Son of Sno*Drift XVII

Jan 10, 2015 Start/Finish Whitmore Lake, MI Words: Scott Harvey/ Photos: Steve Balanecki

The 2015 edition of Son of Sno*Drift was, in my opinion, one of the best ever. By moving the start to Whitmore Lake, we have moved much closer to many of the best roads we have available to us here in southeastern Michigan. In addition to the good roads, the weather came around just in time. We had snow the week leading up to the event and the temperatures stayed cold right through the weekend. This was in contrast to the conditions encountered during the layout, measurement and safety checks. For those runs, there was little to no snow and the roads were, in fact, dry and dusty in many areas. So it turned out that the speeds that had been defined with snow in mind came to be reasonable for the conditions.

My schedule is such that I need the Christmas break to create and define the entire rally. About the only thing I was able to accomplish in advance was reserving Captain Joe’s Grill for the morning and evening of the rally. While it was a bit cramped at the end, I think it worked out well for our needs. With all the road work that needed to be done, I was slow in getting workers lined-up. Fortunately, this all fell into place about a week before the big day; unfortunately, there was nothing to be done to get a bigger turn-out of competitors. At seventeen entrants, this was, by far, the smallest number ever for Son of Sno*. It seems we are not attracting the novices as we used to. I have my theories on this – but they would most likely sound like the ramblings of a cranky old man. I can’t seem to get inside the minds of the youth today (not sure I’d want to) – to see how we could make this sport more attractive to them. As a group, we rallyists seem to be an aging lot and with few exceptions, there are not many new teams coming into the sport and sticking around. Ideas on how to make this more attractive to new participants are always welcome.

Anyway, I was able to enlist the help of my lovely wife to assist with initial course design and note taking. We ran a couple of times to get the route in good shape – one of them on our anniversary. Now that’s a keeper! I was also able to get the help of Mike Bennett, our divisional rally director, to perform the safety check. On the day of the rally, I was lucky to have the help of some fine folk to work registration, controls, scoring and sweep. The following people are to be thanked for their work: Mary Shiloff/ Registration and controls; Jerry Shiloff/ controls; Jim and Nancy Shaffer/ controls; Phil Smith and Ray Foulkrod/ controls; Chris Bargman and Ben Vallerand/ controls; Ben Bargman and Matt Kwiek/ controls; Steve Balanecki and Mile Bennett/ controls; Ken and Alex Knight and Doug Harvey/ controls; Rich and Linda Line/ sweep; Jen Glass/ scoring. Thank you all!

Not only were the roads a marked contrast from the dry and dusty conditions of layout – but also hugely different from last year’s super slippery ice-drift. Last year the first section was so icy and slick that emergency speeds were put in place before we started and it became more a question of survival than going after good scores. Some of the highlights from last year were having my car (#0) bounce off a bank on the way to the start of the timed portion. It took a little experimentation to figure out that applying a little throttle kept the car under control rather than coasting and letting the car to go where the ice wanted it to go (off the crown and into a bank, for example). I also recall one road strewn with abandoned cars that were unable to climb out of either side of a small valley. As I motored along, several of the locals stared in amazement and even applauded as I effortlessly made it through the carnage. Ah yes – proper winter tires.
So severe were the conditions last year that at least three of the top teams decided that rather than risk damage to themselves or their cars, they decided it best to flee and live to play another day. Little did they know that, by the start of the second section, most of the roads had been cleared of the really dangerous ice. There were great comments on some of the many T/A slips. Jack von Kaenel had one that referenced a Brett Hull pee wee hockey game breaking out in the road.

Back to this year – things were going well. I had a chance to have a nice hearty breakfast at Captain Joe’s. We discussed with the on-duty manager that we would prefer to finish in the side room of the main dining area rather than trying to conduct our post-rally business in the same room as the live band that were to go on at 9:00. We have found that this is not a very good combination. We were also able to play match-maker for a couple of drivers that needed some ballast. Bruce Fisher found John Kytasty a willing accomplice and Jeff Boris was able to rope Rob Moran into running with him. The driver’s meeting was short since most teams were not new to the sport and needed little coaching. I did leave plenty of time for the novice teams to ask questions and help them with the basics.

Once on the road, it was clear the conditions were just about right. There was plenty of slippery stuff to keep things challenging and fun – but certainly nothing like last year’s insanity. The first control crew was in place and ready to go, though their clock needed to be swapped for one with all elements working. When I arrived at the second control, there was definitely a problem. It seems the marker I had placed in a tree to locate the timing line had gone missing. Also the pressure sensor for the timing hose was questioned, so I swapped that out with a spare I was carrying. To get the control properly located, I drove on to the out marker and back-measured to find the right tree. This was a minor inconvenience, but one that would repeat itself at the end of the rally with a higher level of frustration.

Most everything else went well and all controls were placed and ready to go when I came through. One crew was actually taking the time to perform a little parts swapping. I was so intrigued by this I didn’t really notice that they should have ideally been further off the road and more clear of rally traffic. From there it was on to the last few controls of the section and then to the first break in Pinckney. The teams started filtering in and from all reports, the section was well received. Ed Showalter had some very positive comments regarding the nature of the roads. He liked the twisties. I told him the next section would be even better.

And better it was. The second section used a few new roads but for the most part, contained a lot of favorites from years past. Things were in good shape and all seemed to go well with the exception of leg 9. Evidently a large panel truck got on that road and caused a lot of havoc for the competitors. There were reports of several rally crews arriving bumper-to-bumper. Sorting out their in-times became impossible. That leg had to be tossed.

Section three started well but there were a couple of minor issues, including a clock that was somehow off by 14/100s. I tried to get it synced to my clock and failed. After screwing around a little, I switched the sync procedure and ended up syncing my clock to the same 14/100 error! Crap! So I had to hand off another clock. There were still two more snafus to deal with. The first was the control right at the beginning of the bridge on Lima Center Road. When laying out the rally, I thought it would be kind of cool to have a control there. During the safety check we had a discussion about it and, since it was dry (and in the daylight), we kind of left it as it was. When I arrived as car #0 – after dark and in slippery conditions – it became painfully obvious that it was a bad idea. I heard about this at the end of the rally and the complaints were well
founded. I was prepared to throw the leg, but after looking at the scores for the leg, there was no clear advantage or disadvantage between competitors. It was decided the leg would stand – but rest assured that specific location will not be used again on any of my future rallies.

The final hiccup came to my attention about the time I got to control 17. My brother called and said they were not able to find the marker for the last control location. My suggestion was to keep looking and that I would be there shortly. Once there, I could not find it either. Someone had removed it! I back tracked to the last good mileage and upon returning was able to located the proper tree. By this time, we were short on time and the first car was due in less than two minutes. The only thing left to do was to measure the distance from the original tree to where the crew had set up. This delta would be subtracted from the original distance and recalculated to produce a new ideal in-time. It worked well and special thanks to Ken Knight for making the suggestion. My frustration level, by this time, was getting pretty high. Fortunately it was the end of the rally and time to head back to headquarters to enjoy some good food and a cold beverage. But wait. On the way back I took a wrong turn! The route was effectively totally new to me and I went off course for about half a mile! I was not in the best of moods when I got finished. Fortunately the reports from the competitors and workers did not further agitate things too significantly.

With the exception of leg 9, we were able to score all of the other controls and some of the class battles were very tight. Only three novice teams came out to play. This is a significant drop from years past. Nearly all editions of Son of Sno*Drift have had novices out-number all other competitors combined. For whatever reason, we don’t seem to be attracting that crowd any longer. Taking the class win in Novice were Jeremiah Packham and Daniel Gonzalez with a total of 893 points. The other two novice teams were both within 100 points of the class winners. (Photo above: Packham/ Gonzalez – 1st N)
In Stock it was Adam Spieszny and Piotr Roszczenko winning with a score of 59 points. Adam has not missed a single running of Son of Sno*Drift. I don’t think there is anyone else that can make that claim (except the chairman/rallymaster).  (Photo below: Spieszny/ Roszczenko – 1st S)

In Limited the battle was very tight with the Ushers (Nathan and Aaron) edging out the Wiedbuschs (Ken and Dennis) by one point (27 to 28).  (Photo below: Usher/ Usher – 1st L)
The Equipped class was the most populated this time around, with no fewer than seven teams checking off the “E” box on their entry form. Six of the teams came in at 22 points or less (the seventh team missed a CAST change on a leg slip, and it was their first time in E). Third in E were Sellers and Ford with 15 points. Second went to Stone and Bell with 12; and winning again, and by only a one point margin, were Johnstonbaugh and von Kaenel. (Photo above: Wiedbusch/ Wiedbusch – 2nd L) (Below: Stone/ Bell 2nd E)
Overall, the event went well. The positives outweighed the negatives by a fair amount. There is a good chance we will do it again next year. Thank you to all that came to play and especially those that came to work.

Scott Harvey – chief cook and bottleneck – Son of Sno*Drift

Balanecki/ Bennett set up and ready to time cars at control #6

Layton/ Layton – car #9 (7th E) arriving at control #6
John Fishbeck looking for a hug at control #7

Boris/ Moran - car #14 (5th E) at control #7
Conger/ Langosch - car #10 (2nd S) at control #6

Engle/ Engle - car #17 (3rd N) at control #7