

RACING CAR NEWS

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Wayne Brown's Datsun during its spectacular roll on the first afternoon — right in front of the spectators! EAGLE PHOTO

PORTMAN DOES IT AGAIN!

Story by IAN BALDOCK

GEOFF Portman, with Wayne Gregson in the Autosport Datsun 1600, predictably won the 1979 Ballarat "Begonia" Rally on March 3-4. Almost six minutes behind was the Datsun 1600 of Chris Power/Fred Laterink, with State Champions Warwick Smith/Paul Paterson a further 54 seconds behind in their Lancer.

The "Begonia" was run totally in daylight and, being timed to the second with a maximum points loss on each section, produced much desperate motoring.

The Ballarat branch of the Light Car Club had missed nothing in their organisation, with radio links to their computer in Ballarat for scoring, and a caravan at the central service point each day, also for scoring, with a photocopied set of up to date results for crews caring to ask at any time.

The first section, a 1.4 km combination of bitumen and gravel in Victoria Park in Ballarat, was won by Hugh Bell, 2 seconds quicker than Portman and Armitage, with Warwick Smith spinning on the bitumen and Peter Crawley sliding his Datsun into a rock.

On the next two sections, in the plantations north of Creswick, Bell won the first (20 seconds quicker than Portman) and equalled Port-

man on the second, including having an overshoot. Laurie Wilson retired his H & H Panels Datsun 1200 after hitting a tree.

In the Cobblers Gully Plantation, Bell was 30 seconds quicker than Portman in the first 7.8 km section — seeing him enter the spectator point at the 'Arches' was an experience. — I have never seen anyone enter a corner as fast or as sideways!

Wayne Brown rolled his Datsun 1600 here later in the day, with David Wemyss running his Mazda RX2 into a ditch, but continuing on. On the next section Bell rolled and retired, taking home \$70 for his efforts.

From then on, Portman won every section of the day but for two, taken by Autosport's John Armitage in his Datsun 180BSSS. After John had fixed a broken rear brake line, he proceeded to set very fast times, putting him in the top four of most sections.

After the first service break, the pine plantations south of Creswick were entered, with five seconds clear of Harrowfield and Power.

All sections but the first were then repeated, and at the end of Saturday the scores were Portman 1074 (secs) Power 1279, Armitage 1291, Smith 1351, Watson 1368, Corkran 1455, Sinclair 1467, McKinnon 1481, Adams 1485 and Harrowfield 1553 after collecting a maximum when he broke an accelerator cable on the last section.

Sunday morning sent the crews to the forests south of Ballarat, with the first section being taken by Harrowfield, with Armitage one second behind. Two sections through Shepherd's Flat with Armitage six seconds quicker than Harrowfield on the second, Portman seemingly content over most of Sunday to sit back and enjoy his lead without pushing himself.

The field then proceeded to the Scarsdale plantations via Smythesdale and Happy Valley, with sections alternating between Harrowfield and Portman, Armitage snapping at their heels.

David Wemyss rolled his RX2 in Scarsdale at the fire-spotting tower, returning later to watch a videotaped replay, courtesy of the students of Geelong Grammar School, who had been filming the proceedings.

After a meal break, the Scarsdale and Happy Valley sections were repeated back to service. Some cars were

beginning to look like they had been in a 'Demolition Derby', with the Galant of David Officer/Kate Hobson being the best example — hardly a straight panel was left on the car.

With only six sections left, crews proceeded back over the sections between Smythesdale and Shepherd's Flat in reverse. Grade 3 crew Adams/Morrison in their Lancer setting fastest time 4 seconds quicker than Portman and Harrowfield on section 38.

This section unfortunately saw the retirement of John Armitage when he hit a tree head on while holding second place, putting Power into second after a consistent run.

The final section was through the Sago Hill sand quarry, where Harrowfield was quickest from several Grade 3 crews, many spectators being present.

It only seemed a pity, with so many State Championship rounds clashing, that the event did not get the number of Interstate entries that it so richly deserved, being the best run event conducted for quite some time.

RESULTS

- Autosport: G. Portman/W. Gregson (Datsun) 2391
- C. Power/B. Laterink (Datsun) 2747
- Rallyquip: W. Smith/P. Paterson (Lancer) 2780
- G. Harrowfield/N. Richards (Datsun) 2828
- Bob Watsons Service Centre: R. Watson/I. Pearson (Peugeot) . 2896
- G. Sinclair/S. Lister (Datsun) . . . 2973
- D. Adams/I. Morrison (Lancer) . . 3153

(Won Class 'B')