



Heading for victory on a perfect rally road is the Watson/McAuliffe Renault 16TS, adding yet another conquest to the Renault string this year.

"BLUE RIBBON" TO STATE CHAMPS

Story by ROGER BONHOMME

CURRENT Victorian Trials Champions, Bob Watson and Jim McAuliffe (Renault 16TS), moved further into the lead for the 1969 Championship on July 27 with a four-point win over team-mates Peter Janson/Neville Price (Gordini) in the "Blue Ribbon" Rally. Third in the event was another Renault, crewed by Colin Wilson/Tony Wunderlich.

The event was a typical VSCC/Bob Simpson affair, with tight times over good roads calling for quick, accurate navigation. Despite the promise of several hundred dollars prizemoney (mainly aimed at the private entry), the rally only had 30 entries. From the start proper, near Gisborne, crews moved off

on a "warm up" section via Fingerpost Corner. Ironically, all three crews of one team took a slightly shorter route than the Director intended and all lost points when their route became impassable.

The next section was a 23 minute blast along tortuous Chettles Road in the Daylesford Forest. Only Tony Roberts/

Mike Osborne (Porsche) cleaned the control, with Watson, Janson and W. Smith/R. Dash (Mini) from Canberra each dropping one point. No one made the next control—using Yankee, Wheelers and Lederberg Roads—on time, although Roberts, Janson and Watson showed their skills to again drop one point apiece.

The route then looped between Blackwood and Trentham before exiting the Daylesford Forest north-east to Cobaw. As crews moved further north onto the Heathcote map, Watson moved ahead of Roberts, four points to five. The Heathcote and Whroo forests had dried out since they were last used six weeks' earlier in the MUCC "Akademos", and the top crews had little trouble in maintaining the Director's required times through a series of loops. The only stumbling block was a five minute thrash north west of Graytown, which utilised more roads than were mapped. Roberts, Mal McPherson/Robin Sharp-ley (Renault) and Graham Alexander/myself (Monaro) sorted out the roads quickest to drop one minute each.

The remaining five controls were intended as straightforward semi-transport sections to the mealbreak at Seymour. However, on the last control, navigators were given an additional instruction to use at least approximately five miles of the Hume Highway. Roberts' navigator, Osborne, took the instruction too literally and the pair dropped 11 minutes going a lot further than their competitors. The loosely worded instruction (crews were meant to use only 4.4 miles of the

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Hume) was the only fault in the smoothly run event.

At Seymour, Watson (7), Janson (12) and Roberts (19) were leading from Wilson (22) and McPherson (29), with Gordon Frohling/John Begelhole (Zephyr) leading the restricted class on 49.

The second stage started from Koboyboyn with a stomach-stirring drop off the Great Dividing Range down to the Ghin Ghin, on the Yea River flats. The top six crews had no trouble—among them racing driver Bill Evans, who made up for his Datsun 1000's relative lack of power with a devastating drive off the top of the range.

From Murchison's Gap, near Strath Creek, crews plunged deep into the Mt. Disappointment Forest (also known as Broadford, Kinglake, Wallan and Whittlesea Forests), where Wilson stirred the experts in his relatively stock Renault 16 to drop one point, three minutes faster than McPherson and Janson. Three unmapped tracks in the area caught other crews napping and the tight timing allowed no room for slight errors.

Fog became more of a nuisance as the crews moved further south along Number 7 road, where Janson and Watson added a point each to their scores with fastest times. Even the top navigators found themselves missing corners in the fog, as drivers tried desperately to keep up the required times. Loops around Harry's Nose, Comet Creek and Cottrell Road followed in quick succession, with a final run up Hill Range Road to the finish adjacent to Broadford Reservoir.

Watson/McAuliffe's tally of 17 gave them a well deserved win over Janson/Price (21) with Wilson/Wunderlich (34) in third spot. The 11 point "blue" near Seymour put Roberts/Osborne back to fourth place.

The winners' consistent placings this year, second in both the "Akademos" and "Experts", and their win in the "Blue Ribbon" make them outright favourites for the State Championship for the second year in a row.

RESULTS (Provisional)

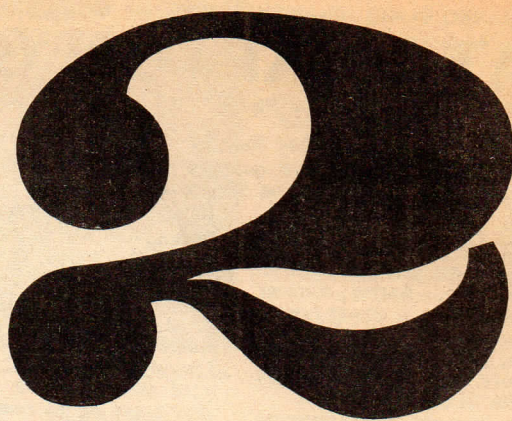
1. Waltons Rally Team:	
B. Watson/J. McAuliffe (Renault 16TS)	17
2. Waltons Rally Team:	
P. Janson/N. Price (Gordini)	21
3. Colin Wilson:	
C. Wilson/T. Wunderlich (Renault 16)	24
4. Porsche Distributors:	
T. Roberts/M. Osborne (Porsche)	39
5. Waltons Rally Team:	
M. McPherson/R. Sharpley (Renault 16TS)	45
6. Gordon Frohling:	
G. Frohling/P. Battrick (Zephyr Mk. II)	78

STATE CHAMPIONSHIP STANDINGS (Unofficial, pending finalisation of experts trial results)

1. Bob Watson/Jim McAuliffe	21
2. P. Janson/N. Price	16
3. T. Roberts/M. Osborne	12
4. M. McPherson/R. Sharpley	8
5. C. Wilson/T. Wunderlich	6

FIRTH CONFIRMS RETIREMENT

AUSTRALIAN Rally Champion, Harry Firth, has reconsidered his decision to drive again and has handed over his 253 Monaro to Barry Ferguson for the "Southern Cross". Navigator will be Roger Bonhomme. The pair will compete first in the "Ampol-Warana" on September 20-21.



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