Some of our old car gatherings are designated intentionally as mystery runs or rallies, and they are a great deal of fun. Most, however, are “tours.” The supposed plan when touring is to follow a given route from one place to another with as few deviations and as little confusion as possible. This is a great idea and real “laid back” fun, but it seems to me that many tours have become mystery runs! One might argue that it is fun to get lost, and in some ways that is true, but if one wishes purity and well-managed touring, one must answer some questions. How come your copilot grumbles and stammers when asked where the next turn is? Why is there a 12.7% divorce rate at the end of some tours? How come you see people arriving at the lunch stop from two or three different directions? Why is it that five or six antique cars full of well-educated and experienced people wander off on tours of their own in the middle of the afternoon? After thirty years of antique touring all this “wonders me” as the Dutchman would say. It was particularly frustrating when I got lost two years ago following my own directions but, of course, it was nice to see some friends along the way. Very embarrassing! On a recent otherwise well-run tour nearly 100% of the entrants got lost at last once a day. I’m sure the folks that laid out the routes knew exactly where they were going, but the rest of us didn’t! I know they are all upright, God fearing and lovable people, but we still got lost.

The purpose of this dissertation is to make some simple suggestions to future tour masters from one who has lost friends and been lost among friends. This is done with the full realization that getting lost and having to tour around in front of those five cars that trusted your judgment is part of touring. It is done by one who has turned around when on the right road just thinking he was lost. I’m sure we have all participated!

Obviously the problem is in communication, and the most important part of communication is the universality of the language used. It is a bit snide to say English should be used, but it is a truism that one person may interpret a statement far more rigidly than another or differently than what the author meant. One man’s “Y” can be another’s “T.” A writer may disregard a side road which seems very important to a literally minded friend. Thus the English used must be less subject to misinterpretation. Sports car rallyists print “General Instructions” before any route info is given. For example they make it clear what the main road means, the one with the yellow line or whatever. All turns are 90 degrees unless specified otherwise. Unpaved roads, dead end roads, driveways, etc. “do not exist.” Although we do not need to be as rigid, we should learn from them and spell out a few ground rules. Perhaps what we mean will be understood and interpreted better by our readers.
Great route planning can be wasted if we don’t use simplicity, but with full and exact wording. This doesn’t rule out the use of “cute” or innovative methods, but these can be a difficult art. I remember a set of instructions for part of a day during the 1978 Glidden Tour which were written phonetically as a Pennsylvania Dutchman would use his English. Paul Loch of Schnecksville, Pennsylvania wrote them so thoroughly and exactly that no one got lost and everyone had a good time. On the other hand, I was once told to go down the road a “tad” and turn left. Three miles later there was a left turn which I presumed was the end of the “tad.” What is essential, no matter what language you use, is to have an outsider re-read and rerun your instructions.

The dependency on mileage as the chief or only indicator of turns is a very poor policy, especially when dealing with brass era cars. On many cars of that age the odometer was an accessory. Many of our older speedo-odo combines are hard to read and slow to get their own speed and distance without relationship to our cars. Some of us know the number of rattles or a thumps per mile coming from our chargers, but it is tiresome to count while enjoying the countryside. Granted it is nice to know whether the next turn is 0.4 miles or 8.4 miles, but to depend on an odometer reading of 2.7 miles as the only source of information is a hazard to our senses of well-being and an extra burden for the driver. The instructions should read “In 2.7 miles look for a purple house on your right and in about 200 yards turn left on a macadam side road marked “Smedley’s Boulevard.” A reassurance notation should then follow in less than ¼ mile such as “Note sign for Mail Pouch on barn.” I do not wish to be misunderstood. Mileage can be useful and perhaps some use it extensively but the visible clues are basic. Total mileage for the morning and afternoon runs should always be included so the travelers can “plan” their day. Also remember, as one goes back and forth over a route picking the best reads, the notes on mileage will probably get screwed up and a wrong figure put down. A rerun when the plans are finalized is essential. As noted late, a rerun when the plans are finalized is essential. As noted later, a rerun in the old car and another by an outsider is a must.

My own feeling is that if there are to be two or three quick direction changes, they should be included in one sentence. If one is to turn left at the stop sign and in 100 yards right on a yellow brick road, it is best to say so all at once. If listed in two separate numbered instructions the copilot may miss the yellow brick road while window-shopping the local stores. A half a mile down the road we get to turn around in a muddy lane and will probably say something regrettable.

It is important to space the instructions for easy reading and to have print large enough for the bi-focal crowd. Each clue should be numbered. It helps some people remember where they are on the page. Numbering also helps but does not entirely prevent the lost clue phenomenon. This disease occurs when the copy typist skips a line in the manuscript. Elegant confusion can result! A more malignant form of this disorder can occur when a careless photocopier omits a whole page. This miscue made a certain Maryland lady famous a few years ago.

There are two more considerations. First, it is important to include warnings of bad
roads, dangerous intersections, steep hills, bad traffic and so on. This is very essential to the safety of our friends and to the loose nuts on their cars. We have had too many accidents and near accidents recently. One cannot get the feel of the road unless you drive the route in the old buggy. That soft Detroit iron with hydraulics won’t tell you what you need to know. Secondly, including also in the write up the points of local interests, bits of history, some humor, and the things of beauty that the tourers might miss. Try to suggest points of interest to stop and see. Note, by all means, the local junk stores. Spaced between the instructions, these things add a great deal to the enjoyment and success of the tour.

Now we have done our thing and are ready for the tour. Clear plastic envelopes have been obtained so our wisdom can be read in the rain. We had started with country maps and found beautiful back roads and interesting countryside. We have even made a map of each day’s run to help our illiterate friends. Now proof read the final typed version using two people, one reading the typed version and one the rough draft. Now we find a friend or some other martyr and send him or her out alone in their car. We stay home. If we don’t hear from him in 24 hours we go back to the drawing board. If there are not mistakes, joy and happiness follow us the rest of the week.

Now we can sit back and relax until the week prior to the event when the local road supervisor will close a bridge and set up a detour on the route. Of course, a month ago, unknown to us, someone already changed a clue that was fundamental to an important turn. Rerun? At the end I hope we will have the same number of friends. Some may even thank us! However, I know some person that will get lost anyway!

Suggested Discipline for Routing Tours

1. Start with “General Instructions.” Define what can be disregarded, what is a main road, etc.
2. Get country maps. They have all the little back roads. Spend enough time to find the best.
3. Use simple and brief and complete language.
4. Make a map of the day’s run.
5. Avoid mileage as the main definer of turns. Give visible clue before the turn, at the turn, and a reassurance clue after the turn. Include mileage as a helper only. State total mileage for the AM and PA however.
6. Number the instructions.
7. Lump Quick direction changes under one number.
8. Include specifics on bad hills, dangerous turns, etc...
9. Include points of interest, humor, beauty, etc...
10. Run the proposed lay-out in the old car to get the feel of the road.
11. Proof read the final typed draft against you manuscript using two people.
12. Give the final draft to an outsider and see if he gets lost.
13. Be sure final handout is collated with all pages present.
14. Recheck the tour and the clues the week before the tour.