

BEGONIA FESTIVAL, 1979

# PORTMAN WINS CAR RALLY



Geoff Portman, navigated by Wayne Gregson, pictured at the start of the Begonia Rally in a closed-off Grenville street south on Saturday morning. Portman won the event.

Geoff Portman — the man all the experts say is one of the quickest rally drivers in Australia — proved it by winning the 25th Begonia Rally held in Ballarat over the weekend.

Portman, a forester from Benalla, driving a Datsun 1600, blitzed the opposition in a display of controlled, precision driving which saw him lead the 600 km two-day event almost from the time the flag dropped.

He won comfortably from Melbourne-based driver Chris Power in another Datsun 1600.

Third was 1978 Victorian Rally champ Warwick Smith in a Lancer.

For his win Portman receives \$1000 plus about \$400 in special prizemoney. He was navigated by Canberra's Wayne Gregson.

His win must give him confidence for the Castrol International Rally (another special stage daylight event) to be run in the forests around Canberra on March 31 and April 1.

Portman said after his win, "All daylight rallying is completely new to me. I've never done it before."

He said some mechanical problems were sorted out on Saturday night.

The Begonia Rally was directed by Geoff Boyd and Ross Runnalls, Portman's regular navigator.

Saturday's running took Portman to within a few hundred metres of the Creswick School of Forestry where both Runnalls and he were students.

The pace of the event

on Saturday.

Hugh Bell, the driver who set fastest time on the first three sections, rolled his Datsun on the fourth.

John White, an early front runner, rolled on stage 12. The rear end of Peter Crawley's car collapsed.

Unlucky John Armitage (Datsun 180B SSS), sitting in a comfortable second place, hit a tree late yesterday afternoon putting him out.

Local driven Garry Harrowfield had tyre and mechanical troubles on Saturday but came from 11th place on Saturday night to finish fourth, setting fastest times on 10 of yesterday's special stages.

Class B was won by David Adams and Ian Morrison (Lancer).

Second was local crew of Russel McKenzie and Kim Baxter who drove consistently quickly on both days.

The rally received high praise from rally veterans throughout the weekend. Frank Kilfoyle, the director of this year's Repco Round-Australia trial, praised organisers.

"The Begonia Rally will now go from strength to strength," he said.

Ex-Australian Rally champion and one of the "name" drivers in the event, Bob Watson, who finished fifth, said the rally had set new standards of organisation