introduction to the unclassified fruits of our research. As I have shown, there is nothing magical about rally cheating, it is simply a matter of following the basic ploy, and of course as with all skills it is a matter of application.

The brilliance of the master cheat is shown in the unique twist he can give the basic ploy. Practice, practice, my children, that's the secret - learn the fundamentals, then apply yourself unstintingly, relentlessly, unceasingly, dedicatedly to that lost necessary of all rallying skills - cheating.