

My Secrets On How To Win A Rally

B-M Rally winning driver shares his in-depth knowledge

By “Wrong Way” Chuck Wills

When you ask people what it takes to win a rally, you get various answers. I've compiled a list and have compared that against my actual rally winning experience. I don't mean to brag, but I have used these techniques to place in the top 5 finishers in national as well as regional events. These are tried and true techniques that most rally professionals will not divulge.

Actual responses to the question “What helps you win a rally?”

1. “Weak Competition”: While this never hurts, it is possible to rely on the STRENGTH of your competitors to aid you in winning the rally. If your competitor is strong, you can generally count on them to be headed in the right direction most of the time. Use this to your advantage! See more details under the “Co-Pilot” section.

2. “GPS Navigational System”: While this might be handy, it certainly isn't necessary. They are still somewhat expensive, and that puts a dent in your budget for “celebration beverages” for when you win the rally. I've found that a good alternative to fancy electronics is a good pair of binoculars. These can be used by your co-pilot for spotting far-off road signs, obscure clues in the distance, and skilled competitors that are likely on the correct route.

3. “A co-pilot that is good with direction skills”: This would make sense, but I've found it to be completely unnecessary. In fact, in the last rally that I won, my co-pilot had us lost by the 3rd instruction on the route sheet. That didn't really matter because she had darned good eyesight. She was able to spot another rally competitor out in front of us, thereby getting us back on the route. This is the key quality to look for in a co-pilot — spotting other Miatas at great distances. When it comes to winning rallies, this is more valuable than a cell phone and signal flares.

4. “A Topographical Map of the surrounding area”: I have seen competitors fussing with maps the size of table cloths, and it sure didn't help those poor people rank any higher in the standings. Rather than fool with a huge sheet of paper, I suggest buying some inexpensive 3x5 cards and a pencil. Arrive at the rally site early and use these supplies to take notes on your competition. Pay special attention to the relationships between driver and co-pilot. If you hear them address each other with names like “Wrong Way Chuck”, “Moron Mike” or “Old Backwards Beth”, take note that they may NOT be cars to fall in behind. Also listen for key phrases like “If we get lost again, will you PLEASE stop and ask directions?” or “We got turned around just getting to the starting point!”. Again, these may be people to stay away from at all costs. Take good notes and use them later on the route. HINT: it may be best to just categorize the competition as “skilled” and “unskilled”. Keep these cards handy, because you will use them for reference later.

5. “Good directional Skills”: This is one that I would have to agree with. Directional skills are necessary just to get to the rally site. Without them you may as well take the bus. Once on the rally, though, the directional skills are secondary to observational skills. What I mean is this — you are in a “directionally challenged position” (hopelessly lost) and you happen to spot another competitor on the road. First, check your 3x5 cards to make sure it's not someone that is as “directionally challenged” as you. Now casually fall in behind them and you use your observational skills to try and determine where you should be in the route instructions. Look for road signs, and other clues that seem to fit the directions on the rally route sheet, and then try to keep track of where you are in the instructions. Do this in case you become separated from

the other rally competitor. If you've been lost once, there's certainly no reason to become lost again! So, figure out where you are and try to stay glued to their bumper!

6. “You don't need a fast car, just steady, consistent driving”: All I can say to that is “Horse feathers!”. Rallies are all about going really fast through the corners and driving the Miata the way it was meant to be driven. Yes, there may be some route instructions that you miss due to co-pilot nausea or going past street signs so fast you can't read them, but that's all part of the game! (Refer to 1 through 5 about getting back on course.) And I must say that a fast car is critical. In that last 1/4-mile before the finish, you need to have the horsepower to rocket around the competitor that you've been following. That way you get the satisfaction of beating them to the finish, and you have still had the opportunity to enjoy some fast corners without the hassle of following route instructions to the letter.

Road Rallies can be fun for the driver and co-pilot as long as they maintain the proper competitive perspective. This list of helpful rallying tips should encourage novice competitors to come out to the next event. Try them out and let me know how they work for you. I'll see you all at the next event — I'll be in the blue Miata right behind you!



Always check out the competition.