

2022 Sandblast Rally

By Bill Heybruck, W4EDN with contributions from Jeff Cold, K4MGM, and Mary Hunt.,
N4MH

This year the Rally was March 5. In early November I committed to attend only to find that Cheraw State Park RV sites were sold out so I tried and secured one at H Cooper Black which was nearby and as it turned out closer to the action (more on that later).



I arrived at 1530 on Thursday the 4th and setup camp, by 1630 I was done, made dinner and checked into the NC Evening Net at 1830. I run an ICOM 7100 with an AT180 Antenna Tuner to a G5RV (home brew), center mounted on a 35 FT Hastings telescopic pole mounted on the back of my camper. Power comes from a dead Astron SS30 power supply I bought on Ebay for \$15 and repaired. I typically run 80 watts.

Proceeded to check into the early Carolinas Net (3571, CW at 1900) and the Carolinas Slow Net (3571,CW at 2000), shower and check into the late Carolinas Net (3571, CW at 2200). Went to bed around 2300 and woke up at 0730 for the NC Morning Net (0745, SSB on 3927).

I then drove into town for Registration and to fill up with gas.

At 1330 I left camp and went to the Shakedown radio team meet. Shakedown is a Rally practice session run on a 2 mile section of sand road that Participants can run over and over from 330PM to 6PM. At 1430 the radio team left for the location just South of Chesterfield SC. There we met the team lead and other volunteers and were placed along the route.

Clint (WA1AC) was Start Radio OP, Rod(N4RTG) and Tom (KG6FS) were at finish, Andy (K4GKK) and Andrew (KO4HXB) were $\frac{3}{4}$ of the way down the course, Pedro (KO4IYS) was $\frac{1}{2}$ way and Bill (KN4PXY) was $\frac{1}{4}$ of the way down the course.



At 3pm the first motorcycle started the route.



Clint would call it out: “Shakedown Finish, Bike 102 is on course”, Rod would reply “Shakedown Start, roger that 102 on course”. Finish would keep track of starters and when all bikes had started would wait for last one to finish the check to see that all were accounted for. If any were missing we would query those along the route to see where it was lost, luckily none went missing all day long. Only then would we start Cars on the course. Vehicles left start at 1 minute intervals so typically 2 or 3 may be on course at one time. When the last car left we would again wait for it to finish and be sure all were accounted for. This continues until 6pm.

Competitors would finish, then circle around and get in line to run again.



The line at start.



Starting Queue.



One of the specialty cars, this one would eventually go off course into trees and drop from the event.

Saturday my position was Communications Chief where I remain available to fix radio issues. I was issued 4 new radios and antennas to replace as needed. (to be returned of course) There are 9 stages to the Saturday event spread over 3 counties. Amateurs play vital roles in all of them.

We met at 0620 in the high school parking lot and there I assisted 2 volunteers configuring their radio for the repeater (tone and offset). The remainder of the day I hung out in the Service Area in Patrick SC where I was called upon to configure a Baofeng HT and help install a radio in an official's truck.

At 1730 I headed back to camp only to find the direct route closed as it was a race route. So I circled around and went in the camper and started my dinner (Hot Italian Sausage, peppers and onions. I stepped outside and could clearly hear the cars so I put the stove on low and drove about ¼ mile toward the noise and there they were. I watched them until the end. Went back to camp, had supper and checked into my nets.

The following is from member Jeff Cold K4MGM who was at a stage called Sexton's Pond"

Photo 1 shows cars lined up to go at Stage 3, Sexton's Pond.

Photo 2 shows Harland Williams (volunteer, not a HAM) doing time control next to Subaru car 56.

Photo 3 shows Chris Kearns, K04WLD, getting a motorcycle competitor ready to run the course.

Sandblast Rally today in Cheraw, SC -- March 5, 2022. We worked closely with Rod Turnham , N4RGT, at Stage 3, Sexton Pond Start and Steve Nosko, W4SJN, and Net Control Mary Hunt, N4MH and Thomas Hunt, KA3VVJ.







Mary Hunt provided:

Sandblast Rally event is where the motorcycles and cars are running against the clock and not each other. Ham radio operators are used at each stage at the Start and Finish as well as along the route in case someone breaks down on the course. We use Ham Radio to make sure all the bikes and cars that start each stage make it to the finish line on their own or towed.

We had 32 cars and 21 bikes that started the event. We had 19 cars and 20 bikes that completed all 9 stages. There was actually one car that caught on fire out in the middle of a stage and burned. Since they are out in the middle of the state forest, it is very hard to get fire trucks out on the route.

We had 61 hams supporting this event. The following members from the MARS club supported the event: Dave Holbrook, KC4SGT and Carol; Mary Hunt, N4MH; Tom Hunt, KA3VVJ; Rod Turnham, N4RGT; Jeff Cold, K4MGM; Steve Nosko, W4SJM; Andy Hawkins, K4GKK; Chris Kearns, KO4WLD; JD Shefte, KN4X; and Andrew Wallace, KO4HXB.