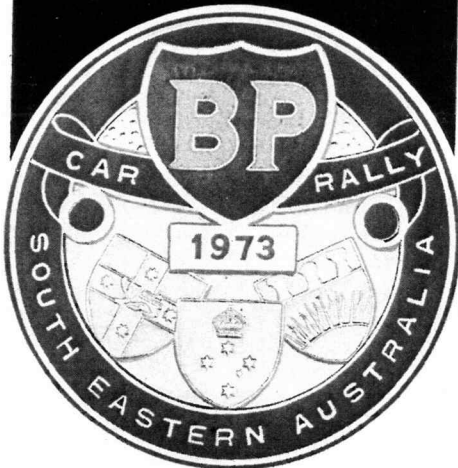


THE LAST "BP"



by

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Early last month a band of motor sport enthusiasts assembled at Benalla (Vic.) on the Hume Highway some 190 km. north-east of Melbourne. Cars — tuned to perfection — drivers and navigators, officials of the Light Car Club of Australia, technical service crews, tensed and ready to battle the rugged Trial Stage of the 1973 BP Rally.

After sixteen years, this year's BP Rally was the last in this long running series organised and conducted for the Company by Victoria's L.C.C.A. Listed on the International Motor Sporting Calendar, the "BP", as it is now affectionately known, rated as the top motor sport event of its type in Australia. Over the years, entrants have been attracted from all States of Australia and overseas to compete in the four day trial over its secret route.

The decision to terminate such a popular long standing event was not taken lightly, nor without disappointment. However, it was felt that now was the time to terminate on the high note of success, rather than attempt a debatable up-dating to today's different motor rallying concepts.

It is particularly fitting that 1973 should be chosen for the last "BP", as this marks the golden anniversary of the Light Car Club of Australia, whose members have contributed so much to the event's success.

But what made each year's big BP Rally? . . . who were the competitors of yesteryear whose cars carry the distinctive enamel medallion? . . . how was the "BP" born? . . . why was it so popular? These questions and many, many more are (and will be) debated whenever motor sport types gather. Nevertheless, most would agree that much of its popularity was due to the universal acceptance that each "BP" has been primarily a sporting occasion and not just another stunt event.

During its long history, the BP Rally — or as it was known, "The BP Rally of South-Eastern Australia" — has had only four Directors. These ultra-enthusiasts, namely Messrs. D. K. (Donald) Thomson, 1958-67; K. A. (Tony) Theiler, 1968-9; F. E. (Frank) Kilfoyle, 1970-1 and M. R. (Mike) Osborne, 1972-3, supplied the very life-blood.

The success of any event is directly related to preliminary planning and allied standards of detail. Perhaps this has been the secret of the BP Rally success story.

The standard was set from the very inception in 1958 by the first Director, Donald Thomson. A born administrator, he was one of the founders of the Con-

federation of Australian Motor Sport and for the past twenty years its Secretary-General. His name was to become very well known to rallyists and the blame for many points lost! His reputation for small details and infinite planning is widely known and automatically respected.

Anyone with a map can plan a car rally, but to do it in detail involving some 60 cars and crews, officials and controllers, service people, etc. over a long distance with given exact timings is something very different. It is of interest that what Donald Thomson recalls most of all about "his" rallies is "the collaboration of dozens of people over the ten years I was the Director".

The original idea of the BP Rally must surely be credited to BP's Motor Racing Manager, John Pryce. The concept developed from the then Sun Car Rallies of 1953-55. Donald Thomson had also directed these. Together, Pryce and Thomson spent days, hours and kilometres doing innumerable survey runs and re-runs navigating "the old Vanguard" in all sorts of weather.

There is hardly an area of Victoria that they did not traverse. From Mt. Gambier (S.A.) to Bendoc and from Tarwin Swamp to the foot of the Rainbow; to areas of southern New South Wales and from the Wimmera to Hotham Heights. Donald Thomson insists that even today some of the "tracks" have not been used since the Kelly gang days.

In retrospect, Donald recalls the enormous preparation the "BP" always called for — the so-called "operations orders". Well over 80 separate items of publication were needed for the 1967 event, the last he directed. The actual work of compilation had started 12 months earlier. In some cases, selection of controls and certain sections were picked two years ahead. An able Assistant Director of those days was London-Sydney Marathon veteran, Graham K. Hoinville (then a BP man, now in his own business) described by Thomson as a "prince of navigators".

The prince of the scorers must surely have been L.C.C.A. executive member, Charles Weir. It was he who developed the technique of setting up the mobile scoring teams. Their little portable duplicator was to churn out thousands of progressive score-sheets (with suitable corrections!) for competitors and eager publicity-hounds. Bill Bryce, Ron Dearie, Ian McKnight and current Club President, John Ould and many others all took their turn at assembly.

The first BP Rally — back in 1958, "The BP All Victoria Rally" — was part

of Melbourne's Moomba Festival. It was won by a New South Wales VW with a three-man novice crew (B. Taylor, T. Smith and I. McDonald), each 21 years of age, who had never entered a rally before! The calibre of future competitors was "typified" in this first rally by the crew of car 21 — a Peugeot 403. Whilst Harley Mehegan drove, navigator Bob Jane spent the 13 kilometres prior to Ararat control point straddled across the front holding the bonnet open with one hand and operating the broken accelerator cable with the other. Similar feats of initiative were to mark each year's "BP".

Has the BP Rally been too tough? . . . too much of a strain on drivers; too difficult for navigators? These questions have often been argued at over-night stops and rest controls. If so, why do the same names appear each year? For example, this year was the 15th "BP" for Ian Inglis and the 14th for Mal. McPherson.

After all, each BP Rally has been meticulously planned as a trial of both man and vehicle, and not just a Sunday drive. It has often been acknowledged that much of our information of today's local safety requirements has been developed from the "on-the-spot" exper-

ience of rally competitors. In addition, the motor industry itself has gleaned much and introduced many modifications to their products.

Carefully located within each year's secret route, were the refuelling stops. It was here that the chain of BP resellers and the Company's field staff made their contributions. Not just providing fuel and lubricants, but help and assistance to the dust/mud spattered veterans. On many occasions local police had to control interested onlookers and clear space to enable cars to depart. Panel beating was done on the forecourt, major overhauls in the service bays, headlights and windscreens replaced or perhaps just 'debugged' and washed.

And during these pauses the local press, radio and T.V. would seek out interviews and on-the-spot reports. Prime targets were the Rally Director (each of whom always made those couple of minutes available), the old hands at rallying like Harry Firth, both as a competitor and a team manager; Bruce Wilkinson of Datsun; our overseas visitors, Swedish entrants Erik Carlsson and his wife Pat Moss Carlsson — we even had one news team quite insistent on locating Donald Campbell and his "Bluebird"!

Past winners were of course always good value to the media. From South Australia, Stewart McLeod and Jack Lock are the only crew to win the "BP" twice. Other well known competitors who have shared winning honours as individuals on more than one occasion include Tony Roberts, Geoff Thomas, Frank Kilfoyle and Harry Firth. As well, others who were always good for a quick interview included Bob Watson, Bob Forsyth, Mike Osborne and Rex Lunn.

Each year familiar faces of BP personnel would keep appearing around "the track". These included BP Automobile Club's Don Ellis, Jim Whittick, Ron Gaudion (now in Tasmania), Geoff Du Cros and Norman Batters — each carrying out their own particular duty at that time. Even Company photographer, Joe Collins has become almost a rally consultant and claims he has clocked more kilometres than many regular entrants!

Sixteen different makes of cars, including 14 Datsuns, competed in this year's event. The very styles and types of cars mark the passing of the years. The range has been wide and varied, right from the big "tanks" down to the Minis and even a Goggomobil. The glamour

■ A typical early control point—unexpected, congested and almost inaccessible to all.

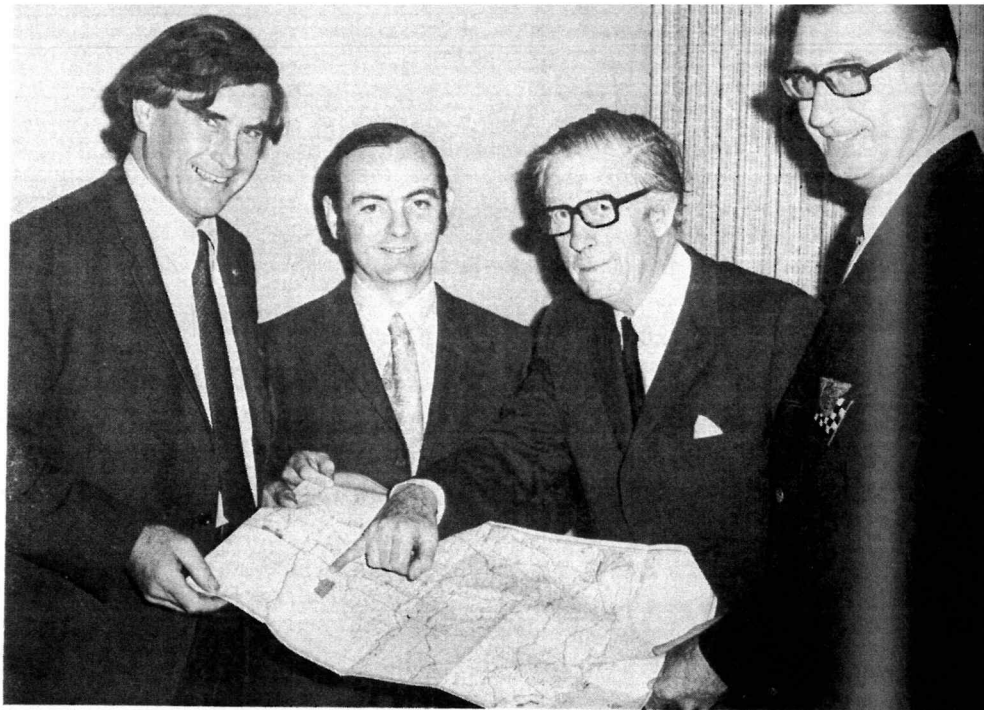


names Saab, Volvo, Jaguar, Alfa Romeo, Skoda, Porsche have all competed, although we never did get a Rolls nor a Bentley.

One of the most popular vehicles to turn up at control points during the 1971 and 1972 events was a Holden driven by Rod Barwick, Tasmania. A former taxi it had well over 600,000 kms. on the speedo — and that didn't include the 'Searoad' trips across Bass Strait with other Tasmanian starters. This year Rod, together with navigator Don Reid, was in the rally again in the same vehicle!

Over the years, Volkswagen had the greatest number of entries followed by Ford and Holden. It is of particular interest to record that VW and Ford both won the "BP" four times; Holden three times and Standard, Alfa Romeo, Renault, Peugeot and Datsun once each.

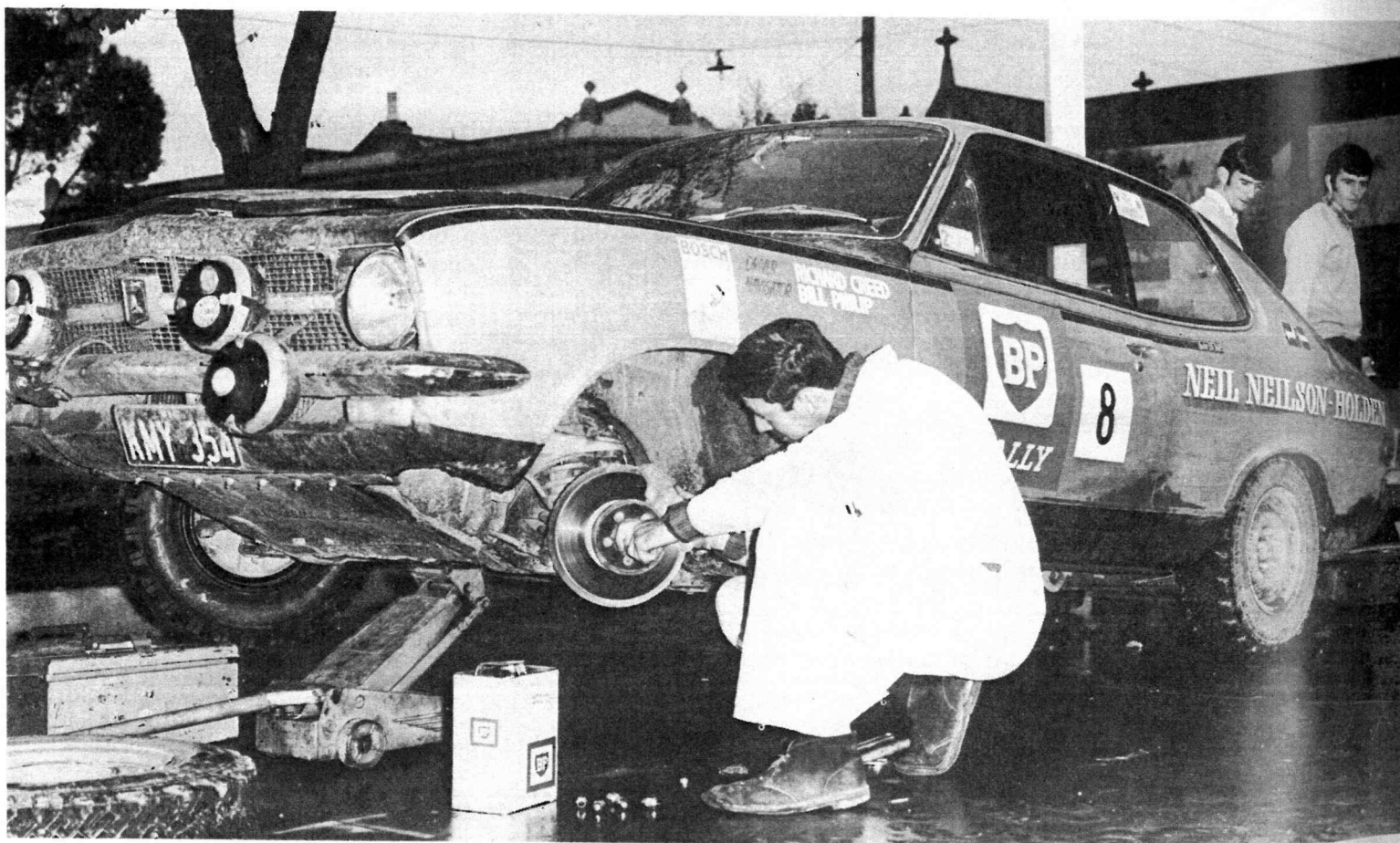
1964's winner was the Volkswagen sedan, "Antarctica 1" driven by Ray Christie and navigated by Joe Dunlop. "Antarctica 1" had returned to Australia after 12 months service at the Australian National Antarctic Research Expeditions' base at Mawson. Operated on BP fuel and lubricants throughout its life, it won the 1964 "BP".



It would not be argued that major components of the BP Rally included cars and facilities, but the most important component of all was people. This was the very point that Donald Thomson recalled most in his long career, and without those people — all the people who have ever been associated with the

■ The big four! The BP Rally's original director, Donald Thomson 2nd right, discusses a point on the '73 "BP" with left to right, BP Motor Racing Manager, John Pryce, Rally Director, Mike Osborne and Chairman L.C.C.A. rally committee, Charles Weir.

■ Front end check and service for a '71 crew? — nothing to it, but be quick.





■ The only two-man crew to win the "BP" twice Stewart McLeod and Jack Lock, South Australia, receive the BP Rally perpetual trophy from Victorian Manager, Wes. Peters following the 1971 event.

"BP" — this motor sport event would never have endured in the affectionate and respected manner it has.

To Australian Rally Champion, "BP" winner, and former Director (1970-1) Frank Kilfoyle, the "BP" has become almost part of his life. He explains the traditions of the BP Rally as . . . "to the winners go the honour and prestige of taking out the tough event, to the losers the atmosphere unique to the "BP", and the never forgotten experience of merely 'being in it' with the hope that you just might have won".

The important factor in any sporting event is to finish and that's exactly what the crew of Car 21 made sure they did back in the 1971 event. When forced to leave their Renault with a broken differential in the desert near Renmark, Australian Rally Champion Bob Watson and Jim McAuliffe walked some 30 km. before getting a ride further towards Melbourne. After a series of lifts and extended walks they insisted on marching over the Chadstone Finish ramp!

When this year's rallyists set off from Melbourne's Chadstone Shopping Centre it was appropriate that the early cars led by Car No. 1 (Datsun 1200: Philip George, Ian Swan) were flagged-off by Donald Thomson — and he was back there on the Sunday to welcome their return, with his usual critical eye.

Sunday afternoon, 13th May saw the end of another chapter in Australian motor sport. The four-day final "BP" which took competitors over the tracks and roads of districts around Mt. Hotham, Shepparton, Swan Hill, Bright and Ouyen, was over. It was the usual

heavy going. As one competitor was quoted in Melbourne's "SUN" newspaper: — "To finish in a "BP" is like winning!"

To Car 30, a Datsun 1600, entered by Surrey Motors of Melbourne, went first outright; crewed by a quietly efficient combination, Andy Chapman (driver) and Laurie Comerford (navigator). It

was Andy's sixth and Laurie's fifth BP Rally; for each, their first win.

A great rally ended a grand era.

In a recent issue of "Competition Communicator", the L.C.C.A. members' publication, Donald Thomson wrote . . .

"Sadly we say goodbye to the "BP" which truly lived up to its repute as 'the blue ribbon' event. Back into the dusk of memory go all the faces of crews, entrants, officials; all the shapes and sizes of cars caught with their suspensions down in sandy deserts on freezing nights. Its been to me, as it was always intended to be, a lot of fun, and what else is motor sport about?"

The era of the big "BP" has passed.

BP RALLY OUTRIGHT WINNERS

Year	Car	Crew
1958	Volkswagen	B. Taylor, T. Smith, I. McDonald
1959	Standard	A. Theil, R. Seidel, G. Chapman
1960	Volkswagen	K. Lott, F. Kilfoyle
1961	Volkswagen	R. Foreman, W. Hartigan, M. Hartigan
1962	Ford Anglia	H. Firth, F. Kilfoyle
1963	Ford Falcon	H. Firth, F. Kilfoyle, G. Thomas
1964	Volkswagen	R. Christie, J. Dunlop
1965	Ford Cortina	R. Lunn, G. Thomas
1966	Holden	A. Roberts, A. Haas
1967	Renault	M. McPherson, R. Sharpley
1968	Alfa Romeo	S. McLeod, J. Lock
1969	Ford Falcon	I. Vaughan, R. Forsyth
1970	Holden Torana	A. Roberts, M. Osborne
1971	Holden Torana	S. McLeod, J. Lock
1972	Peugeot 504	R. Watson, G. Thomas
1973	Datsun 1600	A. Chapman, L. Comerford