



Rally with a difference

PREETI SINGH focuses on the spirit and the aspirations evoked by sports events for the blind, while reviewing a recent car rally

WE don't come from outer space you know, we are only visually impaired. It's okay, you can make friends with us, we don't get violent if you play a friendly prank! So it is reasonably safe to sit in the same car with us and let us read the instructions on the road map while you drive. This is an honest fact! Those who have driven in the car rallies of the past will testify to the above.

It was Mrs Rehamat Fazalboy, an officer at the National Association for the Blind, Bombay, who came up with the idea of a car rally in which visually impaired persons could participate along with sighted partners. This happened in 1985 in Bombay.

Her idea was supported by the Himalayan Car Rally Association and Ceat India. Since then Ceat India has all along supported this car rally and it is known by the name of the Ceat Car Rally for the Blind.

Although the rally originally came from Bombay, it has found firm roots in Delhi. The first Ceat Car Rally in Delhi was held in 1987 and since then it has been an annual event. Hundreds of visually impaired people look

forward to this exciting motor sport. For the last two years PCRT has also been supporting this event along with Ceat India and NAB.

This year the Ceat Car Rally was held on January 8th. I woke up in the morning to the rumble of thunder. It was very cold and one could smell rain. One step onto the balcony confirmed my fears. It was a very wet morning. The first rain of the winter had chosen to descend upon the capital on the very day of the long awaited car rally. However, at the Talkatora Stadium spirits were soaring sky high.

The visually impaired navigators were there before their drivers. Most of them biting their nails, wondering whether their respective drivers would turn up or not. They need not have worried. Seventy cars turned up in spite of the adverse weather conditions.

This year, for the first time, there were five 'all handicap teams' participating in the rally. 'All handicapped teams' being ones in which the driver as well as the navigator have a disability. In these all handicap teams the drivers were all wheelchair

users. The cars used by these wheelchair users were hand-controlled. One of these all handicap teams was an all-women team. The enthusiasm of the drivers matched that of the navigators. The nonstop drizzle did not manage to dampen the excitement.

AS flag-off arrangements were made in the open, the chief guest very graciously agreed to flag off the cars from

points at various places, awarding plus-points as well as penalty-points.

There were eight teams that were declared as winners. Vipin Malhotra with Rai Sodhi, as his driver, were at the top of the winners list, followed by Rakesh Sharma with Sandeep Sehgal at second position, Harsh Negi and Adil Murgowala at third, R. K. Trivedi and Anuj Kalia fourth, Dipendra Manocha with Sarabjit Arjan Singh at fifth, Baldev Gulati with Dr R. T. Sharma at sixth, Pushkar Raj Pandey with Yogesh Grover finishing seventh and Hemant Kumar with Sameer Bakshi eighth.

Dipendra Manocha and Sarabjit Arjan Singh got the award for securing the first position among the 'All Handicap Teams'. "It was a challenging route this year," said Dipendra, "I felt quite exhausted as I do all the calculations for my team myself, without the help of any of the crew. Why we made it to be one of the winning teams is because Mr Sarabjit Singh was ex-

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inside the NAB van. The car rally was an outstanding example of the integration and equal participation of the disabled and the able. The sighted drivers could not drive without the help of the visually impaired navigators, as the route map in the hands of the navigator was in braille. There had to be complete co-ordination and perfect communication between the sighted and the sightless.

Once flagged off, there was no sign of disability in the teams. The only goal then was "We hope we win! We hope we don't miss the next clue!"

The rally was to follow a route of about 80 km within Delhi. The route map took the competitors through lots of confusing territory. There were various check-

cellent at following my directions."

This rally not only remains just a sporting event, it also becomes the commencing point for many good friendships between the sighted and the sightless. The curtain of inhibition and hesitation, that exists between the worlds of the able and the disabled, parts in the excitement of the rally. Once this happens, the fear that there is something wrong with a disabled person no longer holds good. Whether visually impaired or not, all of us feel good about being alive. Being blind does not change basic human feelings and needs. So join the next Ceat Car Rally next year and find out for yourself. I promise you it will be great fun!



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