

CLASSIC DRIVER

BMW 2002ti Rally: Whiplash mountain

Lead

Rain, nothing but rain. Why must the heavenly floodgates open on the January weekend of the Planai Classic?

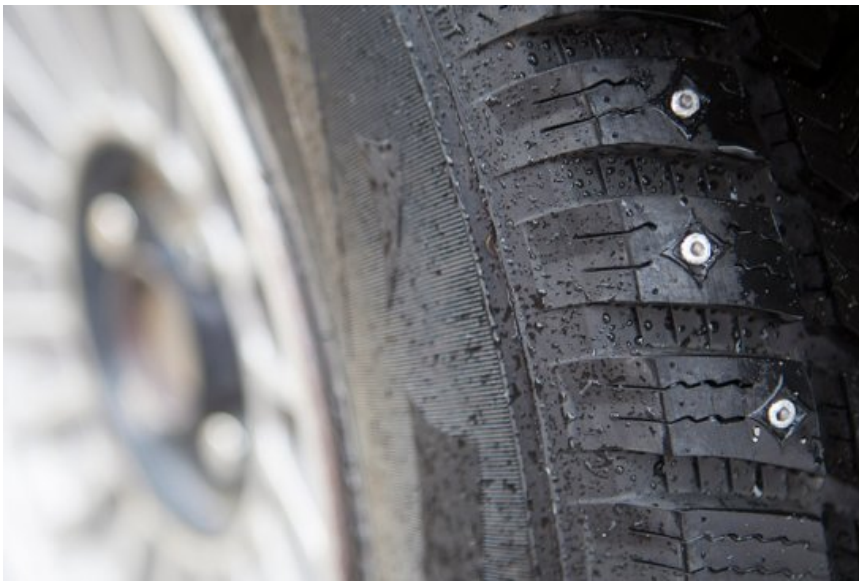
Every year, this rally season-opener attracts participants with promises of wild rides on snowy mountain roads and icy mountain passes but, when the rain comes, the conditions degenerate into a hydroplaning ballet. My mount is the BMW 2002ti rally car and it has far more relevant rallying experience than I do. Built in 1969, the 'little' car was successfully launched into the Group 2 class of the World Rally Championship and, with its 4-cylinder in-line Alpina engine, was driven in the 1970/71 rally seasons by no less than Rauno Aaltonen and Sobieslaw Zasada – who won the 1971 Polish Rally with this car. The impressive output of 190HP and weight of just 1,040kg means lots of drifting fun; but without snow, there's only half the pleasure.





As the rally starts, in Gröbming, the water falls only in a liquid state from the sky but, by the end of the first day's competition, there's a slippery mix of snow and ice to contend with. Steep curves see me babbling with unintelligible excitement into the microphone, drawing a distraught look from my team-mate Florian. Fortunately, his stare is quickly interrupted by the start of the night stage.





As I drift around the tight turns on the long route to the Dachstein, the snow-covered road lit only by the wide arc from our headlamps, I'm reminded of the 'Night of Long Knives', the famous night stage of the Monte Carlo Rally. The studded tyres make loud scratching noises as they cling to the road surface and we dart left-right, in second gear, through the bends. My head aches – and my back too, as the bucket seat is not entirely comfortable – but a high dose of adrenalin ensures rapid healing.



The experience is immensely good fun but I did become very aware of my limitations as a driver. The Planai Classic is no tourist's cruise... although, fortunately, the 45 starting teams had enough rally experience on

snow and ice that – despite the demands of the night-time special stages – there were no accidents. However, in preparation for next winter, I've already signed up for winter rally-driver training with Rally-Professor Rauno Aaltonen in Finland.





Gallery

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