

DATSUN WINS THE LAST BP RALLY

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THE LAST BP RALLY

DATSUN WINS THE FINAL BP

by Roger Bonhomme

MELBOURNE, MAY 13. The 16th and final BP Rally of South Eastern Australia which finished here this afternoon was won by Victorians Andy Chapman/Laurie Comerford in their first ever team effort.

Driving a Datsun 1600 for the Surrey Motors Rally Team, they overcame just about every rallying problem on the final night — mechanical failures, punctures, navigational difficulties and strong opposition — to record a well-deserved victory.

They beat by 13 points the Mollison Motors entered Torana XU-1 of Mat Philip/Roger Bonhomme. At Bendigo, the end of the competitive rallying, Philip was in fact three points ahead of Chapman.

However, the final section was deleted because of an error in the route instructions and victory went to the Chapman-Comerford combination.

Third place in the BP went to the Datsun Rally Team entered 180B SSS of Gil Davis and Peter Haas who led home, by a mere point, Colin Bond/Warwick Smith in the Holden Dealer Team Kingswood 308.

The minor placings went to Richard Creed/Tony Wunderlich (Range Rover) and Bob Watson/Jeff Beaumont (Peugeot 504).

The event was the shortest, fastest and probably the roughest BP in the rally's long history. There was certainly a higher incidence of heavy body damage and suspension failure in this year's BP than in previous years.

There was also a greater variety of terrain packed into the four-day, 1500 mile route. Conditions ranged from foggy mountain roads, where snow was expected, to the vast sandy and salt bush tracks of north western Victoria.

The fast pace of the event — especially the ultra-quick first division — caught many crews unawares. Each of the first six placegetters suffered at least one major points-adding drama in the event and, as is usual in a BP, around 10 crews could have won the event but for one "if it wasn't for..."

MYSTERY

Because it was to be the final BP, the rally attracted some 62 entries of which 60 started. Crews, the cream of Australian rallying, drove from Adelaide, Hobart (via the P.O.T.), Melbourne and Brisbane (there were no Sydney starters) to the northern Victorian town of Benalla for the start proper.

Even the rallying stage had its fair share of drama. Watson had a mysterious electrical fault (fixed in a flash at the Benalla service point); the 500,000-mile Hobart Holden taxi of Rod Barwick/Don Reid started its third BP by needing a differential rebuild at Benalla; Dave Jonas/Fritz Suenerrmann broke a screen on their Renault; Tony Pennell/Colin Abbey had a bent axle housing which showed a remarkable aptitude in wearing out rear tyres (their problem was partially solved by fitting narrow width rear tyres); the Hutchinson/Brasier Peugeot 504 holed its spare fuel tank; and the only all-girl crew of Glynnie Roberts/Jean Reid drove their Datsun 1200 into Benalla on a flat tyre.

SPEED TRAP

But perhaps the best (or worst) story came from Gee-Long's Max McGinley who's Colt developed a rattly bearing. They filled the donk with STP but later removed the offending bearing rod, piston (by smashing it with a cold chisel) and pushrods then drove the rest of the event on three cylinders.

Meanwhile, Creed/Wunderlich found the whole rally stage somewhat tiresome and spent time surveying the area around Woodongal.

However, when dusk fell last Thursday, 60 cars pulled out of Benalla for the first competitive sections. After a short transport run, which included a speed trap, to the city's outskirts, the rally

got underway with an incident packed 22-mile run due south over Mt. Samaria to Bridge Creek.

Freshly-fallen trees across the first half dozen cars while the rocky, then boggy, nature of the terrain caused another type of havoc.

Bond's Kingswood broke steering bolts which were replaced temporarily by similar ones from the (Bond) Roll bar. Len Shaw/Jim McAuliffe in the "Age-Auto Action" XU-1 punctured on the rocks and then suffered the first of their numerous shock absorber unit and mounting failures which plagued them through the rally.

Creed, pressing on hard through the rocks, bent a Rover wheel rim so much that he could touch the inner tube.

Ken Cucask, who worked miracles to get his recently rolled Monaro ready for the event, lost a wheel and axle near Bridge Creek.

Philip/Bonhomme, as car 57, faced Samaria when it was at its mud-rutted worst and bogged their Torana for 20 minutes.

The first service point, at nearby Mansfield, looked like an automotive casualty station with cars being worked on at a furious rate.

The next competitive section was a 100-mile run from Jamie-

The 100-mile competitive run from Jamieson saw some of the rally's most dramatic incidents including a watery roll-over.

The Maffra crew of Hartley Ruskin/Peter Burley rolled their Renault 16TS into a water-hole.

Burley spent some time keeping Ruskin's head out of the water while they recovered their senses and scrambled from the car.

Undeterred by the incident, and despite the fact that they were only a few miles from their home town, they repaired the car and drove to the other side of Victoria to rejoin the field, two divisions later.

That's keenness. The drama continued on the following section up the Dargo Road to Castleburn Creek.

Queenslanders Allan Lawson/Murray Coote rolled their Datsun 1600 whilst chasing a car through thick dust. They continued on in their very battered car but later retired with suspected head gasket failure.

Watson too came to grief in the dust. Chasing the Bryan Evans/John Suominen 240Z, he clobbered a bank head on, pushing back the Peugeot's suspension and guards.

DUST VICTIM

To the surprise of the crew, the car continued almost as if nothing had happened!

Later the dust claimed another victim when South Australians Pennell and Abbey rolled their XU-1 out of contention.

The incidents up to Dargo read more like a Southern

son, over foggy and freezing Mt. Skene to Licola then up past Tali Karn to Cromwell Knob.

Containing just about every type of road surface — straight and windy bitumen, thick dust (near Licola), mud (Skene) — the section would have done any Alpine director proud.

Bond, who left a trail of amazed drivers in his wake, complained the section was too easy but he was one of a small handful to make it on time.

ROUGHEST

From Cromwell Knob, the route turned south along one of the State's roughest tracks — Valencia Creek Road. Average speed was around half that of the previous section but still cars were late after picking their way over the first 20 miles of almost continuous sump-smashing rocks and sharp gullies.

Tony Roberts/Lindsay Adcock (Datsun 1000) ran out of fuel near the end — many others were running short — but fortunately Philip had a spare jerry to help them out.

Bruce Shepherd/David Hodge (Renault 12) broke an accelerator cable and were stranded until Shepherd, a Renault team mechanic, could make repairs.

Field leaders Hallifax/Granger (Datsun 1600) fell off the mountain, possibly due to suspension failure, leaving South Aussies John Taylor/Graham West to lead crews into the rest break at Bright.

During the break, crews wondered whether they had in fact entered the wrong event because it didn't seem like a BP. But the navigational emphasis was soon laid on hard.

Division leaders were Davis/Haas 16, Watson/Beaumont 17, Chapman/Comerford 30, Philip/Bonhomme and Tom Barr-Smith/Rob Hunt (Renault 12 Gordini) 33 and Chris Murray/Jack Lock (Datsun 180B SSS) on 36.

Bond/Smith were next on 37, 32 of these being lost on the Samaria control.

Division two started with a quick arc around Mt. Porepukah then a zig-zag through pine forested Ovens plantation near Myrtleford.

Watson was soon in trouble with a faulty alternator which had to be replaced at a service point.

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- 1 Sixteenth and last BP Rally winners, Andy Chapman/Laurie Comerford blast their Datsun 1600 through a muddy section (Martin Film Productions).
- 2 The Colin Bond/Warwick Smith HDT Kingswood 308, takes a water splash at speed. (Orange Photography).
- 3 All hands on to get the Williams/Fletcher Torana out of the sand (BP).
- 4 Demonstrating the "Bonhomme bounce" to its best, Roger rides Mat Philip's Torana XU-1 through a warty water-covered bush track. (Utility Photographics).
- 5 Yes... it was very rough and wet going on the last BP. (Utility Photographics).

SOUTH AUSSIES' HOPES SHATTERED!

SOUTH AUSTRALIAN hopes were shattered in the Stanley plantation, near Beechworth, when two favorites — Murray/Lock and Stewart McLeod/Adrian Mortimer (XU-1) retired. Murray's Datsun broke a cross member while McLeod bogged badly and broke his gearbox during extrication exercises. Murray rejoined the event during a later division but the failure must have been a great disappointment for him and twice BP-winner Lock.

The tricky forestry sections suited the Victorians best and Davis/Haas and Chapman/Comerford took over front-running from Taylor/West.

As the route moved out of the ranges through Eldorado to the Peecheba plains, Tom Edgar/Ron Shepherd called it a day with piston failure in their Renault TS.

Overall leaders were: Davis/Haas 60, Bond/Smith 63, Watson/Beaumont 68, Chapman/Comerford, 74, Barr-Smith/Hunt 81 and Creed/Wunderlich 84.

The division had virtually only one competitive section, near Barnes, and even that was cleaned by half a dozen crews.



Electrical problems recurred for Taylor and Barr-Smith who suffered a lack of alternator and starter motor respectively.

Those who cleaned the division were Tasmanians Lin Gigney/Ross Kelly (VW), Bruce Wilson/Mike Mitchell (180B SSS), Roberts/Adcock, Creed/Wunderlich and Mal McPherson/Geoff Thomas (R12 Gordini).

Philip/Bonhomme lost a point and Watson/Beaumont dropped two.

This put Watson ahead on 70 points followed by Chapman 77 and Creed 79.

EXPENSIVE

Davis dropped back to fourth on 83 and Bond back to equal fifth with Barr-Smith on 85.

Friday evening was spent wining and dining, courtesy of BP. However, most crews were feeling, quite rightly, that the event was to get tougher and dropped into bed at an early hour.

Division four was the most expensive points-wise and led from Swan Hill due west straight into the vast deserts between Ouyen and the South Australian border.

The first five sections were easy but the fun started on an hour section from Underbool to Birthday Tank.

The "road" was alternately sandy, rocky and muddy with the emphasis being on soft sand which got more and more churned up.

Eventually some 20 or so cars became bogged to the door sills in a long stationary convoy over Mt. Crozier (all of 323 sandy feet high).

MORE

THE LAST BP RALLY

TALL TALES AND TRUE... (con't)

MANY TALL TALES AND TRUE came later from crews boasting of their prowess in the border deserts section — crews banding together to lift and carry their steeds over the sandhills into control.

Several drivers cracked screens and lost external rear view mirrors through low lying branches on the few substantial trees lining the route.

Next came a similar section into Last Hope Tank and, although the roads were slightly less sandy, they were still rough. Suspensions took a pounding from drivers trying to make control on time.

The Division's final section, across to Nowingie on the Calder Highway, cost Watson, Bond and Creed any chance they had in the event.

Watson broke a steering component and as he was around 100 miles (by fast crow) from the nearest Pug dealer, he appeared to be stranded.

Fortunately, nearby control official Ian Home just happened to have a 504 which was quickly stripped of the vital part and Watson continued only to have a suspension collapse shortly after.

Undeterred, Watson/Beaumont used the old trick of holding their car's suspension together with a winch and they continued in fine form to the finish.

Creed cheered everyone immensely when he spun out while negotiating a clay pan at speed and firmly bogged his Range Rover.

Luckily for him, assistant director Frank Kilfoyle was nearby and his ex-Ampol trial Falcon was hastily pressed into service as a land anchor so the Rover could be winched back onto the track.

But Bond was less fortunate. He lost a mammoth 66 points looking for the correct route which lay through an unmarked gate.

Strictly speaking, there was no need for a gate entry sign, but Bond/Smith were unaware of this and spend a fruitless hour searching for an alternative route.

Chapman, now at the head of the field, celebrated his new position by hitting one of the area's few hardy kangaroos.

He and Wilson/Mitchell tied for division honours on 21 points with Davis/Haas and Philip/Bonhomme next on 25 each. Barr-Smith also lost 20 or so time competitively but was docked another 20 for working on his car replacing a drive component during impound time.

Outright leaders at Ouyen were: Chapman 98, Davis 108, Philip 115 and Barr-Smith 118.

During the Ouyen service break, Davis replaced a front strut and Bond changed shockers in his Holden.

The second last division caused few troubles and led generally south east to Charlton.

Davis and Bond both had electrical problems, Davis with alternator bolts and Bond needed a new battery.

Philip/Bonhomme, working hard to catch the leaders, didn't do their cause any good by booking into the Lake Marmal control two minutes early.

Davis/Haas spent a few moments mapping around Titty-bong, allowing Philip/Bonhomme into second place on 117, creeping slightly closer to leaders Chapman/Comerford on 103.

Davis was third at Charlton on 124 with Wilson/Mitchell 147, Bond/Smith 155 and Creed/Wunderlich 158 followed on behind.

With the field fairly closely bunched, there was an air of excitement as the crews filed out of Charlton to Bendigo on the final division.

Navigational dexterity became a key factor between St. Arnaud and the finish as the route led through the forestry mazes south of St. Arnaud, Dunolly and north of Bendigo.

Mitchell had a navigational flame-out near St. Arnaud and dropped back to seventh place.

Chapman and Philip exchanged the head of the field position several times during the division, the former driver using all his skill to drive as his Datsun had virtually no clutch over the closing sections.

He drove into the Stuart Mill control on a flat tyre, then spent agonising minutes changing it with a jack which refused to jack.

To make matters worse, the Datsun's alternator light glowed brightly all night, warning of impending disaster in the electrics department.

At McIntyres, the rear universal on Barwick's Holden collapsed, ending the car's tremendous run. The component was eventually repaired, but not until several controls had closed down.

WHAT NOW?

Barr-Smith too retired during the division, his transmission finally giving up for good.

On the very last control, a route chart through Bendigo's Whipstick scrub, Philip and Chapman knew they were close together on points and when Chapman ran out of fuel and had problems sorting out the many-roamed woods, he was convinced Philip had taken a last-minute victory.

But the route chart was wrong and director Mike Osborne had no alternative but to cancel the section.

Philip had his share of luck on the final section too — he arrived at control from the wrong direction but managed to scrub-bash (to the spectators' delight) around to the correct route.

Chapman/Comerford won through consistent performances throughout the rally rather than brilliant patches. They had more than their share of bad luck both mechanically and navigationally but kept going with a great deal of determination.

Both experienced BP competitors, they have scored minor placings in previous years.

Chapman navigated Surrey Motors Rally Team leader David Cuthbert to two fifths while Comerford navigated David Chettle to second place in 1971.

Comerford was handicapped during the event by a bout of laryngitis which no doubt added greatly to his problems.

By contrast, Philip/Bonhomme had virtually a trouble free run in the event.

Mechanically their car ran like a clock. Time lost getting bogged in the first and second divisions plus the missed check point near Shepparton kept them from the winner's circle.

Victorian rally champions Gil Davis/Peter Haas were always in the top six, but they moved up and down as their fortunes flared and waned.

Haas found the final night a little tougher than expected and finished just a point up on the HDT's Bond/Smith.

It is not yet known what will happen to the BP in future.

Other sponsors may be sought to carry on the tradition that Don Thomson built up as a director and which was carried on so well in recent years by Tony Theiler, Frank Kilfoyle and Mike Osborne.

I believe that Australia needs a tough navigational rally to cater for those who prefer this type of event to, say, the Southern Cross.

I hope the LCCA can find a company to replace BP as official bill footer but, in any case, I would like to say to BP: — "On behalf of those who prefer tracks instead of tarmac, thanks for 16 great years of sponsorship."



Well, you've got to take time off for something — Bob Watson does it the right way. And with the best motor sport 'paper, too (PH)

BP RALLY OF SOUTH EASTERN AUSTRALIA Provisional Results

1 Surrey Motors	A. Chapman/L. Commerford	Datsun 1600	128
2 Mollison Motors	M. Philip/R. Bonhomme	Torana XU-1	141
3 Datsun Rally Team	G. Davis/P. Haas	Datsun 180BSSS	164
4 Holden Dealer Team	C. Bond/W. Smith	Kingswood 308	165
5 ULR Sales and Service	R. Creed/A. Wunderlich	Range Rover	177
6 Renault Australia	R. Watson/J. Beaumont	Peugeot 504	193

Class A: Laurie Graham/Ian Inglis, Honda Civic automatic.
 Class B: Andy Chapman/Laurie Commerford, Datsun 1600.

Class C: Mat Philip/Roger Bonhomme, Torana XU-1.

Manufacturers' Award: Nissan Australia Ltd. (Chapman/Comerford, Davis/Haas and seventh outright Wilson/Mitchell).

Teams Prize: equal on 1386 points, Gigney/Kelly, Pooley/Tysen, Barwick/Reid (all Tasmanians) tied with Hutchinson/Brasier, Waterhouse/Amey and Creed/Wunderlich.

State Winners:
 Queensland: Stones Corner Motors, Hank Kabel/Ced Reinhard (Mazda RX3)

SA: Taylors of Medindie, John Taylor/Graham West (Austin X6).
 Tasmania: Lin Gigney Automotive, Lin Gigney/Ross Kelly (VW 1600).
 60 starters, 55 finishers.



ABOVE: No prizes for those who can guess whose backside this is. For those not in the know, it belongs to Fritz Suenderman. He's hitching a ride on the Bryan Evans/John Suominen 240Z (utility photographic).
 Below: The only female crew, Glynne Roberts/Jean Reid, press on in their Datsun 1000.



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