



OLDE BP RALLY 1998



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CONTINUING THE TRADITION

The Olde BP Rally is held at infrequent intervals. Its purpose is to ensure that the traditions of the original BP Rallies of the 1950s, 60s and 70s are not forgotten. Each Olde BP Rally introduces a new era of rallyists to the concept of the original BPs - long, hard events which travelled far afield, and tested the endurance of both car and crew. In the original BPs, and their successors, the Olde BPs, the competitors were compensated for their considerable efforts by visiting unique and remote places - places that would never be visited except on an event like the BP - and by the comradeship that such an adventure generates among its participants.

The 1998 Olde BP Rally lived up to the tradition. It was long and demanding, a tough weekend of rallying that the competitors will remember for a long time. It coincided with the finish of a long hot Victorian summer, and the finale produced 35 degree plus temperatures which made the task of car and crew even more difficult. The hot weather, and the fact that the field was limited to pre - 1976 cars may have contributed to the relatively large number of retirements due to mechanical problems, but for those who completed the course the satisfaction of finishing must have been even sweeter than normal.

The 1998 event covered 1500 kms, starting in Melbourne on Friday afternoon and heading west to Hamilton, north to Horsham, Jeparit and Hopetoun, and then east to Swan Hill for a dinner and a sleep on Saturday night. Sunday saw the field (or what remained of it) return to Diggers Rest via Kerang, Pyramid Hill, Elmore and Heathcote. 37 cars started, and 23 reached the finish.

The fun started almost straight after leaving the BP Oasis start at Somerton. A via at Greendale confused many navigators, even though straight on at the pub was the logical choice. Almost all made it the right way in the end, and it was on to control 5.8 kms SE of Gordon, which all but the Whittens, running tail end charlie, managed to enter from the correct direction through the Llandeilo forest. Then it was on to Meredith for a refuel, via Mt Egerton and an interesting forest leading into control 2.5 kms SE of Meredith. Best here were DeVaus / Fiddes (Peugeot 403) and McLaughlin / Floyd (Volvo) who cleaned the section, and Laidlay / Upton (Sunny) and Ballard / Bainbridge (Torana) on 1.

The action restarted from Woodburn, where a 52 km section took crews through a number of vias to control at Illabarook. Via 3, 4 kms S of Grenville saw only 7 crews find the information board, while Tim Collins at Via 4 on an obscure realignment 2.5 km NNE of Dereel had only 12 visitors, including one WD. Then it was on to a control 4.5 kms ESE of Lismore, where a via near Werneth presented no problems to the majority of crews, and Wallis/ Nicholas, Laidlay/Upton McLaughlan/Floyd and Fernie/Smalley and the Whittens managed to arrive on time.

A quick fuel top up in Lismore, and crews headed to control 8 3.3 kms S of Dundonnell. Exiting Vite Vite to the W caught out 10 cars including Wallis/Nicholas and Harper/Harper. 10 cars cleaned the section. The next challenge was fairly straightforward, although the time was tight, with Wallis/ Nicholas, McLaughlan/ Floyd and Davis / Long clean and a further 5 crews one point down.

At the first division end at Hamilton at around midnight, a confident looking Wallis/ Nicholas arrived first, but it was McLaughlan/Floyd in the Volvo who were outright leaders on 22 points from Laidlay/Upton (32) and Fernie/Smalley (35). Retirements included Azzopardi/DeVaus VW (broken rocker arm), Garth/Garth VW (engine), Verschuur/Barnes Mini (not known), Coffey/Wunderlich (engine) and Dyer/Vaux 240Z (alternator). The Whittens from Wangaratta were coping well with the culture shock of their first BP, and enjoying the experience.

Although the leaders had some rest, the stragglers were sent on their way after only a brief respite to tackle the challenge of the Grampians, the Wimmera and the Mallee in the early hours of the morning. A short run to just east of Cavendish set cars on the way to the toughest part of the event, two controls along the western edge of the Grampians range. The roads were fairly rugged, causing problems for some cars. Kim Harper's Escort broke a rear axle but father Ken came to the rescue in the mighty Mustang and the disabled Escort was towed to the Horsham refuel. Dave Condon's Mini survived the stony roads without a problem! Maybe Frank Kilfoyle's old saying is right - there are no such thing as rough roads - only rough drivers!

Section 13 into Glenisla via a hard to find gate stripped points off everyone, best being veterans Kilfoyle / Thomas on 3 down, followed by DeVaus / Fiddes (7) and Hartmann / Pickthall and Quill / Gallacher (11). A tricky passage on the next section NE of Glenisla caught all but Ballard / Bainbridge and DeVaus / Fiddes. Ballard's rally ended shortly after when he stopped at an intersection in heavy dust and his Torana was rammed from behind by Gil Davis's Datsun, causing both cars to retire, thankfully without injury to the crews. The distributor cap of the Datsun was smashed in the collision, but Davis managed to find most of the pieces lying on the sump guard and glued them together to get the car mobile. Aussie ingenuity at its best.

A run across the Black Range to Telangatuk was easier except for avoiding the kangaroos, and a tricky drop off route cart in a small forest near Brooksby was also cleaned by quite a few. Then it was in to Horsham via Mockinya, for a welcome refuel and a quick bite. Crews were starting to feel the BP pressure, as there was still a long, long way to go to Swan Hill.

The next section near Dimboola included the new Dimboola bypass, not mapped on Broadbents of course, but Naish/ Runnalls (now starting to apply the pressure) and Quill/ Gallacher were clean. Saturday was starting to dawn as the survivors headed towards Jeparit and a quick service crew refuel, with one section shortened to allow the stragglers to catch up.

The event was now in the Mallee, strange terrain for those accustomed to forest rallies. After running along the eastern side of Lake Hindmarsh, and up the strangely named Amy Johnson Highway (was the famous aviatrix born here?) cars wandered near the historic Pella Church to Peter Fraser's control near Lake Albacutya. At this stage puzzled navigators were trying to figure out how to reach a control on the far side of the lake, not realising that it last held water 17 years ago. The drive across the dry bed of Lake Albacutya will be a lasting BP memory for many.

A fairly direct run took cars to a welcome breakfast stop at the Hopetoun Football club, where the locals made the rally most welcome. Hot, tired and dusty crews snatched what rest they could before the long run east to Swan Hill to a real bed. Kilfoyle / Thomas retired the 240Z on this leg with suspension problems, and Young / Byron from Bendigo pulled out with bearing failure in the Austin 1800. Leaders at this point were Naish / Runnalls on 131 points from Laidlay/Upton (139), Devenish/Wylie (161), Wallis / Nicholas (167) and Riseborough/Smith and Fernie/Smalley equal on 275.

The next leg was shortened to allow crews time to freshen up before the social dinner. It took crews north east via Wathe, Dattuck and Speed and the hard to find Turrife East school to Sealake for a refuel. The run across to Goschen saw some crews having fun in the sand, and Devine/Davidson retire after contact with a kangaroo. At this point the organisers would like to formally apologise to Alan Banks, who was given a rendezvous time of 11.30 pm Saturday at Chinkapook instead of the correct 11.30am. Alan duly turned up, and as a result missed the Swan Hill function. Sorry Alan.

The social dinner in Swan Hill was brilliant, in spite of a number of competitors missing due to mechanical breakdowns. Tired crews miraculously recovered, and partied on in fine style. Don Ellis MC'd the proceedings ably, and the sole remaining member of the original BP organising team Graham Hoinville spoke of the early days of the BPs. Past BP winners at the function included Ian McDonald (co -driver of the car that won the first BP in 1958) Mal McPherson, Geoff Thomas, Frank Kilfoyle, Martin and Bill Hartigan, Mike Osborne, Peter Haas, Reg Lunn, and Bob Watson as well as Olde BP winners Ross Runnalls, Graham Wallis and Phil Nicholas. There was a contingent of veterans from the Light Car Club, including Charles Weir, Arnold Terdich, Ron Rawson, Jack Ellis and others. Leaders at Swan Hill Naish/Runnalls were presented with a trophy from the City of Swan Hill. The venue was awash with BP nostalgia.

As refreshed crews left Swan Hill on Sunday morning for the run home, Naish/Runnalls were leading on 146 points from Laidlay / Upton in the incredible Datsun 1000 on 173, Wallis /Nicholas on 208, Devenish/Wylie on 210, Riseborough/Smith on 325 and Thorpe/Oake on 419. The first three sections were cancelled due to a combination of lost route instructions and masses of duck shooters along the course, so activities recommenced just outside Kerang. By now most of the survivors had come to terms with BP style navigation and were performing much better than early in the event.

The route wound through Appin, Pyramid Hill, and Sylvaterre to the final fuel stop at Elmore. Naish/Runnalls had a fright when they WD'd Adam Wilson's Muskerry East passage (along with lots of others), fortunately for the leaders Laidlay/Upton did likewise, although Wallis and Devenish did it right to draw closer. It was on through Toolleen, Heathcote and Glenhope to the finish of the event proper at Carlsruhe, and the leaders hung on to take a great win. Unfortunately Nicholls/Leake did not finish the division due to unspecified problems. Devenish/Wylie had a brilliant run on division 4 to drop just 6 points.

The barbecue finish was at the Diggers Rest Hotel, and even the hot northerly blasting across the Keilor plains did nothing to spoil the celebrations of those who managed to finish a long and demanding event.

In the original BPs it was Donald Thomson's aim to have every control possible. An analysis of the 1998 Olde BP Rally on that basis shows that of the 48 controls, 42 were cleaned by at least one car. Taking a combined "ideal" result, the winner of this Olde BP, had he done best on every section, would have lost 29 points. The winning score was 170, which shows that even Ross Runnalls is not perfect! The most difficult section was Glenisla in the Grampians, with the best car losing 13 points, followed by Depta Railway station, with a minimum loss of 10.

Congratulations to the finishers, thanks to the hundreds of people who supported this year's event by organising, officating, competing, servicing or just lending moral support. Finally, thanks go to the HRA for accepting the responsibility of continuing the great tradition of the BP rallies. We all look forward to the next Olde BP, whenever it may be.