

Those with rally fever in the Northeast have a special “vaccine” in the form of John Buffum, enthusiast extraordinaire, who decided that the cure to break us out of our Covid Cocoon would be a special version of his annual Winter Challenge, dubbed the Summer Challenge.

John’s got all these perfectly fun whoop-de-do roads sitting out there in Central Vermont, devoid of the usual 2” (or 2 feet) of snow we play in every February. Why not whip up a tasty little 130-mile jaunt with some appropriate twists in the instructions (a normal part of John’s toolbox) and see if it can be run under sensible safety conditions? Who among us could resist?

Certainly not my driver, Gary Thomas, who has his temperature tested eight times a day at his job, nor me after Staying-In-Place since early March. The schedule allowed me to stay in my home state, NY, then venture up to Randolph before the event and return after; VT has travel restrictions and this let us all comply in a way that didn’t upset the government.

Online registration. waiver-signing outdoors by your own pen; route instructions in a packet left on a table. Timing was done using EZ Trak GPS boxes on our dashboard (more on that later). The Vermont Mask Advisory went into effect the day of the rally; compliance by competitors and workers was complete without complaint. I ran the entire event wearing a mask.

The rally was broken up into timed sections (Regularities) with each start time on your scoresheet; each regularity had 1-3 hidden timing controls (we never saw a checkpoint all day), “Monte Carlo”-style. The lack of visible controls means on-time, all the time running each regularity since you never know where you will be timed and the EZ Trak unit sits on your dashboard dumb as a skunk, not revealing when you’ve been clocked.

This is hard for the drivers: no rest for the wicked, you have to be ontime all the way through the regularity. No rest on the straight roads, no peace after a checkpoint sign. The roads JB selected seemed particularly hilly. Imagine trying to stay on time, driving exactly 32 mph up a steep hill. Worse, try staying at 25 on a steep downhill. That was the Challenge!

Try to maintain a pace on a very twisty go-up-over-the-mountain road infested with about a gazillion people on bicycles zig-zagging up and racing down the hill, all blissfully unaware that cars were on their road (no bikers were harmed on this section - a miracle!).

Most of the contestants picked up the rhythm of the rally and many were turning in single-digit scores by the end of the event. The pace was fast enough to keep the entertainment level high and navigators picked up a pace of their own. Chris Regan and Michael Beliveau managed the only real drama of the day, finding/replacing a clutch line on their Mazda in time to pass the last four controls with low scores and finish.

No controls to see means no way to know how you're doing. We were oblivious to the tight battle going on in Class A (Equipped): Mark Stone and Marc Goldfarb scored zeroes on 8 of the 16 scored controls, as did my partner Gary Thomas and I. The stars of the Challenge, Satish Gopalkrishman and Savera D'Souza, knocked out ELEVEN! What a run!

Class S was going back and forth as well: Steven McLafferty and Pauline Lambert were squeaking out a 7 point win over Nicholas and Makayla Williams.

The Challenge ended in a parking lot, boxes for the scorecards and EZ Trak units. No contact, thank you and the finishers high-waving (no high-fives) to one another from a healthy distance.

We went our separate ways to safe quarters and received our results online the next day. John was kind enough to provide plenty of follow-up info online as to where the checkpoints virtually existed, some details including course maps and a description of the "situations" that tripped up almost all of us at one point or another.

The blueprint for future (safe) events has been drawn by John Buffum. A relatively rare (Monte Carlo) format has been revived in the rally vocabulary. An alternative to armchair rallying has proven to be viable. Nice time, nice friends, nice to be back in the woods.

<u>DRIVER/NAVIGATOR</u>	<u>SCORE</u>	<u>OVERALL</u>	<u>CLASS</u>
Mark Stone/Marc Goldfarb	37	1	1 A
Gary Thomas/Frank Beyer	43	2	2 A
Satish Gopalkrishman/Savera D'Souza	50	3	3 A
Steven McLafferty/Pauline Lambert	190	4	1 S
Nicholas Williams/Makayla Williams	197	5	2 S
Scott Carlson/Phil LaMoreaux	314	6	3 S
Peter Yetman/Steven Yetman	332	7	4 S
Chris Wright/Jeff Gunn	402	8	5 S
Kathy Moody/Ashly Follett	648	9	6 S
Vojtech Kubec/Joseph Gabiel	716	10	7 S
Ian Scott/Mike Sedlik	725	11	8 S
Sonia Devarney/Beth Greenia	915	12	9 S
Miccal McMullan/Steve Martel	969	13	10 S
Alex Hanson/Gooff Hansen	1016	14	11 S
Paul Poor/Devon Romines	1078	15	12 S
Chris Regan/Michael Beliveau	1103	16	4 A
Griff Jones/Chris Haka	1117	17	13 S
Bill Smith/Greta Smith	1195	18	14 S
Stephanie Gosselyn/Fred Maplebeck	1332	19	5 A
John Heddens/John Henderson	1958	20	15 S
Stephen Moore/Joyce Moore	2246	21	16 S