

The Montgomery Sentinel

Travel Tales

The 2018 Great Race (Part 1): The Coolest Motoring Event You Never Heard Of

by

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This month we focus on the 2018 Great Race, probably the coolest motoring and travel adventure you never heard of. Next month we will interview the only Marylander in the 2018 Great Race, and then we will describe the highlight of the event, the terrifying climb and descent of Mt. Washington in New Hampshire.

The 2018 Great Race was the 33rd running of the time-speed-distance rally, which ran every year from 1983 to 2007, and then again every year since 2011. This year's race involved 150 gorgeous antique and classic cars, including nine international entries, and was held from June 23 to July 1, from Buffalo, New York to Halifax, Nova Scotia.

The first Great Race was organized by Tom McRae and Norman Miller as a chance for antique cars to competitively rally across different routes around the country, on public roads through beautiful scenery. The Great Race took its name from the famous 1965 Tony Curtis-Natalie Wood-Jack Lemmon movie with the same name.

Currently cars built before 1972 are eligible, and the oldest cars on the 2018 Race dated from 1916 and 1917 – over 100 years old! Antique vehicles get a graduated scoring advantage of up to 34 percent for the oldest cars.



The concept for Great Racing is simple, but execution is difficult. A route is laid out ahead of time by Race officials, using back roads with little traffic. The officials calculate the exact time that the “perfect car” should take to follow the route’s hundreds of detailed instructions, such as, “Wait 10 seconds at the stop sign, turn right onto Jones Road, go exactly 22 mph to the first speed limit sign, then increase speed to 35 mph.” There are no trick or joke instructions, but each instruction must be followed exactly, and none missed, otherwise the car can end up in the wrong state! Cars start 30 seconds apart, to avoid bunching up.

No cell phones, GPSs or maps are allowed, only a very accurate speedometer and clock, race instructions, and various stopwatches. Stopwatches allow the hard-working navigator to solve the most difficult problem in Great Racing. That is the fact that the “perfect car” accelerates *instantaneously* from zero to 22 mph in the instruction above, but a real old car may take many seconds to get up to the set speed. So the real car is always behind the “perfect car,” and the navigator must figure out how much, and direct the driver how to catch up. Great Racers are never supposed to break the speed limit, although this happens sometimes when a team blunders and must catch up before the next secret checkpoint.



A sophisticated setup for a GR car, with race instructions, an expensive clock with a sweep hand, and a super-accurate \$1000 speedometer

This type of rallying is so hard mentally, especially for the navigator, that it usually takes years of practice before a team becomes expert. But rookies can have fun by just staying on course and enjoying the two main stops each day, where participants are treated like rock stars. Bands play, local classic cars gather, and the entire town turns out to enjoy the biggest event of the year. This year in Gardiner, Maine, the Governor showed up, and the town Mayor Thom Harnett said, “I think this is the biggest event we’ve ever had. It’s great!”

Such precise rallying is very popular in Britain, and is called a “regularity” there. Perhaps the greatest regularity of all was the Around the World in 80 Days Rally in 2000, and next are the Peking to Paris Rallies held every four years, organized by the Endurance Rally Association (www.endurorally.com). The next P2P rally will be in July 2019, and is already sold out, despite a cost per car north of \$60,000. Back in the US, the Great Race looks relatively cheap, with a 2019 entry fee of \$6500 for private vehicles, \$8500 for corporate cars, and \$1500 for high school student teams.

In the 2018 Great Race, the father and son team of Jeff and Eric Fredette of Beecher, Illinois, won the top prize of \$50,000 with just 82 seconds off the perfect time. They drove a 1933 Ford flathead V-8 pickup, and beat the second place team by only four seconds, in a 1932 Ford Cabriolet driven by Jody Knowles and Beth Gentry, the 2017 winners. The total rally purse in 2018 was \$150,000. It is possible to win your entry fee back!

The 2019 Great Race will run from Riverside, California to Tacoma, Washington, but is sold out. Register now for 2020!

Lew and Susan Toulmin rallied their 1968 "Bullitt" Mustang in the 2005 Great Race (greatrace.com), and have participated in regional regularities put on by the North East Rally Club (northeastrallyclub.com).



Howard Sharp and his son compete every year in the Great Race, usually in Hudsons from 1914-22, and have won many trophies. This is a 1916 Hudson Pikes Peak Hillclimber.

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Photos and credits:

1. A 1960 Studebaker President on the Great Race, on display at an evening "park ferme" (static car show) stop in Troy, New York. (Credit: Lew Toulmin)
2. The logo of the 2018 Great Race, which ran 2300 miles from Buffalo, New York to Halifax, Nova Scotia. (Credit: Lew Toulmin)
3. A 100-year-old 1918 American LaFrance Speedster, one of the oldest cars in the rally, on the 2018 Great Race, on display at a stop in Troy, New York. (Credit: Lew Toulmin)
4. Car 54, a 1936 Ford Fordor police car driven by Louise Feeny and navigated by Jim Feeny, at a Great Race evening stop in Troy, New York. (Credit: Lew Toulmin)
5. The interior of a Great Race car, showing a \$1000 speedometer (left), a specialized and extremely accurate sweep second hand clock (center), and the detailed race instructions (right). No maps, cell phones or GPSs allowed! (Credit: Lew Toulmin)

6. A 1964 Volvo PV 544, a classic road rally car, is checked in to the rally day's final stop at the inflatable Great Race arch in Troy, New York, halfway through the 2300 mile race. (Credit: Lew Toulmin)
7. Some cars on the Great Race have massive support vehicles and support teams, contained in large semis, shown here, but most just carry spare parts in their trunks. (Credit: Lew Toulmin)
8. A 1966 Aston Martin, car number 89 on the Great Race, is almost a lookalike for James Bond's 1964 DB5, but this is a DB6, worth only (!) about \$318,000, compared to a DB5 at about \$450,000. (Credit: Lew Toulmin)
9. A 1968 Ford Mustang on the Great Race, being feverishly repaired in a hotel parking lot at 7:00 am, before the start of the day's racing. (Credit: Lew Toulmin)
10. An Ace sticker on the Great Race is awarded for a perfect score to the second on one of the day's four or five rally legs. Transit legs connect the rally legs and take the teams to their hotels at night. (Credit: Lew Toulmin)
11. Great Race cars all have warning signs in the rears, since they stop, start and turn suddenly, often go slowly – and never break the speed limit. (Credit: Lew Toulmin)
12. A "Blues Brothers" police car on the Great Race, complete with giant megaphone, is an excellent replica of the famous movie car. (Credit: Lew Toulmin)
13. A beautiful 1963 Jaguar E-type OTS glides across the New Hampshire countryside on the Great Race, which ran 2300 miles from Buffalo, New York to Halifax, Nova Scotia. (Credit: Lew Toulmin)
14. Car number 26, a 1940 Ford sedan, on the Great Race across New York, New England, and eastern Canada. (Credit: Lew Toulmin)
15. A 101-year-old, 1917 Peerless Green Dragon V-8, sponsored by the Stahl Automotive Museum, descending the gravel section of the road down Mt. Washington on the Great Race. Sadly, the next day the car sheared its axle and did not finish the Race. (Credit: Lew Toulmin)
16. A 1964 Ford Mustang departs the start of the Great Race in Buffalo, New York, on its 2300 mile time-speed-distance rally to Halifax, Nova Scotia. (Courtesy photo)
17. Jeff and Eric Fredette of Beecher, Illinois, won the 2018 Great Race top prize of \$50,000 in their 1933 Ford flathead V-8 pickup. (Courtesy photo)

18. The father and son team of Howard and Doug Sharp dash out of the start in Buffalo, New York of the 2300-mile 2018 Great Race in their 102-year-old 1916 Hudson Pikes Peak Climber, the oldest car in the rally. Note: no rain or hail protection! (Courtesy photo)

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