



## What is a Rally Volunteer?

By the Volunteer Staff of



## What is rally volunteering?

Auto rallies in the US are almost exclusively organized and operated by people who volunteer their time and resources, their enthusiasm, and their energy to make rallies events happen. A rally volunteer is anyone who donates time and effort and other personal or business resources to the success of a rally. The donation of effort often goes beyond their time; rally volunteers traveling from afar are willing to spend their money on food, gas, and lodging just to reach an event and participate in the excitement. Others donate their time, community knowledge, and specialized equipment to a rally.

Rally volunteers do many different tasks to make an event work; but this work generally falls into several major categories. Please read on if you are curious to know who and what goes into rally volunteer work. (And if you have questions about the term 'stage' used below, please refer to the article "What is a rally?")

**Marshals:** Marshals are the often the unsung heroes of a rally. No, these marshals don't wear a star like Marshal Dillon in Gunsmoke, but they are the key personnel to maintain safety on the roads used as special stages, on which the rally cars are running at full speed. A marshal is stationed at each road or trail intersection or residence (be it permanent or a vacation residence) to insure that no rally traffic enters the road while in use by the rally. The marshal's position in a rally is the best volunteer position for viewing the cars in action. There may be hour-long periods of time while marshals are waiting for the rally cars to start the stage, but, once the first rally cars start, the marshals are treated to the view of each rally car passing by their station at full speed at one minute intervals.

Being a rally marshal requires no prior rally experience, just an enthusiasm to be a part of the event, the dedication and willingness to stay out 'on-stage' for one or more full days, and a dedication to event safety. Marshals typically get up early and get out on the road for a long day of rally action. Marshals should have their own vehicle, preferably one that is not lowered, since they have to traverse dirt roads to reach their marshalling locations that can be rough in spots. They should be prepared for a long day in the fields and forests, and come armed with snacks, water and drinks, bug repellent, sunscreen, rain gear, and so forth; a folding chair is a

great idea, and a camera is a good way to take some rally memories home.



**Control teams:** Control teams work with the marshals on a given stage road to form a 'stage team'. The two control teams on each stage have 2 tasks. First, they secure each end of a road being used as a special stage. They also perform the critical task of starting the rally cars onto each stage at exact one minute intervals, and then precisely timing the rally cars at the exact time that each car crosses the finish line of a stage.



Control teams consist of 2 or 3 people at the start and finish of every stage road. These people are usually experienced in rally work, or may even be experienced competitors who have decided to volunteer their time at a particular event rather than compete. They need the same preparations as marshals to be outdoors for a long day, and are equipped by the rally organization with the needed signs and timing equipment and time sheets to perform their stage timing tasks.

**Event staff:** There are the most experienced rally competitors and rally organizers, as well as local community support organizations. They have usually been participating in large event organizing for years or even decades. These people typically spend hundreds of hours preparing an event and do it for the love of the sport and community that so many people share.

Local community members of the event staff may not always be thought of as part of the event, but their contribution in event planning is priceless. These are the local town, county, and area tourism and community promotion organizations. These folks provide key input and assistance in guiding rally organizers along a good path. They typically know almost everyone in the local community, and have relations and access to many local people who can help with the event. Every rally relies on the wisdom and guidance of these local organizations, and we are always grateful for their help and support.

The rest of the event staff works to make it possible for the rest of the rally volunteers to do their jobs. Rally staff, outside of the local community support organizations, consists of such functions as timing and scoring, radio system management, chief of controls, press relations, and so forth.

**Emergency personnel:** While rally competition may seem dangerous, the use of modern racing safety equipment in rally cars has given rally operations an excellent safety record. But, like anyone who drives a car, rally competitors need emergency support in the rare case of an accident.

The primary source of emergency personnel and equipment is local volunteer emergency organizations. Their donation of time and provision of their equipment on-scene is the most generous example of volunteer support to a rally. Like every citizen served by a local volunteer fire and rescue organization, every rally competitor sees these people at the ready at each stage start, and is very grateful and comforted that they are there to help at a moment's notice.

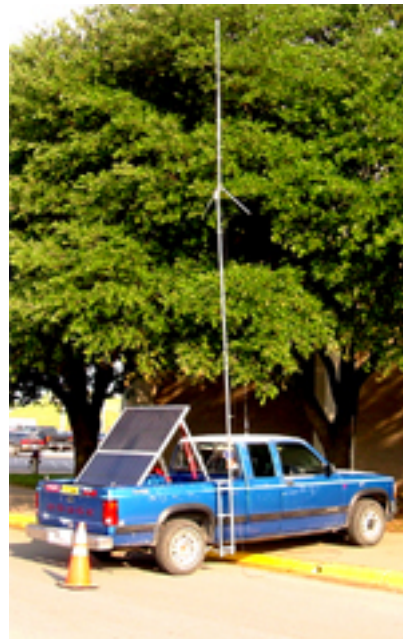
The rally supports each participating volunteer fire and rescue organizations with a donation. One way in which sponsors help the overall community is by making sponsorship contributions that in turn become donations to these local volunteer fire & rescue organizations. It's a great way to help the rally and to support the community at the same time.



**Radio operators:** Each rally has a radio network for safety and for managing event operations. These networks are usually ham radio networks and are manned by experienced and licensed ham radio operators. The networks have an experienced ham operator at rally HQ to serve as 'net control' and manage the communications flow on the network. But the heart of the network are the individual operators who are dispatched in the field to report and provide direct communications support to the stage teams. These ham operators are stationed at the start and finish of each stage road, and at other critical locations to report the progress of a rally, to send and receive messages for rally personnel, and to report any significant rally developments.

Like their stage team counterparts (marshals and control teams) the ham operators need to be prepared for a long day in the field. Additionally, they need to have their own vehicle, be equipped with a 2 meter mobile transceiver, and be an FCC licensed ham operator. No prior rally experience is needed; if you are familiar with your equipment and with basic radio net operations, you can be a rally ham operator.

Note that often ham repeaters are used to make wide area communications possible. These repeaters are usually owned and maintained by local ham operators and ham clubs. The generosity in allowing their repeaters to be used for multiple days for rally communications is one of those often overlooked volunteer contributions, but we want to specifically identify their vital contributions.



**Sponsors:** Sponsors are often not thought of as rally volunteers, but without them, a rally is often not possible. Sponsorship donation levels and participation can vary widely, and the typical rally sponsor is a local business who wants to help make an event happen for the benefit of the larger community. They realize that bringing a rally to an area also brings new local spending and a boost to the local economy.

Much of the sponsor donations are fed right back into community organizations. Local charities are common beneficiaries of rally donations, and much of what is donated as sponsorships goes to contributions to local volunteer fire and rescue operations.

**Sweep teams:** The rally cars are preceded and followed on each stage by a set of cars known as sweep teams. All sweep teams carry radio equipment so they can be in constant touch with rally operations. These are typically 2 person teams. Here are each team's tasks:

Car 00 - This car travels each stage road about 15-20 minutes before the rally cars start. Car 00 checks that all control teams and marshals are in place, look for last-minute, unexpected developments, and serves as an early warning that the rally cars are getting ready to run the stage.

Car 0 – This is a fully prepared rally car and traverses each stage road at about 80% of full rally car speed; Car 0 starts each stage approximately 5-10 minutes before the rally cars start. Car 0 is the final check that all marshals and control teams are ready to go, and serves as the final alert to everyone that the rally cars will be coming next at full rally speed.



Fast sweep – The fast sweep team is the first vehicle to follow the last competing rally car on a stage. They proceed briskly but at a safe speed to check on the safety of any rally team that has broken down on stage or that has an 'off'.

Slow sweep (also known as 'heavy sweep') – Slow sweep follows fast sweep to provide assistance to rally teams who have broken down or had an 'off'. There are usually several trucks in the slow sweep team, and they can assist competitors with extractions of rally cars that have been stranded in ditches, providing tows for cars with mechanical problems, or giving rides to competitors back to the next service area.

Slow sweep teams can use first time volunteers who have trucks with light towing capability. This team will have a rally-experienced team leader. Slow sweep vehicles should carry tow straps and cables, and the people in these vehicles should have some prior experience in towing cars safely out of ditches. The remaining slow sweep team trucks will be manned by seasoned rally competitors or rally volunteers. Each sweep team should carry the same 'out-in-the-field-all-day' items like the marshals carry, and may carry other equipment issued by the rally organizers.

## **Come join!**

Rallies are supported by a lot of enthusiastic and friendly people; come join the fun! Check on the event's website for information on how to become a rally volunteer!