

# Hugh Bell wins Begonia Rally for second year

By DAVID FITZSIMONS

Hugh Bell became only the second driver to win consecutive Begonia rallies when he blitzed a battered opposition at the weekend.

Bell left a long trail of crashed and retired cars on his way to an easy eight-minute victory over second-placed David Officer and Kate Hobson in a Galant.

The only other consecutive winner was Ron Spence in an FC Holden in 1958-59.

Bell's only opposition, highly fancied Geoff Portman's 200B, lost its suspension yesterday afternoon causing the car to retire.

Ballarat's Gary Harrowfield led Bell early but after two hours the engine blew up and Harrowfield retired.

The race belonged to Bell. The Datsun 1600 he shared with Steve Ellis ran virtually trouble-free for the entire event.

Their only moment of drama was early Saturday when they overshot a turn and lost 27 seconds to Portman on the stage. However they gradually worked back to the lead which they held for most of Saturday and all yesterday.

The heat caused havoc among teams on Saturday and many low-order cars struck trouble. Only 27 of the 65 starters finished.

Three of the 12 A1 grade cars retired on Saturday but only three were still running at the finish. This allowed many lesser-known drivers to take the minor placings.

David Officer and Kate Hobson recorded their best performance with a fine second place after a thrilling last stage battle with the David

Hodge-Tom Seymour Cortina.

Officer led Hodge by eight seconds overnight and Hodge passed him early yesterday morning only to be repassed late in the rally. Hodge, from Ballarat, gave an impressive display in the big 4.1 litre engine Cortina fitted with Falcon XD parts.

Geoff Portman said on Saturday night his 2.1 litre Datsun 200B was too big for the tight sections yet the larger Cortina survived till the finish.

After the race Hodge said the car ran on five cylinders for much of the second day because of a mystery fault in the engine. Compounding the problem, the car was not receiving full throttle which meant all power was not being given.

"But even if we had full throttle we couldn't have done much better because we had run out of tyres and the four remaining were treadless," he said.

The Officer-Hobson Galant had to replace the oil sump and front struts after hitting a tree stump on Sunday morning.

Geelong brothers Chris and Simon Brown, the 1980 Victorian rally champions, finished 1½ minutes behind Hodge in fourth place.

Warwick Smith and Janine Kilfoyle in a Lancer were fifth.

Previously unknown, Graham Wise, who began rallying a year ago, stunned most people with a fine ninth placing. He won the clubman section.

Several accidents highlighted the rally. Sydney Escort driver, Ian Hill and navigator Ann Heaney failed to negotiate a bend after a crest and struck a tree trunk early Saturday.

Hill suffered a fractured knee-cap and Heaney a fractured sternum

(breast bone). Both were taken to Ballarat Base Hospital for surgery. The Rob Chambers-Richard Davies Datsun rolled on Saturday.

Bendigo car dealer, Chris Wall, ran well until his Datsun struck a tree trunk near Grenville yesterday morning. Ballarat driver, David Chestnut was in 11th position until his Escort rolled on its side early Sunday afternoon.

Rally director, Mr Geoff Boyd, said he was pleased with the rally. "It is probably the best of the three special-stage Begonia rallies that have been run," he said.

"The high car mortality rate was disappointing for spectators, but the

size of the crowd at various spectator points it was obvious they enjoyed the event," he said. The high retirement rate was due to the heat and dust getting into the fuel system.

Results: Hugh Bell-Steve Ellis, Datsun 1600, 226 min. 51 sec., 1; David Officer-Kate Hobson, Galant, 234:30 (first in group 3) 2; David Hodge-Tom Seymour, Cortina, 234:33, 3; Chris and Simon Brown, Datsun 180B, 236:03 (first in group 2) 4; Warwick Smith-Janine Kilfoyle, Lancer, 243:02, 5; John White-John Williams, Lancer, 247:59, 6; Frank Markus-David Johns, Datsun, 249:37, 7; Peter Corkran-David Stewart, Lancer, 250:15, 8; Graeme Wise-Mark Brooke, Datsun, 250:25, 9; Simon Birrell-Diane



The 1981 Begonia Queen, Yvonne Taylor, flags away the first car in the Begonia Rally, Hugh Bell's Datsun 1600, from Armstrong street south on Saturday morning. Yesterday afternoon she presented the winning trophy to Hugh Bell.