

RENAULTS SCOOP BP RALLY

Story by PETER ANDERSON

THIS year's BP Rally was the best yet. It was dusty and tricky and the winner didn't hit the front until the end of the fourth day of the five-day event.

The 37 starters began the 2000-mile, blue-ribbon event from Melbourne, Sydney, Adelaide and Hobart, following a variety of routes to Tatura in Northern Victoria before meeting at Wangaratta, the end of the assembly stage.

The 25 Melbourne crews went to Wangaratta via Geelong, Camperdown, north through Beaufort, Maryborough and then east to Elmore and Wangaratta. Tony Roberts and Peter Haas in Holden X2 followed their form in winning last year's BP by finishing in front at the end of the rally stage.

Points lost on the rally stage were to count only to break ties at the finish.

At Wangaratta, the drivers' briefing was held at the local drive-in movie—a double bill of Don Thomson and John Pryce standing under a sign "They're a Weird Mob".

From Wangaratta, the cars headed north into the dust of the Riverina, which hadn't seen rain in five months. There was a round dozen of right-angle bends crossing the Murray at Howlong, then to Burrumbuttock, Gerogery (a hotel and railway crossing), Culcairn and some dusty, unmapped tracks turning east to Holbrook, where police warned the faster competitors.

The 250,000:1 New South Wales survey maps were used for the first time in this area and helped navigators. Then a straightforward drive to a forest south-east of Rosewood which ended the hopes of many competitors as they floundered about.

At this stage, the gearbox of the only girls' entry, a VW 1300, worked loose and they were left without gears. A private car club's service vehicle patched it until the official VW support car arrived.

While on the subject of support cars, the Huntingdale Auto Club's Cortina GT followed the event, mothering the club's three entries and rendering service every bit as good as the factory bods.

Incidentally, there were support cars from Holden, Ford, Renault, Volkswagen, Volvo and Chrysler—manufacturers are taking things seriously now. Later in the trial the HAC car was cannibalised for one of its team cars which stretched a suspension leg.

From Rosewood, the route led via Uriarra and some of the roughest, stony roads into Canberra. One car

R.C.N. correspondent, Roger Bonhomme, almost understeers into a culvert in — according to navigator Ron Goode—"a feat of unparalleled exhibitionism".

wore out 50 per cent of its mud tyres' tread and another broke a tie-rod on this stage. Two cars holed sumps.

There were six equal first with no points lost at Canberra when the cars lined up for the drivers' sections north to Goulburn for lunch the next day.

A 44-m.p.h. average was set to keep drivers under the 50-m.p.h. A.C.T. speed limit but some lost points through being too quick. Harry Firth and Gerry Crown shared the lead at Goulburn.

From the Goulburn half-way point, cars trekked south and west through particularly dusty country east of Canberra, skirting Lake Bathurst to Braidwood, Captain's Flat and Thredbo. The cars crossed the Monaro Highway and struck off through a farmer's property with confusing gates and fence lines.

There was even a slalom river ford marked with ski stocks—director Thomson getting with the skiing bit. Harry Firth was six minutes early at Cooma after luckily surveying the route a week earlier.

He led at Cooma, the dinner stop, from Ron Phillips and Jim McAuliffe in a Holden X2, with Colin Bond and Brian Hope in a Colt 1000 third. McPherson and Sharpley were 8th. Cars were quickly serviced in the chilly air at Cooma for the run south across the border.

It was on the first few sections from Cooma that Robin Sharpley pulled up from 8th to clear second place. He ignored the traps on the New South Wales forestry maps and some irate, shotgun-toting farmers.

The obvious route didn't go through, but Broadbent's map was right, and Sharpley and McPherson in their Renault Gordini tucked in behind the new leaders, Bruce Woodful and Bob Forsyth. The Vaughans were third in their Cortina GT after losing nine points for plugging their sump in Canberra.

The Bendoc "Bethanga" loop through a great number of roads trapped many. New roads appeared everywhere, most finishing at the bulldozer which made them deep in the forest. The older roads went through and the competitors joined the highway to breakfast at Orbost.

Bonang to Orbost at 45 m.p.h. average down the highway saw many drivers flop wearily into the navigator's chair and doze. Orbost Apex made a "bangers and mash" breakfast (and a pile of loot) while the crews stretched on the sunny, green oval outside. Cars were looking tired but body damage was still minor.

Then off into the sands around Marlo and into the forest north and west. Dust caused several prangs here. The Ellis, Guymer Falcon V8 auto, lying close to third, found a VW 1300 driven by Lock McLeod on its right front mudguard and both were delayed prising themselves apart. No one was hurt.



N.S.W. came closest ever to winning the BP with a fine performance by Bruce Collier and Lindsay Adcock, who took second in their 1300 Gordini.

A short session of mudguard removals left the VW with the right front 3in. behind the left front wheel—rather like a peculiar Formula Vee in embryo. Right turns were handbrake jobs.

Firth's right front wheel sank exhausted against the suspension leg and was packed out with washers. The Bonhomme/Goode Cortina GT discovered a Volvo in the murk and both wound up with sneering right front guards.

Ken Tubman's Hillman Gazelle developed an ominous rattle and was on the point of retiring when a control official kicked the exhaust—it was a baffle rattle, for sure. He continued, though nearly overpowered with fumes from a leaking tank.

Into Bairnsdale, the Saturday-night stop, cars travelled through forests, steep gravelled roads and around fallen trees to the accompaniment of some crews muttering about wiping sections with trees four feet in diameter blocking the road.

McPherson/Sharpley had the lead by eight points from the Vaughans and the other Gordini, crewed by Bruce Collier and Lindsay Adcock, in second place. The Vaughans lost a minute on the easy run to Melbourne and took third in the event.

Rain made South Gippsland roads slippery and McPherson deliberately gave away two points slowing down for the conditions. The only work required on his car at the finish was a new stop light switch, which is not protected by the skid plate at the front.

There was the usual mickey mouse around the haybales at the finish to please the spectators at the Chadstone Shopping Centre.

It was a fine rally and worthy of Don Thomson's last BP.

RESULTS

1. Renault (Aust.) P/L/M	McPherson/R. Sharpley (Renault Gordini 1300)	27
2. Renault (Aust.) P/L/B.	Collier/L. Adcock (Renault Gordini 1300)	33
3. I. Vaughan/R. Vaughan	(Cortina GT)	34
4. Warilda Motors/B. Woodfull/R. Forsyth	(Cortina GT)	66
5. S. A. Cheney P/L/A.	Roberts/P. Haas (Holden)	69
CLASS A: 1. Wilkinson/Inglis	(Datsun)	133
2. Bond/Hope	(Colt 1000)	161
CLASS B: 1. McPherson/Sharpley	(Renault)	27
2. Collier/Adcock	(Renault)	33
CLASS C: 1. Winkless/Meyer	(Volvo)	76
2. Christie/Hartigan	(VW 1600)	85
CLASS D: 1. Roberts/Haas	(Holden)	69
2. Phillips/McAuliffe	(Holden)	82

