

RALLY REPORT

BELL'S BEGONIA

THE RESULT OF the Windscreens O'Brien Begonia Rally has left the Victorian Rally Championship in a "three way" tie.

Hugh Bell after a brilliant win in this second round of the series, and David Officer who was second, have both joined Geoff Portman on 9 points to all lead the way. If things continue as presently, the 1981 title chase will prove to be the closest ever witnessed.

But back to the Begonia, and what an outstanding event it was. Clearly the best Begonia rally ever conducted, this 1981 event had every ingredient necessary to claim star status. The two leading identities in the directing team, Geoff Boyd and Ross Runnalls have surpassed all expectations in putting together what now must be Victoria's leading event.

And the winners, Hugh Bell and Steve Ellis in their Pedders Shock Absorbers Service, Datsun 1600 withstood two gruelling days of the toughest rallying on offer, to head a star studded field and take outright honours by 7 minutes 39 seconds.

This was perhaps Hugh's most controlled drive, as he took time to settle down before unleashing his full brilliance, then once again settle back to a comfortable pace the minute his main rival, Geoff Portman retired.

Another point evident as to his degree of control was the exceptionally good appearance of the car at the event finish. In the past the Bell cars look far from neat and tidy.

Before I go on to report two incredible performances, it would be unfair not to mention the outstanding performance of Geoff Portman and Phil Rainer in the Autosport Datsun 200B.

The 200B is a most difficult car to drive and I doubt whether anybody in the country could do a better job than Portman does. He challenged Bell very closely until two rose-joints in the rear end broke just after a rather

the nickname — "Dinta" — David has developed into a very steady, fast and precise "forest racer".

Fourth, fifth and sixth placing were taken by the three main identities in last year's series. The 1980 Champions Chris and Simon Brown finished in fourth place, just 1½ minutes behind Hodge.

The 1981 series hasn't started as well as 1980 finished for the Brown brothers in their Datsun 180B. The motor destroyed itself just before the first round, giving them just 3 points from two events, chasing their second State Champion's title.

Fifth position and a repeat of last year's result, went to Warwick Smith, this time with Janette Kilfoyle beside him in the Rallyquip 2 litre Lancer. They had a very troubled run through most of Saturday and early Sunday. It was first thought to be a headgasket, but was later traced to air getting into the radiator, building up too much pressure and forcing the water out the overflow.

Sixth position, again for the second year running, went to yours truly and John Williams in the Peter Lees! Mitsubishi Lancer. Never have I finished after having so much trouble in an event. It seemed as though we literally carried the car to the finish. We blew a headgasket Saturday and were forced to run Sunday continually filling the radiator. Many other small problems were associated with this and it was a credit to the service crew that we finished at all.

almost an hour to get into the crew.

A story appears elsewhere in this edition regarding the injured crew.

Apart from the battle for outright honours, 36 crews were set to contest the Clubman Championship. All of the placegetters in the first round (except for Dunn/Godson) entered, and for a lot of the less experienced crews, the two days were to prove to be very demanding indeed.

The eventual winners, Graeme Wise and Mark Brooke in their Rosebud Datsun entered Datsun 1600 and possibly the least experienced crew in the entire event, steadily improved their position throughout Sunday to run out victors by almost 2 minutes. This could have been greater, had their petrol pump not cost them valuable time late on Saturday.

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Second placing went to Brian Smith and John Birrell in a Galant. They were always within a few seconds of Wise's times and put in a very consistent performance, especially during the



ABOVE: Hugh Bell was in fine form in the Begonia, leading Geoff Portman more often than not before the latter struck problems and retired.

the start of the "Forest Stages". A further 15 were to be contested, but the seventh was deleted due to the accident. Overheating was to be the order of the day, with most cars suffering from this problem. A surprising number managed to limp through, doing what they could to complete each Stage.

The two leading South Australian crews Garry Rainsford and Roger Ellis in the Mazda and the Autosport entered Barry Lowe and Kevin Attwood in the Rotary Datsun 1600, both only managed half a dozen Stages before being forced to retire.

Gary Harrowfield fared no better, completely cooking the Datsun 1600, writing off the entire power plant. Harrowfield was getting along very well and managed an equal fastest with Portman on the Stage before he expired.

Steve Ashton and Ro Nixon had biffed a bank and broke the front end. Temporary welding managed to see them still in the event after Division One, but with many Stages missed.

David Jones had all sorts of problems late in the division, as did Warwick Smith. Jeff Marsh missed five Stages late in the day and we were having unbelievable overheating problems. Many times the temperature gauge was past the first

the restart. Portman was within striking distance of Bell, should the latter put a foot wrong. Hodge and Officer were having a great tussle in a pair of very opposite vehicles. From then on, very little separated a large number of crews, with a mere missed turn proving very costly.

The battle between Hodge and Officer was fought right to the end, with Officer being lucky enough to take the honours by a mere 3 seconds. So even were these pair that of the 20 Stages contested in Division Two, they each won 10 and the lead between them actually changed eight times. It is not possible to give more to an event than these two and it's a pity that one must go down in the results ahead of the other.

Meanwhile Bell had started the day brilliantly, taking the honours on the first five Stages, before Portman bounced back to win the sixth and seventh. Portman only won one more of the five he contested, prior to the rear end breaking.

The 20 Special Stages in Division Two were contested in traditional Begonia Sunday country around a central service near Scarsdale. The usual traditional spectator points were again used, all twice, Happy Valley — the Cherry Tree Fire Tower — Scarsdale

except for Chestnut, who was forced out after only six stages. He was stopped with bonnet put as we went by.

After Portman expired, Bell took outright honours in three of the next four stages, with Chris Brown slipping in for a fastest. From the last major service Bell slowed noticeably and did not set fastest outright again until the Sago Hill quarry Stage and on that he was equalled by David Hodge in that incredible flying Cortina.

That pair that nearly stole all the limelight — Hodge and Officer — true to form shared the other four Stages, two apiece. They did so much together, the only really fitting end would have been for them to tie for second place.

Down in the Clubman category, although most of them were running near the head of the field on the road, Graeme Wise and Mark Brooke were steadily working their way forward. They were seventh in class overnight having only taken class honours on two of the Stages, these being the last two, plus equalling with Peter Glover on two earlier Stages.

Sunday was a different story. This rapidly improving pair managed class honours on nine stages and equalled Glover on one other. On nearly every other stage, they were beaten

rough spectator location. On seven stages he took outright honours from Bell and generally finished within a few seconds on most of the others. Of course, Portman's hard luck story was only one of many, and more about those further on.

Now for second and third placegetters. These positions went to two crews who have seemingly come from nowhere to upstage the established stars of rallying. Three narrow seconds separated David Officer and Kate Hobson in the Piranha Micrologic Ignition 2 litre Galant from David Hodge and Tom Seymour in their Falcon Parts Recovery ex-Round Australia Cortina.

Of course, Officer and Hobson receive the money, the points and the accolades which they deserve, but just as much credit must go especially to David Hodge for an equally outstanding drive. If Portman's 200B is difficult to drive, just imagine trying to charge through the forest in the six cylinder, triple 48mm Webered oversized monster.

When asked about his bionic arms, the small, giant of a driver stated, "It was a dream to drive on the throttle."

With David Officer and Kate Hobson now securing a fourth and a second in the first two events of the series, they must already go down as the outstanding improvers of the year. From a bloke who had earned

A mammoth entry of 89 cars was received, true evidence of the excellent reputation the event has built up over recent years. It was a hard task eliminating the oversubscribed entries, and but for some last minute phone calls, the eventual Clubman category winners and seventh outright, Graeme Wise and Mark Brooke would have missed a run.

They were technically still Grade 4 even though they finished 4th Clubman in the Martini Mountain Rally. This has now been changed, and once a crew gains Clubman points, they will immediately be elevated to Grade 3.

Many interstate entries had made the trip to this large central Victorian city, most were from South Australia and Broken Hill, with Ian Hill and Ann Heaney down from New South Wales.

For Hill and Heaney, it was a very disappointing trip.

On the fifth Special Stage and after a long cresty straight, their ex-works Escort RS2000 came over a crest and hit a small stump, just enough to throw them off course and off the road into a stump at very high speed. The car was very extensively damaged, possibly beyond repair.

Both occupants were badly injured and the following cars stopped to render assistance. This stage was consequently deleted as it took the ambulance

second Division. Smith's Galant is part of an influx of Mitsubishi vehicles coming into rallying recently. In all, 14 ran in this event, which has to be the highest number yet in a major event.

Third Clubman went to Kevin King and John Parkinson in a Datsun 1600, they were just over a minute from the overnight leaders and were going strongly early on the second day before a minor problem cost them about 4 minutes.

Now back to the beginning, when all the action was about to be unleashed. The multitude of spectators were prepared for some spectacular action as this best ever Begonia field was preparing itself for the first Special Stage, Victoria Park — right in the heart of Ballarat.

And out in force they were, to witness Hugh Bell equal his record time of 1.17 which he set the previous year. Just behind on 1.18 was Portman, literally manhandling the 200B. The message was out, it was to be a battle royal between these two, for the next best performance was 1.21 by a long list of crews.

This first Stage went off very well with the only casualty being Bruce Robertson and Stuart Lister. They collected a concrete block after being baulked by a spectator. The majority of the Stage had to be run on a front deflated tyre.

From here crews headed towards the Creswick area for

"S" in Smiths — goodness knows what temperature that is and it's no wonder the head-gasket blew.

Leading Clubman contenders, Peter Glover and Suze Wiseman rolled their Escort but managed to keep going, dropping around 3 minutes. Ian Morrison and Paul Hambleton missed many Stages in their Lancer, as did Rob Chambers and Richard Davies in their Datsun 1600.

Of the fifteen Stages contested in Division One, Bell had taken outright honours on ten and was equal with Portman on one further. Portman managed the money on three and was equalled by Officer on one other. The evening's entertainment was back at the Light Car Club's premises in Ballarat, only for those lucky enough not to be working on their cars overnight.

DIVISION ONE OUTRIGHT:

1. H. Bell/S. Ellis
2. G. Portman/P. Rainer
3. D. Hodge/T. Seymour
4. D. Officer/K. Hobson
5. C. Brown/S. Brown
6. C. Power/M. Prendergast

CLUBMAN PLACINGS:

1. D. Chestnut/K. Baxter
2. P. Glover/S. Wiseman
3. P. Johannesen/T. Johannesen

It was an early 8.30 am start for Sunday, to offset this the hour gained from the end of daylight saving helped, but many weary crews lined up at

Fora and the very different "Golden Lake".

The traditional Sago Hill quarry was the venue for the final Special Stage. Again cars were regrouped in order of points lost, for the descent down the quarry face and then around the interior in view of virtually every spectator that had followed the two gruelling days of the event.

The second day was decidedly cooler than the first, but instead of overheating problems, crews suffered from mechanical or driver problems. Many of the cars that limped into the overnight rest failed to make the restart, with the most notable of these being David Jones and Noel Richards. They were well back in the field and decided to call it a day rather than go on from a hopeless position.

The Clubman category was set for an almighty struggle with David Chestnut holding a 1.21 lead and eleventh outright, but then the next five crews were only separated by 18 seconds. Heading these was Peter Glover who had done a remarkable job after rolling. His good fortune was not to last as he was forced to retire midway through this Division with mechanical problems.

All the other Clubman contenders had problems which have been previously mentioned

by a very narrow margin. Ihey thoroughly deserved this victory, just as they do their lead in the series. To win a Clubman heat in only your sixth event is an unbelievable effort and when you consider the car has no slippery diff, a standard 180B motor, it is even more incredible.

This young fellow is going to come along very fast, because not only does he drive quickly, but he is very, very tidy.

All of this has helped make the event such a success. There was not one area that could be faulted. The time schedule was spot on, the control officials brilliant, it was a total success right from the word go. How could people be stupid enough not to have this as an ARC Round?

OUTRIGHT PLACINGS:

1. H. Bell/S. Ellis
2. D. Officer/K. Hobson
3. D. Hodge/T. Seymour
4. C. Brown/S. Brown
5. W. Smith/J. Kilfoyle
6. J. White/J. Williams
7. G. Wise/M. Brooke
8. F. Markus/D. Johns
9. P. Corkran/D. Stewart
10. S. Birrell/D. Cornish

CLUBMAN PLACINGS:

1. G. Wise/M. Brooke
2. B. Smith/J. Birrell
3. K. King/J. Parkinson
4. R. Pedder/G. Paul
5. P. Johannesen/T. Johannesen
6. S. Mitchell/R. Brown

BELOW: Defending champions Chris and Simon Brown finished fourth in the Datsun 180B.



BELOW: David Officer/Kate Hobson were second in their Galant, but only after a titanic battle with Hodge/Seymour's Cortina. It was a duel that will be talked about for many years to come.

