

Burgessville man rally driver

By SUZANNE HANSON

Sean Hyland isn't a downhill skier because he thinks it's too dangerous a sport but the 24-year-old Burgessville-area resident (formerly of Ingersoll) thinks nothing of racing along unknown roads at speeds up to 120 miles per hour during pro rally auto races.

His competence as a rally driver and the safety features in his specially built rally vehicle give Sean the confidence he needs to be a competitive pro rally driver. But no matter how good your safety equipment is, if you go off the road and hit a group of trees, your survival chances aren't that good, said Sean. Drivers can't waste time worrying about the possible dangers of the sport, however, and if those dangers worry you, you probably shouldn't be out there in the first place.

Sean got his first introduction to auto racing at the age of 16, competing in slaloms - races following a set course, usually marked out on large parking lots. Competing in the slaloms introduced him to the various auto sport clubs and Sean found most of the people in those clubs were avid rallyers.

Burgessville man auto rally driver

(Continued from Page 18) (the competitive portion of the rally) which are then linked by transits. It is the driver's responsibility to drive fast on the stages but speeding is not allowed on the transit sections, under penalty of exclusion from the race.

Sean has already competed in two events this year and he and co-driver Jeff Kinsella of London will be testing out the car in a short eight-hour Black Bear Rally in Minden on June 4 before competing in the next national event on June 18 in St. Jerome, Quebec.

The Nomad Racing team, as they refer to themselves, will be competing in 13 to 14 Canadian and four American events during the 1983 season. They are driving a 1979 TR8 Triumph which Sean bought last November as a wreck. Within about five weeks, he had it rebuilt and ready to go for its first event the end of December.

Sean is now looking toward being a professional driver with the full sponsorship to compete in a complete season. "I'm basically a pro now but I don't get paid for it," said Sean who pointed out that full sponsorship for the season in Canada would cost about

He first started rallying at the age of 18, competing in the navigational - time, speed, distance - events for two-and-a-half years. He finished first in five events and among the top 10 in the majority of the remaining events he entered but he sought a more individual level of competition and by the fall of 1981 had run in his first pro rally.

Sean had marshalled for the Tall Pines Rally for three years prior to entering a pro rally himself and it was that involvement that got him hooked on rallying.

Pro rallying, says Sean, is a form of auto racing in which specially prepared vehicles race one at a time, normally on dirt roads closed to the public, against the clock. Besides the speed aspect, rallying also involves timing and direction. There are usually two people in a rally car - the driver and co-driver - and the division of labor is clear. It is the driver's responsibility to drive fast on the stages and it is the co-driver's responsibility to make sure they follow the proper course and do it in accordance with the organizer's timetable.

\$100,000. If his bid for full sponsorship comes through, Sean will no longer be driving in his open class car. Instead he'll be behind the wheel of a supplied production car.

"What I drive now bears no resemblance at all to what someone can go out and buy," said Sean. Production cars are the basic stock cars with the necessary safety equipment put on. While the open car classes are more exciting to run because the cars are much faster, the skill level required to drive a production car is also high, because "you have to use what you have more effectively," said Sean. He admits his own car this year is one of the most difficult open cars to drive and handle but, "I wanted to showcase my talent in a car that was difficult to drive."

At 24 Sean has a long career of rally driving ahead of him as he has no plans to give it up until he's 40. Within the next 10 years he hopes to see himself racing the European rally circuit to take a shot at the world championship series. It is the equivalent to the Grand Prix in formula racing and there are at present no Canadians running in that world series.

Rallying is only one of many forms of auto racing but it is the one Sean personally finds the most challenging. Unlike circuit racing, which follows a known racing track, rallying takes the drivers over unknown and often rugged terrain.

"Rallying is so different from anything else because you don't know the roads. It's quite challenging because you're out there by yourself." While rally drivers must rely on their own skills as drivers to get them through the course, they must also rely on the others in the field in the event of a breakdown or mishap.

"It's very much a fraternity," said Sean, and "there's a real camaraderie among the racers. They all help each other out along the way."

Rallys used to be run almost entirely at night but the split between daytime and night-run rallys is now about 50-50, said Sean. Part of the reason for the shift to daylight hours stems from the hope that it will bring out more spectators to view the races.

"It's an extremely exciting sport as far as spectators go," said Sean, but it has a very low profile in Canada, although that is changing slowly as more sponsors take an interest in the sport. Sean has sponsorship from two major companies in the auto industry - BF Goodrich and Bosal Canada (distributor of Hella Rally and headlights).

Without the sponsorship, auto racing can be an expensive proposition. While Sean has completely built his own car for the pro

rallys this year, there are factory built cars built to specifications. They would cost in the neighborhood of \$75-80,000, said Sean. At present, the only stock item on his car is the sheet metal for the bodyshell.

In addition to the various aspects of the car built to rally specifications, the car features special seats designed to minimize fatigue, a special safety harness, a built-in roll

cage, an on-board fire extinguisher and modified suspension. Sean also wears a helmet, racing suit and fireproof gloves - just in case.

The pro rally season runs year-round from January right through December and Sean enjoys the challenge of driving on ice and snow as much as he enjoys the faster paced summertime rallys, especially if they're on

fast, smooth roads. Despite the speeds of 80 to 120 miles per hour driven in the rallys, they are statistically much safer than any other form of motorsport, said Sean, although those statistics may change as the cars get quicker.

Most rallys involve covering a total of 500 to 1,000 miles, broken down into 150 to 200 stages miles

(Continued on Page 19)



Readying to rally

Rally driver Sean Hyland of Burgessville is preparing his car for an upcoming pro rally in Minden on June 4. The former Ingersoll resident has been rallying for the past six years. (NG Photo)



Rally route

Rally driver Sean Hyland of Burgessville and his co-driver Jim Kinsella drove Sean's TR8 Triumph in a winter

rally in February this year. They have a busy schedule of races coming up for the 1983 season. (Stephen Liard Photo)