

After a year of anxious waiting, the plans for the Team Pantera Racing contingent of Panteras seemed ready to mount a 4- prong attack in Arnold, Nebraska at the annual SORC Open Road Race.

First up were Mark Schweck (The Marauder) out of Connecticut and his navigator Jim Wallace (The Enabler) out of Boston, Mass. Mark got his entry in rather late and as a result found his team poised as #28 on the rather extensive entrant waiting list. Only days before the race, Mark was notified that he was accepted and could participate if he wished. Naturally his response was “We ain’t there YET??” Marks’ plans called for him to trailer his car to Omaha, Nebraska where he would pick up Jim who had flown in from Boston and the two of them would then drive to Arnold to arrive on the Thursday before race day.

Second up was Frank (Godfather) Cirrincione out of Hendersonville, KY. Franks’ plan involved trailering his just completed and totally restored Pantera to my home in Topeka, Kansas and arriving here on the Wednesday before the race.

Next up was Eldon (Bad Bud) Hower in his Pantera out of Whiting, Kansas which is only 40 miles north of my home in Topeka. He was to drive to Topeka early Thursday AM and meet up with myself, Bob (Rowdy) Radefeld, my son Russell (The Revenger) and Frank. Then the four of us would caravan up to Arnold together. What a parade of Panteras we had planned!

Well, as part of the old saying goes – “The best laid plans of.....” – struck our team at the very last moment and our well laid plans began to unravel.

Mark had just installed a new engine in his car several weeks before the race and was confident that he would have all the bugs worked out by his departure date. Unfortunately, this did not pan out for him and only two days before the race he found it necessary to contact myself and the Official in charge of entries at SORC to tell us he would be unable to attend. Damn! Frank, in the meanwhile, had decided to trailer his car all the way to Arnold just in case he encountered any unforeseen problem(s) with his just finished restoration at the race. Sadly, last minute problems involving three (3!!) bad electric fuel pumps from the same manufacturer in the two weeks leading up to the race forced Frank to AGAIN drive his fake Pantera (Mommy’s Porsche) as he had done in the previous 2 years. DAMN AGAIN!! Needless to say, the other three of us chastised him every minute of every day during this years’ race!!!!

Ok, our caravan is down to Bad Bud, my son and I. I can live with that – we’ll still have a fun

drive up together. Well, two days before our planned departure from Topeka, I get a call from Bud saying that the AC in his car just went north and was no longer working. Our high temperatures here had been consistently hovering at 100 + degrees with very high humidity for the past several weeks with heat index numbers in the 110- 118 degree range. Bud had decided he was going to hit the road at 'O-Dark-Thirty on Thursday morning and arrive in Arnold in time for breakfast to beat the heat. Sounded like a good plan on his part and ended up working well for him. That pretty much blew our plans for a caravan out the window. But hey, sheeeit happens, right?? Just make the best of it – at least we'll have two Panteras and one fake in the race and that's what's important.

Since our plan to caravan is out the window, I decide that this would be a good time for my son and I to head out a day earlier (Wednesday) and drive to Phillipsburg, Ks. which is a little over half way to Arnold. Phillipsburg is where I was born and we have several relatives that own large farms near there that had kindly offered to put me and whomever is with me up for the night on our journey to the race each year. As a young boy my parents used to drop my younger sister and I off at our grandparents' house there and leave us for several months during the summer as part of our summer vacation and we always had a great time.

Little did I realize, until I became a parent, how smart my parents actually were and how much they must have enjoyed those several months of peace and quiet in Topeka while my sister and I were having a blast on the farm with my Dads' parents!! Anyway, turns out my son and I stayed over in Phillipsburg on Wednesday night and during our time there I was able to show my son my Grandparents' old house in town where I was born. The folks that now live in the house were more than happy to let us take a tour of it so I could show Russell the bedroom where I was actually born! These kind folks were headed off to work at the time and just leaving the house and told us: "Just make yourselves at home and browse around as long as you like – the front door is OPEN".

This is one of the things that I've always loved about small rural towns and the citizens of Arnold are no different. As soon as you meet new people you are immediately treated as a new friend and trusted as almost a member of their family. Sadly, there is far too little of these "old customs" remaining in everyday life in this country today. :o((OK, off the soapbox Bob, get back to our racing adventure!

Thursday morning we headed on up to Arnold with the intention of arriving there at about noon. Thursday is designated as the day for the racers to have their cars and equipment run through Tech and have their car numbers and sponsor decals applied by a group of very enthusiastic local high school students that tend to drool over all the cars. In the late afternoon the first of

several drivers' and navigators' meetings is held in Arnolds' newer Community Center which was built and totally funded by the entry fees from all of the racers in past years.

We were about 15 minutes from hitting Arnold when I called Bud to see where he and Frank were holed up so we could find them. They were at the "hunting trailer" just preparing to head to lunch and said to stop by to unload my car. It just so happened that we had all been invited to Gary and Jo Crows' place for a good home cooked lunch. Now, Gary and Jo his wife run a large farming operation on the outskirts of town and Frank, MD and I had made good friends with them when Frank and I attended our first SORC in 2008.

Gary reminds me of a professional wrestler – bigger than a barn door and stronger, and Jo is a petite little gal that looks out of place next to him. They had kindly offered to put two or more members of TPR up in two basement bedrooms at their home this year if the North Eastern contingent of our 4 Pantera team made it to the race. Since Mark and Jim couldn't make it, they ended up making this offer good for as many future years as needed. What a GREAT couple they are and like all the other citizens of Arnold they would give the "shirt off their backs" to help the racers that come to SORC and especially TPR racers! This year, they actually had to leave Thursday late afternoon to head to Kansas City for the graduation of one of their sons from Chiropractic school and wouldn't be returning until Sunday after the race. Even with this trip facing them they graciously invited us all out to lunch at their home, stuffing us all with Nebraska beef, fresh corn on the cob and a host of other great food as well as great conversation with them and other members of their family that had gathered to meet all of us unruly TPR members! Just can't stress enough what a GREAT family they are!!

After lunch, Russell and I still needed to go through Tech and get our numbers and sponsor decals put on my car. We did so uneventfully, except for the kids drooling and asking an untold number of questions about the car. Within an hour we were ready to party at Jim's Bar before the drivers' and navigators' meeting scheduled at 4:30. Bud and Frank had already found their way there and got a head start on their beer drinking (there's always room left for beer- Right??- OR is that Jell-O??). Anyway, when 4:30 rolled around we headed for the meeting in a fairly happy state to say the least. :o))

This first meeting is more of a "welcome to the SORC" affair than anything else, the only exception being that all "first timer" drivers and navigators are required to ride on school buses up the first 1/3 or so of the course highway and be instructed on some of the hazards of the road that SORC officials want them to be well aware of before they run their first race there. Things like loose gravel on many of the curves (the road is of the "chip and seal type" and "crowned" in the middle), not smooth flat asphalt as the majority of other ORR venues enjoy and

there or NO flat runoff areas or asphalt aprons on either side of the road enjoyed elsewhere. As one official puts it – if you're off the road you ARE in the ditch, NO place else you can be and you won't be a happy camper!!! This excursion up the course is a good eye opener for the "first timers". Frank and I head back to Jim's Bar after the meeting and leave Bud and Russell to go ride the buses.

At 6:30 we all departed Jim's to walk over to the City Park where we are treated to a "Welcoming Bar-B-Que" of ribs, numerous side dishes and drinks, again stuffing ourselves, BS'ing with friendly racers from every corner of the country that we've met in the past and anticipating Fridays' activities. Then it's back to Jim's for a nightcap and lots more lies and laughter. Having been chosen as the "designated walker" for the week (did I mention we WALK everywhere) I faithfully lead our band of misfits back to the hunting trailer sometime (?) after midnight and pointed them to their beds. Great beginning to what would turn out to be a terrific weekend!

Friday morning some of the more rabid racers are off by 4:30 AM for a 150 mile round trip south of Arnold to a strip of highway where they hold the ½ mile and one mile "Shoot Outs". We sleep in until 6:00 and all walk down to the Cardinal Cafe for a hardy breakfast. Just as we were ready to leave, a gentleman who we all swore looked like Santa Claus in overalls approached our booth, grabbed a chair from an adjoining table and proceeded to sit down with us. Now, this is nothing new in Arnold as all of the folks take a genuine interest in all of the race participants and like to meet as many as they can. However, this guy whom we didn't know from Adam started the conversation by asking: "What are you fella's doing this morning?" We answered that we had no firm plans until about 2:30 PM when the parade of cars down Main Street was scheduled to begin. He then asked if we would be interested in helping him check on several herds of his cattle, make sure the automatic water tank filling equipment was working OK where the cattle were grazing and refill some chemical feed troughs. He said his pastures were a few miles north of town on the same road we would be racing on tomorrow. Hey, a chance to run the road again and even see what the off-road country looked like in places the Officials had said we'd better steer clear of during the race! :o)) Almost in unison all of us said "Why not?" We then introduced ourselves and determined this guy was none other than the father of Cory Peterson, the owner of our infamous donated "hunting trailer" that he makes available to the TPR members every year! What a pleasant SURPRISE!! A chance to see some beautiful country with a local that knew his way around off-road and at the same time lend a hand to Cory's father. Can't get much better than that! I'll spare all of you the details but needless to say, we had a GREAT mini-adventure that morning.

Next up was the parade down Main of all the racers' cars. Every year the SORC staff asks each driver if they would like to take one of the local children along with them as an enthusiastic passenger. This is a real hoot for everybody and this year I ended up with two good looking

blonds sitting in my passengers' seat. Boy, will I ever be in trouble when the wife sees pictures of THAT! Well, probably not as they were a very excited 6 and 8 years old. As you exit Main you are directed to the Central business district and parked for the car show that follows the parade. Throngs of people wander the street for the next 2-3 hours perusing all the cars and talking to the drivers.

After the car show it's back to Jim's Bar for a bite to eat and another big bar bill. There is no free food and drink until tomorrow after the race at the outdoor awards ceremony. Since this is the night before the race, most of the racers call it a day earlier than usual in order to be halfway awake and alert the next morning. I again lead the gang back to the trailer about 10:30PM and we are visited by our trailer benefactor Cory – the first time we've seen him since we arrived in town. We explain our earlier adventure with his father and how much fun we had and Cory is very happy to hear that we helped his dad out with one of his many farm chores. He also reiterates that TPR will again be welcomed back to hold down his trailer next year – YEA! Score one for the team!

Saturday dawns as a beautiful morning (did I mention we had perfect weather all week long?) and the excitement builds for the start of the race. This year the Officials had decided to start the slower cars first instead of last in an attempt to lessen the chance of the course being shut down early in the race. Most of the mechanical problems and off- road excursions are experienced in the higher speed classes- especially the Unlimited class. Better to run into a delay AFTER the slower, less prone to trouble classes have already completed their runs. This was their thought anyway and the race seemed to run smoother as a result.

We all suited up and headed for the starting line anxious to kick some asphalt. Bud was slotted about 8 cars ahead of me and Frank was behind me in the next class driving Mommy's Porsche. We're beginning to doubt even more than in previous years that Frank actually owns a Pantera at all! But that's another story. About 8:45 AM Bud moves up to the starting line and takes off like a bat out of Hell. Shortly thereafter, Russell and I find ourselves at the start line ready to blast off. After a 20 second delay following the launch of the car ahead of us, the light tree counts down 10 seconds and the green light illuminates and WE'RE off like a Prom dress! I hit my rev limiter in 1st gear, shift to 2nd and then 3rd and we're at 95 mph in no time flat. What an adrenaline rush – you start wishing you could do this on every public highway entrance ramp you encounter!! The first 2-3 miles of the road are a fairly steep uphill grade with about 4-5 normally posted at 45mph curves – makes you feel like you're on a narrow mountain road somewhere in Colorado. Once you've passed through this area and reached the top of the plateau the rest of the course is a series of seemingly unending curves and small hills that make you feel like you're on a rollercoaster. Really fun stuff but you definitely have to concentrate hard on your driving so you don't go plowing any of the seemingly endless nearby fields!

I've always said that posted speed limits on any curve were there only for the typical American driver and any sports car worth its salt should be able to DOUBLE it (or more) and have no problems. My Pantera has never disappointed me in this respect and Russell does a great job of keeping me informed of what's ahead using the GPS on his I-Pad.

The finish line for this first leg of the race comes up way too quickly with the Officials and State Troopers directing you west on an adjacent highway to the small town of Dunning which is about 4 miles down the road. Just before entering town there is a large "Sandhills Public School" building and you are directed into the parking lot and lined up again by class for the return run.

The good folks of Dunning open up the school and provide a hearty breakfast to all of us racers and crews. Donations are accepted but not required to chow down on pancakes, sausage, coffee, orange juice etc. and like Arnold any donations find their way into the local community. After overindulging, it's time to return to the parking lot where there is more BS'ing, bench racing and talk amongst the racers about how they think they've done on the North run and what they need to do on the return leg to nail a perfect time and speed.

As soon as the last class to finish the North leg arrives at the school it's time to saddle up and begin sending us back to begin running the road in the opposite direction. Off hand, this would appear to be a simple run but it's not. It's like navigating a totally different road – completely different from the one you just came up. That's one of the things that make this ORR so much fun and challenging!

While waiting in the starting line, a State trooper approaches us from behind on foot and walks up to my drivers' side window. I quickly think "What kind of trouble am I in now!!" Well, none it turns out, he's just interested in the car and starts asking all the usual questions about it that every Pantera owner encounters from the general public. I tell him the car is probably older than he is and I don't think he believed me until I told him it was a vintage 1973. As the line of cars in my class slowly inches toward the starting line he continues to stay at my window and talk about how much he likes the car. Finally he tells me to be careful on the return run and I tell him I hopefully won't be seeing him again on a Nebraska highway on my trip back home! :o))

Another 10 second countdown and Russell and I tear out on the South leg of the race. Russell

constantly updates me on what is ahead on the road, present speed, average speed, total time on the road since we crossed the starting line and about anything else I could want to know – all off his awesome I-Pad. I may have to beg, borrow or steal it from him next year if there's some reason he's unable to accompany me again as my navigator. Heck, maybe I'll let him drive his first ORR next year and I'll navigate so I can play with it. It's an awesome little instrument and especially helpful when you're trying to hit an average speed and a perfect time in a race like this.

Again, the finish line comes up before you know it and you're decelerating down the long downgrade and back into town. Next, a cruise back to the hunting trailer to see how Buds' run went. Then a short wait for Frank to finish in the pack behind us in his fake P-car. Bud feels as though he has had a good run even though he encountered another driver in front of him that had slowed to 20-30 mph and hadn't pulled off to the side of the road yet. This is a definite NO-NO according to all the rules and I'm sure the guy was disqualified immediately as soon as the Officials heard of the incident. Other than having to slow down quickly to pass this joker safely, Bud felt like he'd done pretty good at holding his targeted time and speed. Soon Frank pulls in and we all celebrate the fact that the race was trouble free for us and we all finished in good shape. Of course Bud, Russell and I give Frank another good ration of shieeet about driving Mommy's Porsche instead of a GOOD car and warn him again that if he doesn't show up next year in his "invisible" Pantera he's going to be banned from the TPR hunting trailer and find himself sleeping in a corn field!!

Since our classes were some of the first to run this year we're back in town earlier than in past years and have more time to party before the big Bar-B-Que and awards ceremony that starts @ 6:30 PM. Time to shed the racing garb and head to Jim's Bar for a bite to eat and again see if we can't run him out of beer! Well, at least we can try while BS'ing with all the other drivers as they trickle back into town. I can't count the number of times during the week that we were literally laughing until we cried and this visit to Jim's was no different. Before we know it, it's time to head over to the park and proceed to chow down yet again.

I'll guarantee everyone that the good folks of Arnold know how to feed the racers when we hit town! Every bash they throw seems better than the last. They feed you great food until you feel like you're ready to bust and then they bring out the dessert. Bet we all gained 10 lbs each during our 4 days of unrelenting FUN! When everyone is finished stuffing themselves the awards ceremony begins. There are 1st, 2nd and 3rd place plaques given out in each class and plenty of applause for the winners. Unfortunately, none of these plaques go to a TPR member this year. :o((Well, I guess that means that we'll all have to come back next year and try it again – Right??

THE SORC SAGA – 2010

Written by Rowdy

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There's no doubt in any of our minds that win or lose, we can't miss this event in 2011. For those of you that have stuck with me through this rather lengthy description of our adventure at SORC this year, I hope you will come to conclude that the race itself is only a small part of the reason why we all continue to return every year. The relaxed small town atmosphere, the making of new friends, the camaraderie amongst all of the racers, seeing so many cool cars and especially the unending hospitality of the citizens of Arnold and its surrounding communities make this a "Must Do" event every year for those that are fortunate enough to experience it just ONCE! The race itself is just the adrenaline driven "Icing on the cake" as they say!! :o))

Bob (Rowdy) Radefeld #5042