

# Recollections of the 1976 MUCC Winter Trial by Simon Brown

Man on Road, in 1976, travels 200 kms plus of Heathcote stump-lined tracks with a young Hugh Bell to pull off a famous victory over some other young Victorian Rally Legends upstarts.

During 1976 I made a few guest appearances with a young upcoming driver by the name of Hugh Bell, who had recently joined the RMIT car club. I, of course, was an “old hand” at the club having been a member since my short stay at the RMIT of 6 months in 1973 and having immediately ‘fallen’ into the role of CCRMIT Campus rep (now that is another story!). I had started navigating earlier in 1976 and had done a handful of events with my brother Chris in his plain jane looking mikan orange, stock standard, Datsun 1600.

The first event with Hughie, from my memory, was the Melbourne University Car Club Winter Trial on June 19 in the infamous rally country of the Heathcote/Costerfield hardwood forest areas. I have no recall of where the event started or of much of the route details, (Peter Otzen can you help with some of those details?) but I do have a few very clear flashback memories of the event.

They include a particularly strong recall of the amount of time Hughie and I spent OFF the road during this rally. Now any regular rally competitor using this area knows you are supposed to stay ON the road in this tight forest as any random straying into the road verges is a sure recipe to being “stumped” by a Heathcote hardwood tree remnant. This night we didn’t hit anything and we continued on our speedy way with a minimum delay on most occasions.

One vivid flashback in the deep pocket of my brain library is a corner on the event's official map, the Heathcote 1:100,000 map. We were heading south-ish with some good speed, along a forest edge boundary track with a black void of open paddocks to our right, and at a distance I now know to be 1.16 kms from a track on the left the road does a hard to read 45° twist to the southeast into the forest, with the fence line and forest boundary continuing straight ahead. Now I think most of you rally type readers can imagine what happened next! Yes, we left the road – stage right – at some speed and ended up a good number of car lengths into the Heathcote hardwood terrain! To my amazement, we didn’t hit anything, and I now think that we were saved some probable event-ending damage by the fact that a good number of



other rally crews had previously explored this piece of dirt over the years and had cleared all the stumps!

I think this was the last section of this Winter Trial, with only 1.97 kms to go until the final control. How can I be so specific about these distance details I hear you ask? Some 12 years after this rally, the two great Victorian map makers, Noel Kelly and Ian Richards travelled this and other hardwood central Victorian forests to create the fantastic MUM, Marked Up Maps. In this instance I can now refer to the GRAYTOWN 1:25,000 sheet original edition drawn on 10 - 2 - 87 by NK.

So what were the results of this 1976 Winter Trial, a round of that years TAUCC Series? Hugh Bell and myself won the event with a time loss of 3 minutes, in equal 2<sup>nd</sup> place, some 5 minutes behind Hugh were two other newbie crews, Geoff Portman, nav'ed on this occasion by his father Alan in the first edition of IFK250, the Datsun 1600, and Hayden West from Geelong with a upcoming star navigator known as Ross Runnalls in a warm Toyota Corolla KE25.

These results were also documented in an excellent report in Auto Action the following week with a report from Simon - now Mr Lovells of Alpine Rally sponsorship fame - Crane, and some great action pics from Ken Cusack. The only problem, the Auto Action - read The Age - sub-editors have chosen TWO incorrect pics from the ones that Ken would have mailed or dropped into the Spencer Street offices of Auto Action. Pictured as Hugh and myself is an unknown Monash Sporting Car Club Datsun 1600 crew, whilst 4<sup>th</sup> place Barry Johnston and - big - George Davidson have been promoted to 2<sup>nd</sup> place as picture fill-ins for Geoff and Alan Portman. I imagine George would be chuffed about that.

Your reporter Man on Road will sign off with another pic of Hugh Bell and himself in the 1977 Mountain Rally which I believe would have been the last event I did with Hugh before Damien O'Reilly took over the LH Seat.