C COMPETITION

Modern Motor's new section devoted to the motor racing and rallying scene. Barry Lloyd reports

THE annual BP Rally of South-eastern Australia is described by the sponsors as "Australia's Blue Ribbon Classic of Motor Sport". During the running of the event, which is noted for its navigational hazards, it is usually described by the competitors in much less endearing terms. And in some it brings out some very strange behaviour indeed. . .

. . . So there we were, navigator John Bryson and myself, in a Colt Fastback, somewhere between Tumut and Brindabella, behind time and unhappily combating the misery of a broken windscreen after dark down a steep, rough, winding track south of the Cotter Dam.

Suddenly we found our progress checked by a big utility blundering along at 25 mph. We'd punched the remaining glass from the screen, and we were choking and blinded from the ute's dust; it seemed impossible to overtake and he wouldn't heed our horn.

Then Bryson seemed to take leave of his senses. "Get up close behind him," he yelled — and climbed out through the broken screen on to the bonnet. As we bounced over the bumps, I kept thinking of the chances of him falling off and being run over; there are many times in a BP Rally when drivers could cheerfully run over their navigators, but this wasn't one of them.

We edged closer to the ute's tail, and in a trice Bryson was up on the tray. He padded across to the driver's cab, poked his head (complete in crash helmet) in the window and said, "Come on, mate — give us a go. Move over."

The poor bloke nearly flipped. But at least he moved over. Bryson scrambled back the way he'd came and, quite unperturbed, said, "Carry on. Watch for a left turn in two miles." I tell you, the BP gets you like that.

As things turned out, the rally was a triumph for Renault. The fast and reliable new Gordinis took first and second outright places, with a Cortina GT third. Three Gordinis also took the teams' prize.

Notable absentee among the manufacturer-teams was BMC. They don't relish competing in a rally in which car and drive-ability play second fiddle to navigation and luck.

The BP has a reputation for mud and water, but this year's hazard was dust. For a large part of the course, cars were separated by three-minute intervals instead of the usual two, to assist visibility.

From four starting points in different States, 36 competitors set off for 600 miles of assembly stage at Wangaratta in Victoria, where the trial began. To ensure that all vestiges of self-confidence were removed from competitors before they started, the last three hours of the assembly stage revealed some fiendish navigation problems, and there were no clean sheets at Wangaratta.

Thomson strikes

Points lost in assembly counted only in the event of a tie, but rally director, Donald Thomson, had already shown who was boss.

After driving all night on the assembly stage, the field left Wangaratta on the Thursday morning for Canberra.

The Carabost State forest, in the highlands east of Holbrook, caused the first major consternation, and a typical "BP" situation ensued.

Cars dashed hither and thither on myriad forestry tracks, desperately trying to "enter X-roads at 575593 from the north". We weren't laughing, as we were amongst them.

It was following this that we lost our windscreen and Bryson did his "space-walk".

Canberra was the first overnight stop, and six cars were still clean. On Friday morning a run northwards over a mixture of roads and tracks brought the field to Goulburn for a late lunch, where the outright leaders were Firth and Osborne in a Cortina GT, and Crown and Collier in a Renault Gordini, both with no points lost.

Down one point were McLeod and Lock in a VW 1300 from Adelaide, Windless and Myer in a Volvo, and Bond and Hope in a Colt Fastback.

South from Goulburn there was plenty of activity for both drivers and navigators: a few rough timber trails after dark, an occasional navigational hazard, but no typical "BP" fiascos.

But finally it came. Five miles north of Bredbo a gate marked "Riversdale" led to a crossing of the Murrumbidgee River. For some, locating the name on the gate was a problem; for others the choice of tracks after the river caused their undoing.

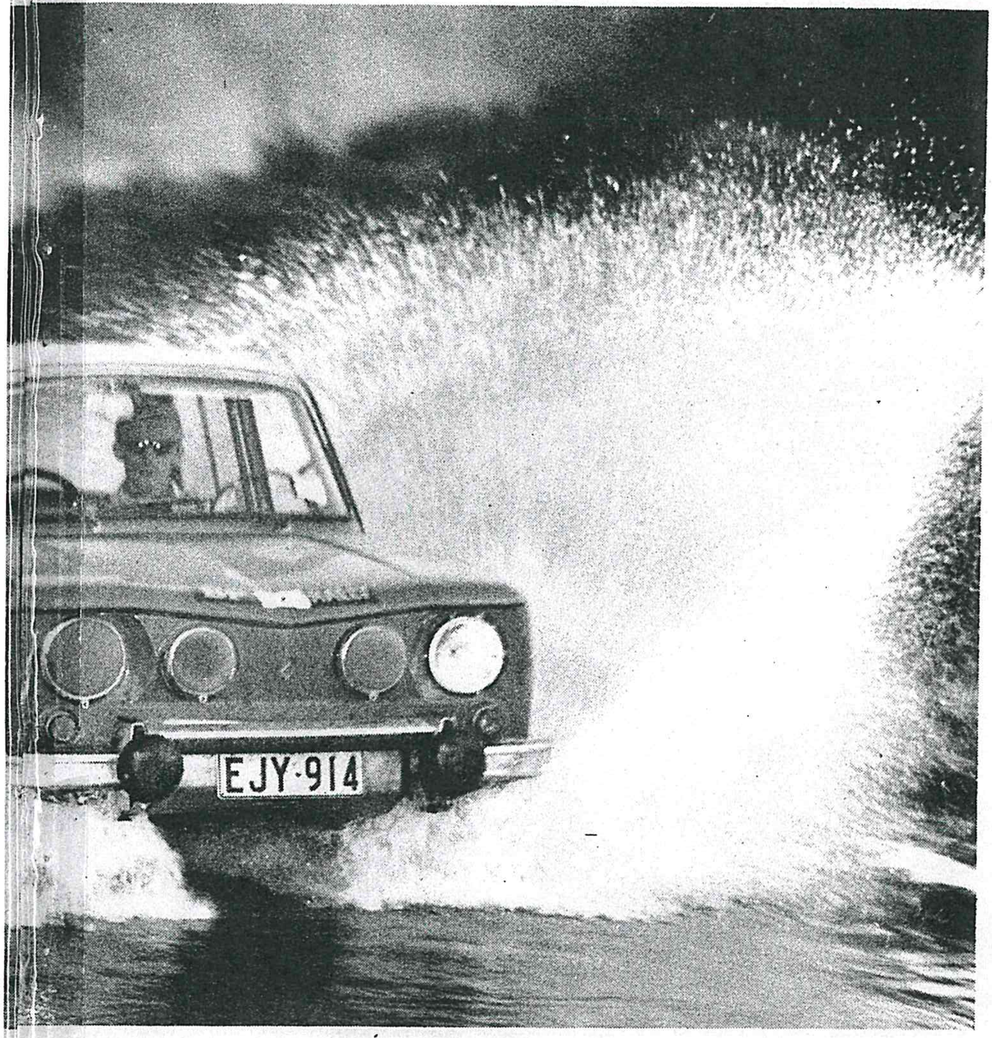
Either way, the Riversdale stock won't feel the same for quite a while after the headlong passage of 35 roaring, dust-spewing projectiles through their previously sleepy domain.

Thence to a midnight break at Cooma for two hours. Firth still led with a clean sheet, but McLeod (VW) and Crown (Renault) had slipped down the list.

The Winkless Volvo was two points behind, and Bond, who was going like the wind in the Colt Fastback, shared

BPto

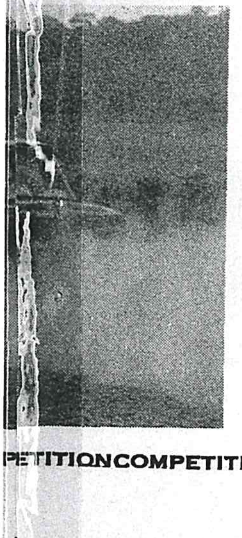
DUST was a feature of this year's



LEFT: McPherson and Sharpley take water-crossing in the Renault Gordini which eventually won "BP" Rally.

RENAULT!

Rally. LEFT: Gerry Crown (Gordini). RIGHT: Keran-Halloran Volvo near Goulburn.



third place with Philips and McAuliffe in a Holden.

From Dalgety, south of Cooma, there was no mistaking we were in the BP Rally. Point scores rose like the national debt.

But the clear mountain air suited the Colt navigators. Bond and Hope took over outright lead and held it for five sections, until fuel troubles checked their excellent run.

Our own Colt came from a humble 25th place to 7th outright and to a class lead after our teammates' demise.

The end of the division was at Orbost, and there were few who could crack a smile. The forest tracks around Bendoc and Bonang were made to order for Donald Thomson, and even those crews who were doing well were too tired to care, anyway.

Woodful and Forsyth (Cortina) dropped only five points from Cooma to take the lead with a total of 13. The ultimate winners, McPherson and Sharpley, had the best performance on the night run by dropping only two points for a total of 15, giving them second place.

Saturday was constant hard work. Firstly, a loop to the north of Orbost, then to the south, followed by some incredibly steep forest roads to the north of Bairnsdale (first gear going up; hold your breath and hang on going down).

Fatigue played its part in this last portion of the 36-hour run from Canberra. Only three crews, Roberts/Haas (Holden), Christie/Hartigan (VW 1600) and Collier/Adcock (Renault) covered the Orbost-Bairnsdale section with less than 10 points lost.

Leaving Bairnsdale for the final day's run to Melbourne, McPherson and Sharpley (25 points) led from Collier/Adcock, and the Vaughn's Cortina GT, both on 33.

The final blow

It was drivers' day, with straightforward navigation, but tighter times on the sections.

Then, right at the end, near Lang Lang, when everyone was feeling kindly disposed to the whole world and drivers had apologised to navigators for calling them all those nasty things back there, Thomson did it again.

It involved the use of a road marked "no through road", which should mean about as much to a BP Rally crew as a no-standing sign does to a diplomatic vehicle.

Some weren't caught, but many were, and, either way, it provided an interesting finish to an exciting rally.

The BP has its critics, but none of them can say it's boring. The pressure is on for both driver and navigator all the way.

So to the finish at Chadstone, where the final results gave McPherson and Sharpley the outright win, followed by Collier and Adcock, both in Gordinis. The Vaughn's Cortina was third.

The experienced Victorian crew of Wilkinson and Inglis brought the new Datsun 1000 home to a class win, ahead of the two N.S.W. Colt Fastbacks.