**Alpine Rally 2022 Debrief Notes**

(sourced from the debrief held via Zoom, via email feedback and other discussions).

**SUMMARY & STATISTICS**

* Held from 1st – 4th December, this was the 100th anniversary edition of the Aline Rally and was organised by the Historic Rally Association.
* The organisers were very pleased with what WICEN did for the event and congratulated us on our performance. There were also compliments from both rally crews and rally stage officials.
* WICEN operated from Friday 2nd – Sunday 4th.
* Approximately 110 cars started on Day 1 and 77 finished the event on Day 4.
* Number of WICEN operators (members + casuals) participating: 24 (including 2 sets of ‘pairs’ who travelled together. Some of the total number attended for only 1 or 2 days.
* Requested number of operator positions: 63
* Number of requested operator positions not filled: 8
* Number of operators positions desired: 81 (This number allows for two operators at each Start)
* Number of operators positions not filled: 26
* Distance travelled by operators: In excess of 16,700 km
* Fuel Cards donated by Organiser: Sufficient for one per operator per day.
* The organisers also made a donation of $1000 to WICEN and some of this amount has been used to partially reimburse those who made a fuel claim, taking into account fuel card disbursements.

**PLANNING & DOCUMENTATION**

* Operators were generally happy with the timeliness and detail of the WICEN documentation. Some would have preferred a more consolidated approach to save having to cross reference multiple documents. Others made their own daily summaries. (Due to other priorities, the Event Commander ran out of time to further consolidate information.)
* A number of changes to operator deployments were required during the rally. These were due to
  + changes in the organiser’s preference for which positions WICEN did not fill
  + several WICEN personnel had to withdraw after Day 1 due to family illness
  + Late advice to WICEN (and then, only by chance) that Stage 20 would be run from Lakes Entrance rather than from Omeo
* Rally Stage officials did not have documentation detailing which radio operators were assigned to their stage. (This information was requested by and given to the organisers on 27th November.)
* The rally management officials (Stuart Lister, Owen Polanski & Kerril Maloney) were very responsive to any questions during the planning stages and readily provided relevant information.

**IN THE FIELD**

Meet Points

* Some less-experienced radio operators were not greeted as they might have expected to be, and could not identify other WICEN personnel at their meet point.
* A number of seasoned operators noted that they wear a WICEN hi-vi vest with name tag, and upon arrival, introduce themselves to the Stage Commander, where upon they ‘sign in’, receive any paperwork that’s on offer, and in best-practice cases are given detail of whereabouts in the convey they are to place themselves.

Duties

* In most cases, provided car tracking and backup comms for organisers
* In a number of locations, PieNet did not work so WICEN became the only comms for the stage or for that location.
* A number of Stage Start operators had very high work load, and could have done with a second operator. Obviously, more volunteers would have solved this challenge.
* Those who did a second shift on Friday endured very long hours. Meals and accommodation were not available by the time town was reached.
* Too busy with Start duties to make improvements to 6 m comms.

Antennas

* A dual band antenna up a mast didn’t work that well for several operators.
* A beam antenna came apart during transit. Tape to the rescue.
* 6m antenna was resonant towards bottom of band so high SWR at 53+ MHz. Trimmed to suit.

Batteries

* Most people had sufficient battery reserve. 250 Ah + gen went well. So did 120 Ah.
* Several operators had battery issues and needed to resort to their car battery.

Repeaters

* For the most part, the repeaters worked well and provided coverage as expected.
* The temporary repeater on Splitters Ridge (147.3 MHz) was deemed to be down in receive performance. (It used two antennas – one above the other on a tower, and did not have a cavity filter.)
* It was suggested that a portable 6 m repeater might have been handy, especially on Saturday to cover the country between Ensay and Omeo.

In-Stage Comms

* 2 m & 6 m simplex worked well in some locations but not in others, despite the modelling. Propagation quite variable. A number of operators would like to improve their 6m performance.
* Some had to rely on either the main repeater or a ‘spare’ regional repeater for comms.
* The idea of each stage managing their own comms worked well, even though the operator at the Start could not go directly to every other position. It was a team effort, and they made it work, which meant that AWI could focus on higher level matters.

Environment

* Some operators or their partners had issues with dust and/or the heat.
* Ball point pens don’t like dust
* A table cloth to temporarily cover the operating table would have provided dust protection.
* PTT stopped working near end of event – probably a dust issue. Should have set up further back.
* Ambient noise was an issue at times – cars and rowdy crowd. Headphones would not have worked with the need to monitor two radios.
* Could have used more witches’ hats - given the crowd proximity.

General Observations

* On several stages, rally officials did not appear to have a red flag (used to stop a stage), but the Rally Safe system alerted the competitors anyway.
* Rally officials seemed much more organised this time.
* Could not believe where the public were allowed to stand at the SS16 (Lake Omeo) spectator point.
* First WICEN event and really enjoyed it!
* Very much enjoyed the event and got some good practice.

**RALLY HQ & AWI**

* Rally HQ in Lakes Entrance wasn’t unlocked as early as desired on Friday.
* The installed UHF links for Mt Buck and Mt Sugarloaf worked well in Lakes Entrance.
* Having each stage manage their own vehicle tracking took a huge work load off AWI. This worked really well and it meant that just two operators at AWI could comfortably manage the operation all day. If a second repeater had to be used for a stage, a third operator may have been handy.
* Purely by chance, the Event Commander learnt that Stage 20 was planned to be run from Lakes Entrance and not Omeo. Some field changes were necessary to enable an operator to remain in Lakes Entrance for the day.
* The Rally HQ staff were excellent to work with both in Lakes Entrance and at Omeo.
* Additional volunteers might have allowed a different crew to establish AWI at Omeo without the need for such an early start from Lakes Entrance on Saturday.

**BEFORE THE NEXT ONE**

* The signal strength modelling is based on certain assumptions in terms of Tx power, antenna gain and propagation etc. In this type of mountainous terrain, additional margin might need to be allowed for in future.
* A number of operators have committed to fix equipment defects including faulty mics, leads, antennas and poor deviation.
* Prepare some authoritative information on the actual performance of the type of antennas that are commonly being used in the field. Further discussion required on how best to disseminate the information.
* Further consolidate information for volunteers in order to reduce the need for reference to multiple documents.
* Some initial discussion has taken place regarding a 6 m field day where operators can test their gear under more relaxed conditions.
* Discuss how we might get more volunteers for such a demanding event.

Thank you again everyone who was involved. It really was a team effort. We will have to wait to see whether any other rally people wish to organise a future Alpine Rally.

Chris Morley

Event Commander