

VRC2 — Horan strikes gold

A SHORT 94 kilometres of competition in the famous Stanley Plantation outside Beechworth decided the second round of the Victorian Rally Championship.

The Midas/Golden Hills Rally organised by the Shepparton District Car Club and held on March 23 was a landmark for rallying in the State as it occurred on road officially closed to the public.

This accounts for the short length of the event as the official 'Order in Council' related to the boundaries of just one (albeit large) plantation. The shorter format and enhanced safety provided by closed roads proved popular with the competitors and the directing team should be commended on their fine efforts in this regard.

At about 8.30 am the little town of Everton was awakened as the VRC circus rolled into

town. Most of the major participants from the first round were present, Hugh Bell being a notable absentee. Geoff Portman brought along his powerful Bluebird and started as No. 1 seed with David Jones next, local Les Adams (who retained a high seeding from '84), 'Pud' Thompson and Brian Smith rounding off the top five.

The seeding system used in Victoria has been developed by rally panel member, Chris Randell, and deserves some explanation. Drivers' stage by stage placings are entered into the computer which eliminates any uncharacteristic performances. The remaining placings are averaged to give a seeding

number. This number is updated by averaging the results from succeeding rounds throughout the year. The aim is to rank the crews in outright driver speed, regardless of finishing record. This will at times lead to discrepancies in a situation where crews experience problems that slow, but do not stop, them. An example of this was Gordon Douglas who was not too happy with his 21st seeding following a misfiring engine all through the Begonia but that's the way the system works.

At 10.00 am the crews headed for the forest and the start location on Lower Nine Mile Road. A 20-minute hold-up caused by a

large semi-trailer and bulldozer on the route gave crews a chance to socialise. One 'bright spark' suggested they should all call it quits and raffle the prize money then and there, using the money thereby saved to all enjoy an extended holiday!

This seemed an excellent idea to Geoff Portman a few minutes later when he crashed just three kilometres into the 16 km section. The stage was tight and rough in places but Gordon Douglas made good use of local knowledge to be equal fastest with Brian Smith. Phil Horan was seven seconds behind with Chris Neilson just behind him. This first stage saw a number of crews in trouble including Fred Markus in the Pedders Stanza from South Australia who crashed, sustaining front-end damage.

Stage 2 started on No. 1 Road and then into the main forest area. Douglas was fastest over the four kilometres one second ahead of Horan and two seconds ahead of Smith and Terry Harris.

Ten kilometres of very fast, open roads led crews into their first visit to the Mason Road service area. Jones and Horan were equal fastest four seconds ahead of Harris, who in turn was four seconds faster than Smith.

Scores at this stage were: Horan 26.03, Smith 26.05, Douglas 26.08, Jones 26.16 and Harris also 26.16. Among crews that appreciated this 15-minute service was Rex Muldoon whose Toyota Corolla was misfiring, but a new spark plug seemed to restore full power. An incident involving a stump on the first stage had slowed Jim Kennedy's Mazda but he was destined to have further problems when yet another transmission failed after one more section. Chris Neilson was already out with an expensive engine failure.

Stage 4 saw the crews visit the traditional Alpine spectator points on Hillsborough Road. The 13 km of generally fast and smooth roads had Douglas fastest by ½-minute from Thomp-

son, Horan and Smith. Harris was also quick, leading the 'Recognised' crews with a consistent performance in the rotary (?) Escort. The director was using almost every road in the forest through clever routing and the liberal use of arrows. David Jones wished he had used just one more when he overshot a tricky call after the second spectator point losing about one minute to the leaders.

More fast roads on Stage 5 allowed Horan and Jones to use their horsepower advantage with Jones taking five seconds more than Horan to complete the 15 kms. Andrew McCathie, driving the Traction Tyres Escort, ran out of both traction and tyres when the rocky roads here left him with no more spares.

Stage 6 threaded the crews back to the eastern side of the forest for another welcome service. Smith and Horan were equal fastest with Rowan Quill (now with Paul Paterson in the 'hot' seat) just two seconds behind. Equal fourth were the unlikely pair of Jones in the Commodore and Muldoon's Corolla showing its potential. 'Pud' Thompson lost time here down a wrong road allowing both Jones and Quill to move ahead of him in the total scores.

Horan still led on 55.16 from Smith and Douglas equal on 55.29, then Harris 56.13, Jones 56.37 and Quill 56.58. Service crews should be congratulated for their adherence to the instructions regarding litter and access to the forest. Monty Sufferin, who was servicing for Phil Horan, got around the problem of restricted access by walking into the forest with spare wheels and tyres. How's that for dedication!

After the service, crews transported to the southern part of the forest for the final two stages. The first was a rocky drive along Circular Creek Road. Harris, who had already experienced axle problems, broke the differential, ending his fine fun. Just three seconds covered the top four crews and

a charging Keith Morling on this six kilometre stage.

The leader board now read: Horan, Smith, Douglas, Jones, Quill and Thompson, but the longest stage of the event, at 21 kilometres, was to be full of drama. Smith lost all chance of bridging the 12-second gap to Horan when he lost third gear. He nursed the Sigma through the section to retain second place. Douglas had a strut break, ending his event when he was just two seconds off second place. Quill blew a rear left tyre, but with about six kilometres to go. He continued at undiminished speed panel beating the rear quarter panel of the silver 1600 Datsun with the flailing tyre dead.

Have you heard the joke about the PRC car that didn't have the grunt to blow up a bull-bag? Well, Muldoon wasn't amused when just that happened with four kilometres to go and he lost ten minutes in the process.

Thompson drove hard and consistently to win the stage from Jones and Horan with Morling again fourth. Glen Cugley and Les Adams both put in their best performance here, taking equal fifth fastest.

Back at sleepy Everton, the times were quickly computed by the INPRO Services people and crews settled down in the 'beer garden' for the presentation of awards.

The final places were: 1. Horan/Wiseman 76.51; 2. Smith/Birrell 77.45; 3. Jones/Curtain 78.06; 4. Thompson/Robson 79.15; 5. Morling/Wylie 80.13; 6. Cugley/Slater 80.51; Quill/Paterson 80.55; 8. Chestnut/Hartnell 81.27; 9. Friend/Poulter 82.33; 10. Adams/Moore 82.59.

Keith Morling/Helen Wylie won the recognised award and Rowan Quill/Paul Paterson again took clubman honours.

After two rounds the Victorian Championship pointscore shows Smith and Horan equal on 30 points then Bell 20, Quill 16, Jones 12, Chestnut 11 and Thompson 10.

— Andrew White

The ARC kicks off — in Tassy

MOST OF AUSTRALIA'S top competitors are entered for the first round of the 1985 Australian Rally Championship. To be run on April 13 and 14, the Advocate Fairford Forest Stages Rally will be run on the North West Coast of Tasmania.

After a lengthy guessing game as to what he'll be driving, Greg Carr and Fred Gocentas will be competing in a borrowed Datsun Stanza. Carr's new vehicle won't be arriving until possibly the James Hardie National Rally in June. Out to give Carr the hurry up will be Ian Hill and Phil Bonser in possibly the last appearance of the Escort BDA. Hugh Bell has spent the summer months rebuilding the Pedders RX7 after its Alpine accident. As usual, Steve Ellis will partner Hugh in the RX7's Tassie debut.

Down from sunny Queensland, will be Greg Hansford in Ian Boettcher's Mazda RX7 and after his performances last year, Allan Moffat's right hand man cannot be discounted from the winners stand. Also trekking South is Peter Glennie. After punting the Datsun 200B for the last couple of seasons, Glennie will be competing this year in Murray Coote's Datsun 1200 Coupe.

Looking forward to the long Tasmanian stages is Peter 'pud' Thomson and Jim Mause in the

2.4 litre Nissan Stanza, Jim Kennedy in his Mazda 626 Rotary Turbo and Brian Smith in his Sigma. Sure to keep these guys honest will be Jon Waterhouse in his bellowing Mazda RX2.

The Tasmanian challenge will eventuate from Andrew Murfet in his potent Mazda RX2, Guy Dunstan in his Datsun 180B SSS and Phil Reader in his Galant.

The Production Rally Car Class could however steal the limelight with entries from Jim Middleton in his Commodore, David Adams in his ET Pulsar Turbo. Rob Worboys will have unusual competition for his Laser in the form of, wait for it, Adrian Taylor in a Honda City. The new Subaru four wheel drive turbos will be handled by Barry Lowe in the Pedders version, and Canberra's Peter Clark in his own vehicle. Toyota will be represented by two brand new fully imported Sprinters for Rex Muldoon and Graham Alexander. Brian Hilton will be competing in his Toyota Levin.

The rally will start in Mount Street, Burnie at 12.00 noon on Saturday April 13. Division One will conclude at the rural town of Ridgley, 10 km behind Burnie at approximately 5.30 pm. After 145 km of special stages division two will bring crews back to Burnie for the overnight break, re-starting at Fairfords in Burnie at 9.00 am.

Division three will take crews into some of Australia's tightest rally country for 135 km of special stages. Crews will lunch during Division three in the historic mining town of Waratah. Also to be conducted here will be a 2km bitumen stage using the streets of the town.

Division three will finish back at Fairfords at 3.00 pm. After the presentations, a post-event wind-down will be held at the Burnie Town House.

Channel O-28 will be in Tassie to capture this great event, and to help with tyre problems, Dunlop Racing will have fresh tyres available for purchase and fitting during the event.