

Targa Newfoundland, I *rally* live for it.

■ by John Hume

Most people look forward to the holidays, Easter, Thanksgiving and Christmas, while others have a favorite season, like summer or springtime. I, on the other hand, spend 358 days a year every year prepping for the time of my life. Targa time!

Targa is an experience that every adventurer and motor-sports enthusiast should put at the top of their bucket list. I could spend days trying to describe the event to you, but the fact is you'll only "really get it" after experiencing it firsthand.

For the past 14 years, Newfoundland has been home to the first and only road rally event of its kind to be held in North America. Taking place each September, Targa Newfoundland offers a 1,600 kilometre course (1,000 miles), running over 40 races in a five-day period, with scenery and competition you won't find anywhere else.

Drivers and car enthusiasts from all over the world come to enjoy the paved open roads of eastern Newfoundland and the many wonders of natural beauty; competitors' only complaints being that

their speed is so fast and focus so good, they have little time to enjoy the smell of the salt water or the up close and personal views of the Atlantic Ocean on the shoreline, according to event organizers. The original event, the Targa Florio, was run on the island of Sicily; "Targa" meaning "plate" in Italian. In 1990 the concept



was re-developed by a group of enterprising motor enthusiasts in the Australian island state of Tasmania.

The Targa Competition format is similar to the format of special stage rallies in Europe, the United States and Canada. The vehicles and crews transit between races on public roads subject to all of the rules of the road. Then race "Targa" or speed sections, which are held

on roads, which are closed to the general public (all on tarmac) for the races. The event allows the owners of historic, classic and modern sporting motor vehicles to drive their cars the way they were designed to be driven in a rally competition. While racing, each vehicle is launched at 30-second intervals and competes against itself on a handicap basis and judged depending on which category and class they are racing in. Each competitor in each division is competing for the overall best time over all 40 races, so they are competing against all other vehicles in their class and category too.

There are **three** distinct ways to participate:

Targa Division, which includes *Classic, Modern and Open* classes. Fully prepared race vehicles,

roll cage, safety equipment and powerful engines compete to see who sets the fastest times, running at speeds up to 120 MPH (200 KPH).

Grand Touring Division, not as fast as Targa Division but still quick. This is a time-speed-distance style competition for vehicles not roll cage prepped for racing. This division includes an *Un-equipped* class, not permitting inte-





grated average speed computing aids, and *Equipped* class, which does permit integrated distance, time and average speed computing aids (rally computers).

Fast Tour Division is not a competition. It is a tour within Targa that is designed to allow car owners to drive within the limits prescribed by the event, but without the stress of competition.

Made possible through the efforts of more than 1,600 volunteers and members of at least 70 Newfoundland communities, the support from the Newfoundland locals is unlike any other that you have seen or experienced. They wait with anticipation and excitement as competitors tackle each stage and the greatest fans are the many school children eager for an autograph and a picture. On any given day during Targa Newfoundland, drivers play hero dozens of times.

Completing or even just participating in Targa Newfoundland is a reward in itself and an accomplishment like no other. It truly is a life changing experience! I should know; for the last six years I've prepared for and participated in this bucket list race. Yes, for most it is a one-time happening. But for some (like me), it gets under your skin. I just had to come back and plan to keep coming back.

I first got involved in 2009, after having a friendly discussion with one of the service chaps my local BMW/MINI dealership. It was the 50th anniversary of the MINI Brand and *Targa Newfoundland Road Rally* was offering a discounted entry fee for MINIs, he mentioned. I had read about the event but never thought I (who had never raced, let alone rally raced) would be good enough to compete.

Well, one thing lead to another and next thing I knew, there I was with my son, John Jr., and best friend, Craig

MacMullen, competing in the 2009 race in my 2005 MINI JCW. The three of us shared driving, navigating and service crew jobs. We didn't do very well that first year; we kept missing our interim times and racked up a zillion penalty points. In fact, it took us until the later half of the race to realize how to even do a timed rally properly.



Photo caption for group shot

Since then the three of us have competed in Targa Newfoundland every year. But not without some close calls...

It was the last race of the day in 2010 through Gander. The race had been delayed until the sun was just about to set. Once we were off the starting line, I couldn't tell the difference between the red caution tape strung across the driveways and the green grass of the houses we were zipping past. My co-pilot blurted out, "Acute right ahead." Blinded by the sun and unable to make out where the turn was, I kept on going straight. At the last moment I saw the sidewalk coming up fast and managed a two wheel emergency turn, just missing a woman's living room by a few feet.

During another race in 2012, while



Photo caption for group shot

barreling through the small village of Garnish, I could see a left turn approaching. I awaited my co-pilot's instructions but he said nothing. So, I made the turn, driving right off the race circuit and into the back of a church. A few foul expletives later, my co-pilot asked, "Why did you turn when I gave no instruction?" To which I replied, "Sorry, eh!" Apparently, the car ahead of me had run left through the red tape at that corner only a few moments earlier. We made a quick "U" turn and were back on the circuit about 3 seconds ahead of the next oncoming racer. Being almost 30 seconds behind our time, we decided to forget time

checks and drove as fast as my skill set would allow. In the meantime, the car behind had caught up and was right up my butt. I managed to pull away from him, while navigating the bumpy, twisty, pot-holed roads, at speeds approaching 100 MPH (most of the town roads have a normal open road speed limit of 20 MPH). Somehow, three quarters of sweat later, we managed to make up all but

7 seconds of our lost time in that race. What a hair-raiser that one was!

But the worst incident I had was in 2013, during the "Prologue" practice races. I had a new co-pilot that year and we were just starting to communicate beautifully together in my BMW 335is. I was doing about 45 MPH (70 KPH) downhill headed into a downhill hairpin





While racing through Bonavista, the brakes on the 2006 MINI GP cooked from overheating and failed. Nicole and Cody had to finish the race using nothing but the E brake. Yet, they still managed to stay within their time window and most importantly kept it on the road. Our amazing mechanic Garrett Nalepka executed an emergency brake bleed on the spot between races. The crowds loved that spectacle! Nicole and Cody handed out a few hats and "Hero Cards" to lucky bystanders while awaiting the repair. They even made it to the next race leg just in time for the start, losing no penalty points at all.

In the end this year, Team Hume took home 1st and 2nd in GT equipped and 2nd in Targa Modern Division. I guess you could say we "Owned the Podium". But, it is the weeklong adventure that is the real prize. There's nothing like returning home with new memories, friends and extraordinary once in a lifetime stories that make you the envy of all your friends. P.S. The Prize Plates are pretty cool, too.

To view the Targa website: www.targanewfoundland.com
 To view this year's event videos: www.targanewfoundlandnews.com

This year was no exception. We entered two MINIs in GT Equipped event, a 2006 MINI GP (driver Nicole Troster, co-pilot Cody Morch) with a 2013 MINI GP (driver me, Co-pilot Craig MacMullen) and in Targa Modern a 2004 M3 (driver John Hume Jr, co-pilot Justin Crant).



right turn. I executed the turn perfectly! We straightened out. Then suddenly, the rear wheels went out from under us. I managed to correct quickly, just in time to have the front wheels slip out and fail to grab hold. At this point the car was driving us and we were just along for the ride. I managed to slow it a bit as we slid sideways into a tree, then forward through a fence. The entire situation took place in a matter of only a few short seconds but seemed like a lifetime.

With the car slightly wrapped around a tree and completely not drivable, my race week was over before it even began. Thankfully there were no injured bodies, just pride. To this day I suspect someone put something slippery on the road there, but it rained hard right after the crash and all evidence was washed away.



“ Drivers and car enthusiasts from all over the world come to enjoy the paved open roads of eastern Newfoundland and the many wonders of natural beauty...”

