

The 1979 Begonia Rally, held in and around Ballarat on March 3rd and 4th, saw intense competition for the \$2840 prize money. Crews were provided with up to the minute scores at each of the eight service breaks and armed with this information they were able to set about improving their times and positions.

The first special stage of the event was held in Victoria Park, almost in the centre of Ballarat, and from the outset it was clear that competition was going to be intense. Portman was first away and covered the twisty dirt and bitumen 1.4km course in 1 minute 23 seconds. Target time for the section was 1.00. Harrowfield and Watson both dropped 26 seconds, then Hugh Bell scorched through in 1 minute 21 seconds. The only person to get near these four was John Armitage with a 1.23. Unfortunately John lost his brakes here and completed the next five stages without them, which dropped him to 13th position by the first service.

On the second stage Bell clipped an incredible 20 seconds off Portman's time then they equalled on the third, 13 seconds ahead of Harrowfield. On the fourth stage Hugh Bell dropped a wheel into one of the many dangerous gutters and rolled over. This unfortunately put him out of the event and ended what was obviously shaping up to a real battle.

The first service came after six stages when Portman held a 40 second lead over Chris Power. Harrowfield, who had lost 30 seconds with a puncture on the second stage was just behind them while White, Adams and Watson were 1 minute down on the leader.

After fixing his brakes in service, Armitage's time improved and by the next service 5 stages later he was in 4th position only 20 seconds behind White. Harrowfield's accelerator cable broke on the 11th stage and this dropped him down to seventeenth position after a maximum points loss of 300 seconds. A real battle had developed between White, Armitage and Smith who had only 30 seconds separating them. B Group cars were also running neck to neck at this stage with Officer, Brooks and Mitchell separated by 14 seconds.

In the next five special stages Portman increased his lead to 73 over Power by recording fastest time on all of them. Armitage moved into third place 40 seconds behind Power after John White rolled in the School Forest on the 12th stage and retired. David Adams was the fastest Group B car on each of the five sections and improved to 9th place, picking up another \$180 in the process.

The final four sections for the day were shared between Portman and Armitage who retained 1st and 3rd positions. Power was second only 12 seconds ahead of Armitage. Warwick Smith was only holding off Bob Watson in 5th place by 17 seconds, heading Group B was Roger McKinnon in his very quick Corolla. Adams was only 4 seconds behind with McKenzie 79 seconds behind him.

The overnight service break allowed many teams to get their cars into top condition for the second days running. An informal night at the Car Club Rooms gave everyone a chance to catch up on the days results and give "expert" advice on how to best attack the second division.

The first special stage on Sunday morning was indicative of the days running. Garry Harrowfield set fastest time, one second ahead of Armitage and three ahead of Power. Garry went ahead to score outright fastest on 6 stages and equal fastest on another 3 of the 22 stages. Armitage began very quickly and took second place from Chris Power on

On the next 6 stages before service Armitage increased the gap to 39 seconds but could not make up any ground on Portman who was pulling steadily away. On this group Harrowfield overtook Sinclair, Adams and McKinnon and was in 6th place. Graeme Trounce was forced to retire at this stage while holding down a comfortable 13th position. Russell McKenzie was going very quickly in B Grade taking over 2nd position from McKinnon and leading him by 2 seconds.

The next six stages saw little change in positions. Peter Corkran, who had been driving consistently on both days moved into 10th place and Greg Sinclair snatched seventh from David Adams.

Immediately after the final service John Armitage hit a tree head on while holding down a comfortable second position. This was extremely unfortunate for John who had driven very quickly throughout the event. On this final group Harrowfield overtook Watson and secured fourth outright position. Power finished strongly in second position with Smith only 33 seconds behind him in 3rd. Bob Watson brought the big Peugeot into a creditable 5th place with Greg Sinclair in sixth. David Adams finished 7th outright and was first of the B Group entrants. Russell McKenzie just pipped Peter Corkran by 12 seconds for eighth place, a fantastic drive after starting off car number 35. In 10th place came another B group entrant Roger McKinnon.

By all accounts the 1979 Begonia Rally was a great success both competitively and socially and should be looked forward to by a great number of competitors in the future.