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# THE GREAT RACE

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## RPM X-CUP 2022 TEAM – RACE RECAP



RPM X-Cup Team  
Navigator Kinzie Wilson

Hi! My name is Kinzie Wilson, a Motorsport Management student at Belmont Abbey College. I was one of the student navigators for the RPM Foundation X-Cup team. I was so excited to embark on my first Great Race with an all-female team. We drove over 2,000 miles from Rhode Island to North Dakota

in 9 days. Now I get to share the rollercoaster journey with you!

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**Trophy Run:** I signed up for this experience not knowing anyone on my team, and that excited me. I got to meet Olivia Gadjo

## Scenes

## The Concours Experience

from Alfred State (student navigator), and Mercedes Lilienthal a freelance journalist (driver). I



Dressing our '66 Mustang in Great Race livery

also met the

man who put the team together, Nick Ellis, Executive Director of the RPM Foundation who would be following us to each stop in the support vehicle. The rest of our team would be joining us along the way. First thing on our agenda: Rally School. None of us had done The Great Race before, so we also decided to attend the rookie meeting afterward. From there, we had to prepare ourselves and the car for the Trophy Run. We had the privilege of driving a 1966 Mustang, loaned to us by [Lemay- America's Car Museum](#). We had some adjusting to do, since none of us had seen the car before The Race. We dressed her up in all her Great Race livery, including our sponsor [Prometheus](#)' logos. Mercedes was up to drive with Olivia as her navigator that day while I did some back seat navigating. We started the Trophy Run on a good note, but mother nature decided to test us. With the windows rolled down due to the lack of AC in our 'Stang, it began to rain! In an unfamiliar state, with an unfamiliar car, and three strangers who had never done The Great Race, we did pretty well for only missing two turns! The

car had died a few times in the turnaround process, and we knew we would have to fix that before the next day. We rolled into the dinner stop with mixed of emotions when we found out we got a score of 12 minutes (how far off of a perfect time for the day). We were happy to see Nick as we drove across the finish line. We caught him up on how the car ran that day, what we had experienced, and what needed to be done that night over dinner. While we were eating, Mercedes came back with our time sheet for the Trophy Run and revealed that we had gotten an Ace (hit a checkpoint at the exact second we were supposed to...this is a big deal, especially for rookies). We were able to get our instructions for the next day, so we took them back to the hotel and got to work. We planned our strategy in hopes of getting another Ace!



Sabr  arrives on the Race!

**Stage 1:** The official start of The Great Race! To start the day off, we got an impromptu lesson in resolving a rich fuel carb

mixture (which was causing the car to lurch and surge at idle) from Nick. He gave us an example of what the "M" in RPM Foundation stood for: mentorship. We then paraded

from the start hotel to a nearby park with residents of Rhode Island scattered along the way waving us by. We got to the park and met other teams around us in the start line. We shared tips and tricks as we waited for our start times. Finally, the time came, and it was my turn to navigate for Mercedes driving. They announced our team as we drove over the starting line, and everyone cheered as the RPM Girls drove off. To start every day, we had to do a calibration run to make sure our timewise, or official speedometer, was calibrated correctly. To do this, the driver stayed at a constant speed the whole time, while the navigator marked down the time it took to get to each sign on the instructions sheet. At the end, we compared our time to the desired time given by The Great Race to see if we needed to make changes. We did the math, calibrated the speedometer, and got to the starting sign. We went through the instructions as directed and had a pretty good first day, not missing any turns. We were thrilled to get our score of 58 seconds for the day. It much better than the day before, especially for a group of strangers whose “practice” was Zoom call training sessions! No Aces for the day, but we were content with being 1 second early on one leg. The Mustang had a new fuel pump put in the night before, but we were still having some stalling issues throughout the day. Sabré Cook (driver, professional racecar driver, and engineer) had arrived that day and met us at the dinner stop with Nick. We got to catch her up on The Race at dinner that night in Windsor, CT. We went over the things we did good and the things we needed to work on.

## **Stage 2:** This



was the first day that we got our instructions the morning of. The girls and I got to the start hotel early to give us enough time



Meeting Tabetha Hammer in Binghamton NY

to go through the Mustang and make sure she was all good for the day. We got our instructions exactly 30 minutes before our start time. We put in calculations for time lost for accelerating/ decelerating to the directed speeds or through turns. We also calculated how much time we were supposed to stop at stop signs, as well as accelerating/ decelerating times, to make perfectly timed stops. Sabré was up for her first day of driving due to having missed the first two days due to flight complications. Olivia navigated Sabré through the day, with me in the back helping where I could. We arrived in Binghamton 1 minute and 3 seconds off, still content with our score but eager to improve. Great Race veteran and former CEO of America's Automotive Trust Tabetha Hammer met us at the finish line. She provided some Great Race tips from her time as a participant. We had less problems with the car, so we decided if it wasn't broke, we weren't going to fix it. However, Nick had bought a carburetor rebuild kit that day...just in case! This was also a very monumental day as our 1966 Mustang got

named: Gracie.



"Yes, Nick, I know where the engine is"

**Stage 3:** One of our most difficult days. It was my turn to navigate again for Mercedes. We got our instructions, got through the calibration run, and got to our starting time... 10 minutes early! We had done our math wrong and thought we were on time, but we wouldn't find out until the end of the day that we were way

off. We got a break in Montour Falls, where there is a waterfall downtown. For someone who was born and raised in Texas, home of the flatlands and not much else, this was very exciting for me to see! Little did I know, the excitement was just getting started. It took a few tries to get Gracie started from our stop, but she finally started, and we got back on course. Gracie was having a rough day and decided to take it out on us by stalling...at just about every stop. By the end of the day, we were just as frustrated with our car as she was with us. We knew we wouldn't have a good score, and we weren't surprised when we found out we got a 13 minute. We ate at the Warner Theatre in Erie, PA which gave us time to clear our heads. Sabré rode in the support car with Nick that day. They had come up with a music playlist for Gracie and picked up magnetic speakers for our future plans.

As soon as we were done with dinner, we took Miss Gracie to the parking lot of our hotel and we showed her who was boss. We brought out



About to reinstall the carb under flashlights and cell phones

a little folding table and the speakers to get us in the wrenching zone. With more mentorship from Nick, we took her carburetor out and apart. Just when it was done soaking in cleaning solvent, the parking lot lights turned off, indicating it was time for bed. Not for us! We got out as many lights as we could get ahold of and took turns putting the carb back together.

As the clock struck 1 am, we had the carburetor back on and Gracie roared to life as Sabré started her up. Our team lit up as soon as Gracie did, knowing we didn't give up on our car and she didn't give up on us. We felt rewarded, empowered, and most of all, tired! We slept really well that night.

**Stage 4:** Just when we thought we were in the clear, Gracie had different plans for our team. It started like a normal day: we woke up, got our instructions, and got on the road. Sabré driving, Olivia navigating. Gracie was running beautifully, no issues at all! We started seeing a



"Five more minutes and then I'm getting us an Uber"

lot of other rally cars on the side of the road as they were starting to go down. The Race is not an easy feat for any car, much

less a classic, and by the fourth stage the punishment was starting to take its toll on the cars. Apparently, Miss Gracie wanted a little break, so about a mile past the first checkpoint of the day, she just stopped. We pushed her off course and popped the hood, ready for a quick fix to get us back on the road. We had three locals stop and offer to help us out. We realized that the fuel pump was the problem after about an hour of going through the fuel lines. The sweep team put Gracie on a trailer, and we loaded up in the truck, thankful to at least get some AC. We stopped somewhere in Ohio to check the trailer, not really sure where. As we were making sure the straps were okay, we noticed a "self-serve" petting zoo. Out of curiosity, we went to check it out. There was an emu, kangaroos, a deer, goats, cows, and alpacas. The stop made for a good stress reliever as we were preparing ourselves for the second long night ahead of us. We got towed all the way to our hotel in Perrysburg, Ohio. We ate before we started wrenching, all feeling like zombies from our adventure so far. Mallory Henderson, the only



member of our team with Great Race experience, had arrived, making our team whole. After dinner, we went back to the parking lot to start operating on our car again. With Nick's guidance, Mallory and Sabré installed an electric fuel pump while I helped Olivia change all the spark plugs for good measure. Gracie fired right up at midnight with Mallory behind the wheel this time. This job did not take as long as the night before, but we still did not get to sleep until around 1 am.

### **Stage 5:**

Redemption Day. We woke up, still groggy from the night before, but ready to face the day. It was Mallory's first day to drive and I was to be her navigator with



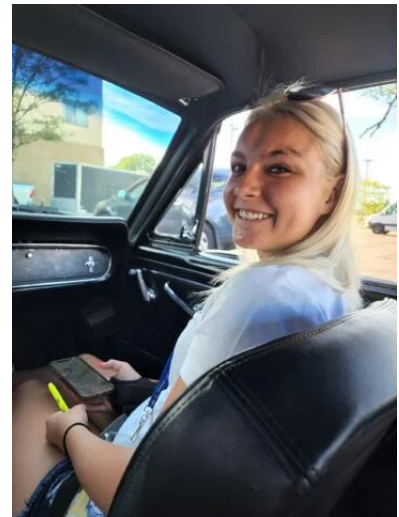
Mallory completes the team, and we meet Amanda Martinez from our sponsor, Prometheus

Olivia and Sabré in the back. We had a full car. Gracie was lurching a little bit in the morning, but we didn't let her take control. By the time we got to the lunch stop, Mallory had blown our minds with clarifying how to navigate while she was driving. We were all feeling more hopeful by lunch, and it seemed Gracie did too because she was running perfectly. We made it all the way to the finish line before we knew it, and it was time for the big reveal of our special plans. We got the speakers hooked up to the "Gracie" playlist, and as we were rolling over the finish line

we had “American Woman” playing in the background of our RPM Girls announcement. This became our theme song that we would play at each finish line. Oh, and the nickname RPM Girls would stick. That’s what everyone knew us by, and we were proud of it. It was a beautiful moment as we were just happy to have made it to the finish line! This was truly our day of redemption. We got our best score of The Race so far, 47 seconds, and our second Ace. Amanda Martinez, Chief Creative Officer of our sponsor Prometheus, was in Plainfield to greet us and take pictures with the team. We expressed how grateful we were for the support and making our journey possible. We had no worry in the world, as we ate that night. We were so proud of ourselves and our car for all the hard work we had put in just to get to that point, while knowing we had 4 more days to go. We were hungrier than ever to make it to the finish line. Nick stayed in IL as we travelled on. We knew that any problems we had from here on out, we would be on our own.



Sabré takes the wheel



Ready to navigate!

**Stage 6:** Onto Wisconsin! We had another full car with



Sabré in the driver's seat, me navigating, Mercedes as media, and Olivia. The lunch stop that day was at the Angell Park Speedway. The photographer for the article Mercedes was writing met us there to get photos of the team. After the photoshoot, we scarfed down some lunch and were back on the road. Gracie was running great that day, with some surging here and there. We kept adjusting the fuel mixture to find her sweet spot, and eventually found it. We had no major mechanical issues all day, and we were feeling good about our times. Just as our car was being announced crossing over the finish line, Gracie died. We pushed her to a parking spot to let her cool down while we got dinner. We went back to Gracie to evaluate the problem, but she cranked right up. We determined she was just hot from the long day of rallying. Our score that day was 42 seconds, with our best leg being only a single second off. The exhaustion was hitting our whole team, and car, so we went to bed super early that night.



It's not all wrenching and racing...

**Stage 7:** Our hotel had a Starbucks, so of course that was our first stop that morning. It turned out to be a smart stop. We ran

into the Hemmings guys and told them about the car

dying as we crossed over the finish line the day before. They suggested we either put a new thermostat in or take ours out all together to keep our car cool. We went to make sure the diagnosis would fix our issue, and instead found a bigger issue. We had 40 minutes until we had to leave the parking lot, but we wouldn't be going anywhere if we didn't fix the problem at hand. We had fuel spewing from our carburetor due to stripped screws, which could ultimately start an engine fire. The only way to fix it, tap slightly bigger holes for bigger screws. Sabré took the support car to the closest parts store (which was not very "close" at all) to get the tools we needed. As soon as she got back, we had one group fixing the car while the others got the instructions ready, in hopes of being able to compete that day. With only two minutes until we had to leave, we checked and double checked the screws and saw no fuel coming out anywhere. We started the car up and left perfectly on time for our calibration run. I got the whole back seat to myself with Mallory driving and Olivia navigating. Sabré would be leaving that afternoon to get back home for work, and Mercedes was media in another car. Luckily, the rest of the day was much more relaxing, and we were in Duluth, Minnesota before we knew it. We kept checking the screws throughout the day to make sure they weren't backing out, but they had stayed put. We were sure that we wouldn't have any more mechanical issues. We had so much faith in our car and our team to make it to Fargo, ND. We ended up getting our best score yet with an 18 second, and every one of our legs were less than 5 seconds off! We felt unstoppable. That night we decided to put some Loctite on the screws, to keep

them in place, just to put our minds at ease.

**Stage 8:** The second to last day. We knew this was a critical day for Gracie to keep moving as we could be



We're kind of a big deal

eliminated if

we didn't make it to the dinner stop. Luckily, we experienced all of our car issues in the beginning and middle of The Race, so we felt confident she would make it to the end. We started to Detroit Lakes and stopped for lunch at the Brainerd International Raceway. They had cars drifting in the parking lot, while the rally classics got a break before finishing out the day. We received our score of 39 seconds at the finish line, no Aces. We were disappointed as we were sure we had gotten some that day. We already had two Aces, but we wanted more. We knew what that meant: we had one more day of the Race, and we were not going to waste this last chance.

**Stage 9:** The last day of The Great Race. We were all eager to get on course and get to the finish line. We knew it was going to be a hard day because it was the last. I was up to navigate, and my nerves and excitement were increasing with each minute. We got the instructions marked up and ready to go and we were off. As we



Racking up two more Aces!

started going through the course, we noticed mazes coming up. Mazes

are where the instructions tell you to go in repetitive motions on the same streets, which results in paths being crossed by other rally cars. We knew we had to pay attention only to what we were supposed to be doing and not second guess ourselves when another car went a different way from where we are supposed to be going. We did just that, and we made it through each maze without any issues. Crossing over the finish line that day, with our theme song "American Woman" playing as the announcer says, "Welcome to Fargo, ND RPM Girls" and seeing Nick waving to us with the biggest smile was one of my highlights of the trip. We wouldn't be getting our scores for the day until the winner was announced, but we did get our checkpoint times. We had to double check them, and if we thought there was a mistake, we could challenge it. I went through each time, and I found a mistake. We took it to the officials to challenge, and the whole time I was second guessing myself, hoping and praying I wasn't the one who had made a mistake and just cost us a possible Ace. They made the changes, and now



all we could do was wait.

They announced the winners in each class and then the overall winner. We celebrated their victory, and then we saw him: the

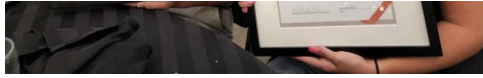


The big finish!!!

score sheet man. We made our way over to him and waited patiently for our scores. I was extremely nervous as he handed our scores over, and then all my nerves went away. We had not only gotten our best score of the entire Race, 17 seconds, but we had also gotten two Aces that day! The leg that we challenged had turned into an Ace and I was so relieved to find out that I hadn't cost our team anything. The whole team was ecstatic as we made our way back to the car. We were all beaming with joy and could not wipe the smiles off our faces. We were so proud of how we, and our car, had performed from Day One, not letting anything stop us from doing what we knew needed to be done.



The banquet was that night. Every single person involved in The Great Race gathered in the ballroom of the hotel.



Dinner was served, a video capturing the whole Race was shown, and awards were announced. The RPM Foundation was in charge of the Scott Henderson X-Cup Scholarship, named after Mallory's father who had gotten her hooked on The Great Race. Nick had Mallory go on the stage and announce the recipients. I had the honor of hearing my name being called for the scholarship and having Mallory award it to me. This was another highlight for me, and I am still very grateful for that moment and the scholarship. Olivia was another scholarship recipient, and deservedly so! The rest of the night was bittersweet. As I stood there, watching everyone celebrate, I was saddened thinking about the fact that I was not going to see any of these people again for a long time. We had only met 10 days before, but we had spent every second together forming a bond that is unexplainable.

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Being a part of the RPM Foundation X-Cup team is something that I will never forget. I wish this blog did The Race, our determination, and my gratitude justice, but I don't think that is possible. Nick Ellis did such a fantastic job at not only putting our team together, but guiding us through our crazy journey every step of the way, even if he was not in the same state as us. My teammates showed me not only how awesome it is to be a woman in the car world, but also extremely special. It was not an easy ride, and we had people doubt us along the way, but we proved ourselves and did what women do best: NEVER GIVE UP!



*Special thanks to Mercedes Lilienthal for the photo use*













Friendly reminder that you're never too driven or  
busy to pet fluffy dogs

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