

Victorian Clubman series a cliffhanger

Tarrawingee (Vic), Sunday October 8 — The North-Eastern Car Clubs' "Milford-B.F. Goodrich North Eastern Trial" was convincingly won by Gil Davis and Peter Haas (Torana XU-1) with the loss of 51 points from a second Torana, crewed by Len Shaw and Jim McAuliffe, down 68 points. Third outright was the Grade 2 crew of Rex Muldoon/Bruce Norton, down 72, with a bunch of the states' leading Grade 2 crews breathing hotly down their necks.

Being the 4th event in the Victorian Clubman Series main interest centred on the Grade 2 crews and the provision of plenty of prize money, along with the promise of a run through some of Victoria's best rally country attracted all the leading contenders, the only crew missing being Bob Bird/Warwick Smith (the present series leaders) whose recent, doubtful, classification renders them ineligible for any further points.

Fords were predominant with nine starters, followed by Renault three, Torana three, Datsun three, Hillman two, and Mazda, Peugeot, V.W. and Vauxhall one each. With this range of vehicles competing perhaps the manufacturers points should be contested amongst the Grade 2s.

The event

A large crowd, including the local TV cameraman, watched the field depart from the co-sponsor's premises, Milford Service Station, Wangaratta, on a short transport section to the start of competition. From Greta West, the first five sections were largely open country runs, taking the field via Lurg, Ryans Creek, Myrree, Whitfield, Cheshunt and Dandongdale to the edge of the Merriang Plantation. Setting the pace were eventual winners, Davis/Haas, closely followed by Shaw/McAuliffe, Muldoon/Norton, the local crew of J. Whitten/J. Parkinson (Anglia) and Gary Harrowfield/David Hodge (Cortina). An early casualty was the Cortina of Wayne Muldoon/Ron Lugg which broke a ball joint on section four and eventually retired with a marked lack of gears. The local constable stopped many of the competitors on the first section, to inform them of a complaint and advising some caution, and his courteous and considerate attitude to the competitors was a refreshing change from some we have seen.

Sections six to 11 were all in the Merriang Plantation, all shown on a special map (a 2in - 1-mile plantation map provided by the Director — bless him) and all very competitive.

Section six was an extremely winding, loose surfaced run through the Running Creek section of the plantation, with the Cortina of G. Piazza/A. Burns joining Gil Davis and Rex Muldoon on five points to lead a further bunch down six.

The following section opened out slightly but was still very dusty and slippery — and four competitors, Len Shaw, Rex Muldoon, G. Piazza and K. Bird/S. Newman (Anglia) shared fastest all down one. Following the service break at section eight, section nine threw the field back into the dusty fray with Len Shaw and Rex Muldoon sharing best time, down two from the main bunch down three.

The loop section 10 was cleaned by the majority of leading crews although a bent steering arm nearly put paid to the Muldoon/Norton Cortina — the repairs costing some 24 points on the following section. The local crew J. Whitten/J. Parkinson (Anglia) running quickly and consistently, lead the field over section 11 with a loss of three while the rest of the field bunched up on four. The final sections to the stage break were straight forward and the positions at half way were:—

Davis/Haas (Torana) 25;
Whitten/Parkinson (Anglia) 25;
Shaw/McAuliffe (Torana) 26;
Bird/Newman (Anglia) 29;
Strawnix/Boyd (Torana) 30;
Robertson/Diamond (Cortina) 32.

A further half dozen crews, all under 40, were setting the scene for a cutthroat second stage.

Division Two

Stage two ran in a large loop from Everton through the Stanley Plantation, Ovens Plantation, and Myrtleford to the finish at the NECC clubrooms at Tarrawingee. Unlike the earlier stage no special map was provided for the sections in the Stanley Plantation and

concentrated, precise, navigation was the order of the night. Some competitors were thrown off-balance when a couple of specified via points were un-manned — the route instructions calling for use of mapped roads only.

After the concentrated navigation work on the Stanley the run through the Ovens Plantation — assisted by another fine map provided by the Director — appeared straightforward, but for some competitors the damage had been done. Bird/Newman and John Adams/Alex McCosh (Cortina) were both forced to cut and run, while Ken Harrison/Paul Patterson (Hillman) dropped 23 on one section. The continual dust, coupled with winding, slippery "ball-bearing" roads and increasing crew tiredness ensured that points losses would mount despite the intense competition.

The best performance for Stage two was put up by Davis/Haas 26, followed by Muldoon/Norton, working their way up the field, down 30. Close behind were Jon Leighton/John Begelhole in the Mini-Bits Datsun (?) down 37, Lloyd James/Tony Walsham (16TS Renault) liking the dry conditions to drop 39, Shaw/McAuliffe down 42 and Strawnix/Boyd down 46.

Director Allan Fleming and his crew are to be congratulated on their organization and choice of route — the only complaint being the incessant thick dust which the organizers could not do much about. With one more heat to go, the WDCC Cooper Memorial Trial, November 4/5, the Clubman Series contenders have been reduced to three drivers and three navigators. Amongst the drivers, Bob Bird leads with 21 points and he can only be equalled by Gary Harrowfield or Barry Edmunds, while the navigators leader is Warwick Smith with 22 points, closely followed by Bruce Norton with 21 and Rex Muldoon with 16 points. With both Bird and Smith classified, and therefore ineligible for further points, the performances of the two navigators will be decisive. — Bruce Norton

The excellent score service had the provisional results posted within hours of the event finish and they are:— 1, Gil Davis/Peter Haas (Torana) 51; 2, Len Shaw/Jim McAuliffe (Torana) 68; 3, Rex Muldoon/Bruce Norton (Cortina) 72; 4, W. Strawnix/G. Boyd (Torana) 76; 5, John Leighton/John Begelhole (Datsun) 77; 6, Lloyd James/Tony Walsham (Rzn. 16TS) 78; 7, Mike Baxter/Rob Hopkins (Mazda) 83; 8, J. Whitten/J. Parkinson (Anglia) 87*.

* = Grade Two crews.