

First Friday Niter Rally, July 3, 2020

I have never been a big fan of trap rallies. Ever since the first one I ran in 1965. I just tend to get lost. I get great enjoyment out of driving interesting roads and will put up with traps to have an excuse to get out and drive. My brain works a methodical mode. Troubleshooting complex problems in electronic assemblies and teaching other people how to do that gave me great satisfaction for many years. For some reason, quirky signs, spelling or route problems just are not so interesting to me. Fortunately, I have run with great Navigators who are really good at this and I have more than my share of awards to show for it.

When Jeanne told us she was putting on a trap rally for July, I quickly volunteered to run checkout and work the event. There are several advantages to this. 1. It's FREE! You get to run the course and learn a lot without paying an entry fee. 2. There is no pressure. You do not have to worry about your bad score showing up on the Internet for the rest of your life. 3. At the end of the event, you can express things you do not like about the rally and suggest changes. This can often make a rally much better.

The evening of June 24th, my wife, Lim and I showed up behind bank of America wearing masks. It's funny how a disease can make this Ok. Larry and Jeanne were already there and after we got our route instructions, we registered our Richta app to join the rally. After verifying that it was working, we headed up Sepulveda onto the 405 and then merged onto the 5 freeway. It was a nice evening without too much traffic and we breezed along all the way to Templin Highway exit. The End of Odometer Check was there.

The drive down The Old Ridge Route was the best part of the rally. Many twists and curves around the hills and nice views of the mountains, this is the way rallies should be. We caught a checkpoint on The Old Road and then a Restart shortly after that. Unfortunately, my iPhone had already registered us at both when we passed by going north on the freeway. There's a problem! Then, we went into a residential area and the first ugly trap raised its head.

Lat 2nd sideroad.

Now to me that sounds like, turn left at the second place where you can turn left. But, I was wrong. The first side road was to the right and I should have counted that and then turned at the next left sideroad. However, I counted the first left as the first opportunity and then turned at the second left. The genius of rallies that Jeanne and Larry write is that they will do that to you and you still end up back on course without ever knowing that you screwed up. Until the end of the rally! The off course just makes you early or late to the next checkpoint.

After much circling around an Industrial Park and finding lots of “Only Only” signs, we hit a checkpoint at one of them and then another one at the “Only Only Only” sign. That was pretty cool! After a short drive to another Industrial Park we followed the maze. Then, as Janis Joplin sang, “Take another piece of my heart” the second trap got us:

“L at CROSSROAD at STOP (tibbitts). FLR.”

Well the FLR triggered my spidey senses for a couple of minutes, but by the time we got to the next intersection, I forgot about it and did not follow the line to the left. Going straight there took you 3 blocks off course but the Jeanne genius worked again and put us back on course a few minutes late.

I worked the Start at the rally on July 3rd and made sure all the cars were registered in the Richta app before they left. Watching the rally on my Samsung tablet was fascinating! You see a top down map like Google maps with each checkpoint showing up as little flag. The cars are little circles moving along the roads. You can watch as they make correct course decisions and wrong decisions. Then, you see them figure out their mistake and get back on course. This is technology that I dreamed of but never really expected to have. Thank you Rich Bireta!

Creating a rally has become so much easier with the Street View on Google maps and the Richta Rally app. It is so nice not to have to organize checkpoint work crews and equipment. It is also fantastic not to sit at the finish with a stack of time cards and checkpoint logs trying to calculate scores. You just download the data into an Excel spreadsheet, make it pretty and present it on a computer monitor. There are still some bugs being worked out, but it is getting better each time we use it. If you have ever thought about writing a rally, you have to try doing it this way.

Paul McGaffey