

Cars and crews succumbed in droves in 1967 Southern Cross Rally—the fastest, toughest open road event yet seen in Australia. Hugh Buntine tells the story

"CRIPES, what's that?"—Winner Barry Ferguson spots yet another hazard. He drove a super-re-worked VW with Dave Johnson navigating. Photos: Lance Ruting.



STAR-CROSSED RALLY

FIRST there was titleholder Harry Firth, in a most uncharacteristic pose: crawling through wet ferns up the side of a mountain from a much-mangled Lotus Cortina.

Then there was N.S.W. champion Greg Garard, swinging upside-down in his Holden's seat belt, blowing bubbles because his head was submerged in a creek. And there was Fearless John Keran, wondering where the hell the Princes Highway had got to as his Volvo sank in the Lake part of Lakes Entrance.

As you may gather, the Rothmans International Southern Cross Rally had its incidents. So many, in fact, involving so many of the top drivers, that for a while it was a toss-up if anyone was going to get back to the finish.

Last year, in a much easier event, Barry Ferguson led until the final night, only to whack a tree and retire with victory in sight.

This year, with much fiercer competition and Dave Johnson as his navigator, he worked his way to the lead at the halfway mark and, from there on, dodged all the trees. He won convincingly in his "super" VW.

His machine, entered by VWA, was a real wolf in Wolfsburg clothing. Beneath the humble beetle body lurked a 1600 cc motor with cross-flow cylinder heads and multiple carburetors giving a substantial but undisclosed power output. To help put the power on the

road, a limited-slip differential was fitted, with ultra-wide wheels at the back. Disc brakes were at the front, along with ventilated magnesium alloy wheels. (Not so much a poor man's Porsche as a rich man's Volkswagen. A rare beast and, in Ferguson's marvellously skilled hands, an extremely potent rally vehicle.)

Second outright was the Victorian FoMoCo Cortina GT of Frank Kilfoyle and G. Rutherford, which was never quite in the lead but always hovering in the background.

Kilfoyle is a confessed slow starter. He wound himself up early in this event, but, true to reputation, managed his best times when the rally was well under way. He'd be a hard man to beat if he could only start a rally on the second day.

Third man home was race and rally exponent Bob Holden, of Sydney, in a local works Mini-Cooper S. He and navigator George Shephard survived a troublesome first night (in which he broke a steering wheel, of all things) to be best home of the strong BMC contingent.

Had the rally ended on the first night, BMC would have shouted champagne for the next 12 months. They had five cars up in the first eight places, with overseas drivers Timo Makinen, Tony Fall and Paddy Hopkirk leading the way. But Makinen and Hopkirk pulled out during the second

night, when their imported works Minis each shed first gear.

Makinen was then leading and his freakish times were the talk of the event. The big Finn fully lived up to his reputation as the fastest rally driver in the world, left-foot-braking his way down mountain passes at unbelievable velocity and leaving behind a trail of overtaken drivers, each with a slightly glazed look about the eyes . . .

Toughest ever

The rally ran from October 4 to 8 and covered 2300 miles of mountainous country in southern N.S.W. and south-eastern Victoria. It was the fastest, toughest event seen in this country. It began at a rapid pace on rough winding roads and, as a rival sponsor might say, it never varied.

Of the 79 starters, maybe 20 had a chance of winning. All the drivers—and it was a drivers' event, with little emphasis on navigation—had to go like blazes all the way if they wanted to win.

There wasn't much room for good old-fashioned tactics. No one could sit back and wait for the leaders to drop out—he'd have been run over.

From the start at Bankstown Square, the route headed through Mittagong to the first batch of difficult sections in the Wombeyan Caves region.

Almost before competitors had had time to settle any butterflies, they were



LED in early stages, amazing rivals by his speeds in rough country, till outed by broken gearbox: Timo Makinen in works Mini-Cooper S with Bob Forsyth.

launched into a special stage—14 miles of narrow, twisting road down a mountainside to Goodman's Ford. You'd think twice about walking down some parts of the road, but contestants were given 20 minutes, with a penalty of one point per 15sec. late.

Incredibly, two did it on time: Bob Holden, in his extremely potent Mini, reputed to be developing more than 110 bhp, and Makinen.

The Finn was the most spectacular. He could be seen coming down the mountain because his front discs were glowing white-hot. When he stopped at the control, the paint on the tie-rod ends was smouldering! Navigator Bob Forsyth was looking a little wide-eyed and Makinen was thinking of fitting new front tyres. After 14 miles!

Next fastest, on 3 points, or 45 seconds late, were South Australian Stewart McLeod in one of the big factory Beetles, and the other two overseas Mini drivers, Hopkirk and Fall.

Volvo's top man John Keran lost 4 points, as did Colin Bond in the new, and extremely fast, works Colt.

Barry Ferguson lost 5 points and seven drivers were on 6—Tony Theiler (VW 1600), Tony Roberts (Holden), Frank Kilfoyle (Cortina GT), Doug Stewart (Colt), Harry Firth (Lotus Cortina), John Garard (Holden) and Evan Green (Mini S).

The next special stage, to Wombeyan Caves, saw everyone lose points. Again Makinen was fastest, losing 6. Next best were Fall and Green on 9, with Hopkirk 10. McLeod, Keran, Ferguson, Bond and John Garard lost 11, with Holden, Kilfoyle, Greg Garard (Holden) and Ray Christie (VW 1600) on 12. Harry Firth lost 17.

Next section, to Mount Werong, involved a long hillclimb, some fast sandy tracks, and the first real forestry going of the event. A private Cortina left the road in the forest and Alan Lawson's Peugeot 404 did a neat ground loop into the bush, losing time but no paint.

Only Green's Mini made this section on time. Ferguson and Makinen each dropped a minute. McLeod, Keran,

Hopkirk, Kilfoyle, Bruce Collier (Gordini), Fall, Stewart, both Garards, Bond and Christie lost two minutes. Firth dropped three, along with Peter Janson and Ken Tubman (both in Hillmans), Doug Chivas (Morris 1100S), David Hansen (VW) and Ron Phillips (Holden).

Only Fall and Makinen cleaned the next section, a 98 mph run back towards the Caves road. Tubman, Kilfoyle, Chivas, Bond—who really had the Colt flying, much to the pleasure of the visiting Japanese engineers from Mitsubishi—and John Garard lost 1 point.

Max Winkless got among them in his Volvo to drop 2, along with Stewart, Greg Garard, Firth and Green. Hopkirk lost 3, Ferguson and Holden 4. Also on 4 was South Australian M. Barnett, who was winding up his yellow VW as though to launch it into space—which he did on a corner in a subsequent section, setting what must have been a new long-jump record.

One of the Fiat 124s left the road and went bush, preceding team-mate Max Stahl, who was to have first bite at a tree just beyond a particularly greasy water splash beyond Collector.

And so it went on. Makinen was the only one to clean-sheet Swallow Tail Pass. In fact, he was to lose no more points while he remained in the event.

By the first refuelling break at Collector, Makinen led with 7 points, Fall was on 15, Hopkirk 20, Bond and Green 21. McLeod's VW and John Garard's Holden shared fifth spot on 23, a point ahead of Ferguson and Holden.

The Sawyers Gully road, in the Wee Jasper area, is a nasty piece of work, so naturally it was included. At a 48 mph average, of course.

Jack Mullins inverted his Daihatsu, an example copied by Newcastle pair M. Ditton and D. Thompson. Their Falcon tripped and fell on its roof on the worst corner of the entire rally, a severe left-hander that curled back sharply over a crest.

The bend almost claimed Makinen. Unable to take the curve cleanly, he drove straight off (rather than risk rolling), careered down the side of the hill, through a gully, up a grassy slope

on the far side, and rejoined the road. And made fastest time.

Apart from Makinen, 12 clean-sheeted the section: Keran, Hopkirk, Theiler, Roberts, Peter Brown (Morris 850), Holden, Fall, Bond, Gerry Crown (Gordini), Phillips, J. Garard and Green. Ferguson and Firth each lost a point.

A succession of tight sections followed as the cars neared the first day stop, Canberra. Keran, Ferguson, Phillips and Makinen were the only clean-skins on a 20-minute section near Argalong, a rough track that cost South Coast doctor Adrian Adams the sump on his Austin Mini-Cooper S.

A rocky track to Brindabella brought Ian and Roger Vaughan's works Cortina GT up among the leaders for the first time. The Victorian brothers clean-sheeted here, with Firth and Makinen.

VW fortunes were mixed. Ferguson was still going well, but McLeod, the S.A. champion, had rolled and was soon to retire, while Christie and Theiler were having mechanical bothers.

The rapid Renault Australia Gordini of Gerry Crown was down to three cylinders, but still making fast times.

The final special stage before Canberra involved a hammer-hard climb to Piccadilly Circus and the long, swinging descent to the Uriarra road. Tony Fall, nursing a broken rear subframe, had one last fling on the way down, passing one of the works Holdens as he sent the Mini down in a series of long controlled slides. He lost no points here, along with Keran, Hopkirk, Theiler and Makinen.

At Canberra, then, the order was: Makinen, 7; Fall, 19; Hopkirk, 22; J. Garard, 26; Bond, 27; Green, 28; Keran, 29; Holden, 30; Ferguson and Kilfoyle, 32; Firth, 34.

Leaders collapse

From Canberra the route wound south through the Alps, into Victoria at Corryong and along greasy roads to Omeo and the next stop at Bairnsdale. This division was to see a major change come over the rally.

First, Fall was late out of Canberra. He lost 38 points having his cracked rear subframe fixed. It was the start of a bad night for the BMC stars.

At first things looked bright. The private Mini of Max Cheesman got up among the big guns to clean-sheet the first difficult section, the Piccadilly Circus run in the reverse direction to that taken earlier in the day. Others to lose no time were Keran in the Volvo, Ferguson in the VW, Vaughan and Kilfoyle in Cortinas, Collier in the Gordini, Stewart in the Colt, the two Garards and Phillips in Holdens, and Hopkirk, Fall, Makinen and Green in Minis.

Times grew tighter. On the Itles Point special stage only six cars beat the bogey—the Minis of Hopkirk, Fall, Makinen and Green, and the Cortinas of Kilfoyle and Firth.

But the end was near for Makinen. On the run to Kiandra his first gear spit, depositing many teeth in the sump, and the rally leader retired at a handy pub. Within an hour, Timo was joined by Hopkirk and navigator Gary Chapman. Same trouble. Paddy's first gear had gone at the end of the mountainous special stage on the way from Kiandra to Tumbarumba.

Two of the leaders out and the third—Tony Fall—now behind the field, due to his long stop at Canberra!

This left Green in front, a position that he and navigator Roy Denny held for two sections. Then, on an easy run into Corryong, the top came off a carbide fuel bowl and they lost eight minutes.

Harry Firth had been weeding his way towards the lead and was obviously going to make a big effort on the long special stage towards Benambra.

Heavy rain had fallen, and the road was treacherous. Winding, narrow, slippery and with big drops. And, of course, at 48 mph.

No one made it on time, but Firth was as fast as anyone with nine miles to go. That was as far as he got. His limited-slip diff chose a nasty corner to become temperamental and the Master of Australian Motor Sport found himself heading straight for the edge.

For 50 yards he fought to get back on the track. Finally, the two left wheels had nothing under them but air and over went the Lotus. It slid down the steep cliff face on its roof, which was just as well, because the extra friction brought it to a stop against a tree 50 feet down, beyond which was a big drop for a couple of hundred feet. Firth and navigator Graeme Hoinville were unhurt but got mighty wet and muddy getting back to the top.

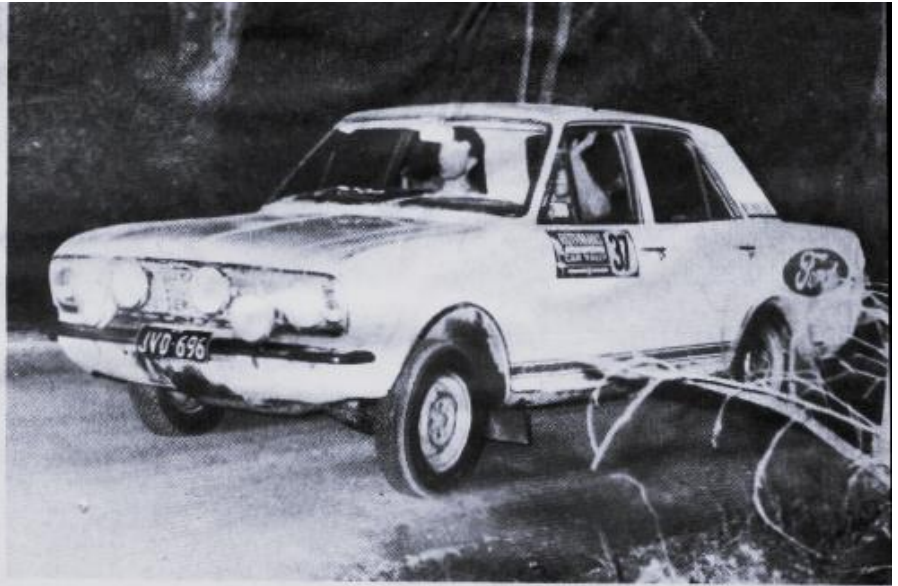
On to Bairnsdale, and more drama.

Ferguson, now leading on the road, was blocked by a fallen tree. Green took a wrong road in a special stage and dropped a bundle of points. And Greg Garard, who never but never dents his motor-car, tipped it upside-down in a creek.

His factory-prepared Holden didn't like the greasy mud before a wooden bridge that was just wide enough for Horatius. The car slewed half-on, half-off the bridge, had a brief see-saw, then turned sunny-side-up.

It landed on its roof in the creek, ten feet below the bridge. Garard and navigator Frank Goulbourn found the water level up to their collars, exchanged meaningful glances through the bubbles and floating maps that separated their submerged heads and departed that motor-car like Lloyd Bridges quitting "Sea Hunt".

Some of the mud was atrocious. "Gelignite" Jack Murray skated off the road and did a wall-of-death act up an



RUNNER-UP Frank Kilfoyle in works Cortina GT, with imprint of a tree on rear guard. Navigator Rutherford braces himself in readiness for yet another bump.

embankment. The stunt did not harm his Prince GT but frightened the daylight out of fellow-Redex-winner Ken Tubman, who was following.

A little later "Gelignite" Jack was reversing out of a mudheap when Colin Bond came flying upon the scene with his high-revving Colt. It was Jack or the bush, so Bond went bush. Only there was no bush. Just swamp, and the Colt made the biggest belly-buster yet seen in those parts. Murray had the power to pull him out, and the Colt lost only one minute.

Tony Fall dropped a valve guide and lost time changing heads.

The two surviving works Cortinas were also making odd noises from the tail, but Frank Kilfoyle insisted all was normal. Bill Nolan ran the bearings on his Volvo and a few more trees fell across the road.

Ah, yes, it was quite a journey to Bairnsdale. Ferguson, teeth bared in his perennial grin, was the sole VW driver who was still competitive, but he was really competitive. He was leading. Just behind came Volvo's fastest, John Keran, then Kilfoyle in the Cortina and Green in the Mini.

Turn for home

The run home promised action, but no one expected to lose one of the leaders so quickly. Keran had one of those things happen to him which must be the secret dread of every competitor.

Navigator Steve Halloran, one of the top men in the business, headed them the wrong way out of the Bairnsdale control. For more than 30 miles they drove towards Melbourne, instead of Orbost, before the penny dropped. Round they turned, and away went Fearless John, out to make up the lost 60 miles.

He got as far as Lakes Entrance, which, it seems, was having one of those nights . . . A caravan had caught fire in a park, a police car had rammed a vehicle whose driver was wanted for questioning, it was raining like blazes, and J.K. came thundering down the hill, intent on making up time.

All was confusion, and that glittering black surface he saw ahead was **not** wet bitumen. And so the Volvo disappeared into the lake, going down with all hands. Keran was not happy, and Halloran felt worse than ever, but a Falcon service wagon made things a little chummier by joining them in the water. Quite a night at Lakes Entrance! Meanwhile the front cars were tackling a series of special stages north of Orbost. Two 48-mph sections were set on Bonang Highway, a road with scarcely a straight to its name.

Only Ferguson and Green were on time at the first, and they and Tony Fall were the sole clean-sheeters on the second. Bob Holden hit a kangaroo but pressed on with a crumpled guard.

Around Bendoc, rally director Bob Selby Wood had arranged a series of loops at special timing. It was real Fergie country—mud and rocks, and a fog that thickened after the first couple of cars passed through.

The forests became a nightmare of bogged cars, long queues of stranded vehicles, and mud holes that grew deeper with the passage of every

DRIFTING round a bend with opposite lock on to check a tail breakaway—Colin Bond in fourth-placed Mitsubishi Colt. Open-mouthed navigator is Brian Hope.



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TOUGHEST RALLY

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vehicle. Ron Phillips, who had been going best of the Holden drivers, punctured a tyre and bogged.

The blinding fog claimed a couple of casualties. Tony Theiler's VW savaged a tree and Evan Green's Mini wandered off course on a lovely goat track. Navigator Roy Denny had to head the way back on foot.

Tony Fall, who had been going great guns, was delayed by a line of bogged cars, then clouted another Mini, whose driver had stopped on a greasy patch to clean its headlights.

What else happened? Nothing to change the trend of the event. Ferguson was now well in front and no one looked like catching him.

Ron Phillips, who had driven splendidly under the handicap of a large car, drew up to third place in his Holden but then suffered diff failure.

Doug Stewart and John Bryson did an end-for-ender in their Colt which took them the length of a football field and left their Colt looking as much like a fast-front as a fast-back. They hit a gutter across the road, lost count at the eighth roll, and finished up astride a wire fence. Gamely, they drove on to the end—only to be greeted by police with a vehicle defect notice!

On the last night Ferguson broke a fan belt on a special stage. Kilfoyle drew to within 10 points, but then the "bikky baron", as Mr. Arnott's fastest-driving employee is known, wound up the VW again and pulled away.

Kilfoyle had his problems, needing some front-end repairs in Camden to get his Cortina back to the finish.

Green split a fuel tank and dropped vast quantities of petrol and many points. Holden, coming from behind, had an all-night dice with the Vaughan brothers' Cortina to gain third place.

And so they finished: Ferguson, Kilfoyle, Holden—VW, Cortina, Mini.

As this report is written, other placings are not yet confirmed. Special stages, latest allowable times and other calculations have delayed a final result. We'll bring the full score to you next month, together with some further comment on the event. All that is sure right now is that the winner earned his victory, for this was the toughest event Australia has yet seen. ●