

My interest in The Great Race started in 2002 when the race started in San Antonio. Our local Corvette Club, the Texas Corvette Association, went downtown to see the cars at the beginning of the race and the dream began.

The Great Race is a 9-day cross-country adventure for vintage and antique cars. This year, the cars had to be built before 1972. It is a controlled-speed endurance road rally, not a test of high speed. It is a test of a driver/navigator team's ability to follow precise course instructions and the car's (and team's) ability to endure on a cross-country trip.

After 2 years on the waiting list, my wife Pat, and I were accepted to run in the 2018 Great Race from Buffalo, NY to Halifax, Nova Scotia in our silver 1965 Corvette coupe.

We spent a year getting ready for "The Race". We had to learn a lot of new symbols and terminology to interpret the instructions properly. We had to mount a special Race speedometer in the car to achieve precise speeds and a large Race clock on the dash to aid in timing. The rules state that other speedometers, tach, odometer and clocks had to be covered during the race. There is absolutely no use of digital equipment, GPS or calculators allowed. Cell phones are to be stowed away and used for emergencies only.

The official Great Race description of the event is...*Each day the driver and navigator team receives a set of course instructions that indicate every turn, speed change, stop, and start that the team must make throughout the day (usually 220 to 250 such instructions per day). Along the course route there will be from 4 to 7 checkpoints recording the exact time that the team passes that point. The objective is to arrive at each checkpoint at the correct time, not the fastest. The score for each team is the result of the team's ability to follow the designated course instructions precisely. Every second off the perfect time (early or late) at each checkpoint is a penalty point. This format is much more mentally demanding than a flat-out cross-country race. This is a test of human mental agility and endurance as well as classic car endurance, rather than programming capability. The course avoids timed segments on interstate highways, opting instead for scenic local, county, and state highways whenever possible through some of the prettiest country in the United States.*

After making our own performance charts we entered two Regional VCRA (Vintage Car Rally Association) races in Chattanooga, TN and in Joplin, MO. These 3-day races were a great introduction to the intricacies of running this kind of rally. We thought we were ready.

The first challenge was getting the car to Buffalo. I decided to trailer it from New Braunfels, TX. By timing my days correctly I was able to stop at Mid America Corvettes in Effingham and the National Football Hall of Fame in Canton, OH along the way. We arrived in Buffalo a day early and were able to fill another item on my bucket list...we drove to Niagara Falls and got drenched on the boat ride into the mist.

The next day was registration and technical inspection, followed by application of all the race stickers and then photos in front of the fountains at the host hotel. Dinner that evening was BBQ in the back room of the Pierce Arrow Museum.



The day before the official start of the race is busy with a mandatory meeting and class in the morning and the Trophy Run in the afternoon. The Trophy Run is a practice rally to get everyone back into the 'swing of things'. We followed directions to the town of Lockport, NY which is the home to the only double set of locks on the Erie



Canal. There are trophies and monetary awards given to the winners, but the scores do not count toward the final numbers. In the unlikely event of a tie, this score will be used to determine the overall winner. The Trophy Run awards banquet was held in the Pierce Arrow Museum where we



enjoyed a great meal and some fantastic cars on display.

Finally, on Saturday, the first day of the race arrived. All racers line up on the street in front of the Pierce Arrow Museum for what amounts to an incredible car show for several hours. There were 117 cars at the starting line.

The oldest cars were a couple of 1916 Hudsons with a large number of pre-WW II vehicles. There were only 2 Corvettes that started the race. The other was a 1970 coupe that experienced mechanical issues from the start and dropped out after the first day. Hundreds of local car buffs came out in the light rain to watch the start of the Great Race. Cars leave the starting line at 1 minute increments. It was pretty exciting crossing under the Great Race arch for the first time, knowing that we were now “on the clock”.



The start of each day’s race begins with a 30-50 minute speedometer check. This allows the cars to get out of town before the timed run begins, but mostly since the race speedometers are adjustable, this gives racers the chance to make small adjustments to make sure they match the official speedometers. We discovered that weather and temperature play a part in speedo accuracy.

After leaving Buffalo with a late start, we had about half a day of racing. We headed east to the town of Batavia for a late lunch and finished the day in Fairport, NY where the local Corvette Club came out to greet us at the finish line. We were treated to dinner at the Masonic Lodge with a local favorite called the “Garbage Plate”. It was a great meal with a wonderful local ‘Ambassador’ joining us for the evening.



Every day after the race all cars must remain in place until 8pm for the local Parc Ferme’ (race vehicles on public display). Only then, can you leave to drive to your hotel for the night.

On Day 2, we left our hotel in Rochester and “raced” to our lunch stop at the Northeast Classic Car Museum in Norwich, NY. I wish we’d had more time to see all of the buildings of car history that the museum housed. After lunch we raced through Cooperstown past the



Baseball Hall of Fame, and continued through the backroads of eastern New York until we ended the day in Troy, NY on the Hudson River.

Day 3 was Monday and we left New York traveling into Vermont where the roads became a little hillier. A beautiful drive brought us to lunch in Bennington at the title sponsor of the race, Hemmings Motor News.



After a quick lunch, stroll through the small museum and a fill-up at the pumps we continued north on the roads of Vermont to finish the day on Church Street Marketplace in Burlington, VT.



On Day 4, we woke up to glorious weather and headed east into New Hampshire. Here the landscape changed and we started skirting mountains until we reached the base of Mt. Washington for lunch. At 6,288 ft Mt. Washington is the highest peak in Northeastern US and is the most prominent mountain east of the Mississippi. We were given enough time at lunch to make the optional drive up the mountain. It is, probably, the steepest continuous road we've ever driven. Only 30 cars attempted the climb and only a handful made it to the top. Our Corvette was in 2nd gear the whole way up and 1st gear the whole way down. We saw many vehicles take



advantage of the brake cool-down areas on the descent.

After lunch we continued east crossing into Maine and finishing at the Waterfront Park in Gardiner. What else would we be served for dinner but luscious steamed lobster?



We were excited to start Day 5 because lunch was being provided by the Owls Head Transportation Museum in Owls Head, ME. The scenery was spectacular and the bad weather held off all day. The Owls Head was a fun museum to walk through and fortunately we had time to enjoy it. They had everything from early motorcycles, bicycles and carriages to prototype aircraft. With an adjacent runway they had vintage aircraft flying around the whole time we were there.



After lunch we were routed through the backroads of Maine to finish the day at the Bangor Waterfront in Bangor, ME.

Day 6 started off wet and got worse throughout the day. Everyone was looking forward to today because we knew we'd be driving through Acadia National Park and ending in Bar Harbor. We all prepared the best we could

for the heavy rain that was expected. Of course, everyone knows that all old Corvettes leak, so we put some towels where they'd be easy to reach. At least we weren't driving one of the open cockpit cars. Fortunately, we did have new windshield wipers and they got a workout. The rain made it difficult to see the signs and roads that we needed to find and standing water made for some interesting driving. We stopped for lunch at the Seal Cove Museum and the rain made parking difficult to stay out of the mud. After wringing out a couple towels, we continued after lunch. Acadia National Park is a beautiful drive and it's a good thing we had seen it after the NCRS convention in 2016 because visibility was so bad today you couldn't see 50 feet in front of you.



We ended the day at the Town Pier in Bar Harbor but because of the weather the Parc Ferme' was cancelled. What a disappointment...we were looking forward to lobster in Bar Harbor. Despite the challenges of the day, we had some of our best scores of the week.

Day 7 we're crossing into Canada. The rain has ended, for the time being, and after an early start we headed north on a leisurely drive to the Canadian border. After crossing the border we started today's race. Lunch was provided in a beautiful little park in Rothesay, New Brunswick. With some rain in the forecast, dinner and the finish line were moved from



the Riverfront Park to the Moncton Convention



Center with indoor parking. Tonight's menu-whole cold lobster. The President of the Moncton Corvette Club stopped by with a bag full of memorabilia and later gave us a personal escort to our hotel with the added bonus of a beautiful rainbow.

Day 8 is the start of the "Championship Run". We knew it was going to be a challenging course today. Starting early, we had a long, complicated morning of racing before lunch at the Farmer's Market in Truro, Nova Scotia. I think we crossed the same one-lane bridge 3 times on today's route. We finally finished today at Alderney Landing in Dartmouth, Nova Scotia. From the Landing we could look across the harbor to downtown Halifax where we would be spending the night.



Day 9. Last day of racing. We woke up tired and exhausted but knew it would be another tough day. The rally master threw in every trick in the book this morning. We followed the Bay of Fundy for a while, and drove through some beautiful farm and ranch land. We finally crossed the finish line in Halifax, Nova Scotia and were met by Corky and Theresa Coker (Coker Tires) the owners of the Great Race.



They presented us with the medal given to all participants that are able to complete all legs of the race. The motto on the medal says "To Finish Is To Win". After 2600 miles the race was over.



Later in the evening at the Awards Banquet we learned the final results. We had some good days and we had some bad days where we committed the cardinal sins of rally racing-missing turns and not seeing signs that signaled a speed change. Our final standing was 44th out of a total of 117 entries. Not bad for a Rookie, but most important, the car ran great, except for a minor carburetor problem the last day. And we were still married! We had a fantastic adventure and met some truly special people along the way.

Now we're looking forward to next year when the race will be from Riverside, CA to Tacoma WA. I added a 1948 Oldsmobile to my fleet which we will run in 2019. Since the scores are handicapped based on the year of your car it should be advantageous to run an older vehicle.

For more information about the Great Race you can go to www.greatrace.com. If you'd like some personal information or help with joining the Great Race you may contact us at silver65@satx.rr.com



Dan & Pat Martin