

COEFFICIENT AUSTRALIAN RALLY CHAMPIONSHIP

Summary of address to Victorian State Council by BRUCE KEYS, CAMS Manager, Rally on Tuesday 3 March.

During the meeting of 22/23 February, the National Rally Committee discussed the replies it had received as a result of its discussion paper sent out to rallyists in December 1991, which invited comment on what is colloquially known as the "ARC Co-efficient Proposal".

This proposal had the effect of modifying the format of the ARC from its present 6 events, all-rounds-to-count, format to a wider ranging format which included Rally Australia, Esanda Rally of Canberra, the present ARC events and other lower status State Championship events all in the one series.

The NRC distributed 222 copies of an 8 page discussion paper to a wide cross section of the sport, including competitors (both ARC & non-ARC), event organisers (again ARC & non-ARC), administrators, manufacturers and other interested persons.

It received a total of 50 replies to the paper, a number described by CAMS Rally Manager, Bruce Keys as; "disappointing, considering the fact that only 5 of those replies were received from regular ARC competitors, especially considering this group of people was the most vocal regarding 'not being consulted' when the proposal was first initiated in August 1991.

Individually, members of the NRC performed various analyses of the information contained in the replies prior to their meeting in Sydney.

In general, the data gathered from the replies indicated a divergence of opinion on most subjects, save for some important points which allowed the NRC to obtain a clearer picture of what the respondents wish to see happen in the ARC.

WHAT SHOULD BE THE OBJECTIVES OF THE ARC

In order to properly evaluate the data, the NRC took the opportunity to review its reasons for proposing a modification to the 24 year old format of the ARC. These reasons, or objectives were:

1. To increase the number of regular competitors in the ARC (based on the number of regular competitors in coefficient 10 events and higher).
2. To increase and broaden the public awareness and media coverage of the ARC and all rallies in general.
3. To improve the standards of the ARC events and all rallies in general.

In reviewing the initial objectives, and in consideration of the widely ranging opinions voiced in the replies to the discussion paper, the NRC quantified these objectives by assessing the current state of the ARC and produced 'Key Performance Indicators' for the above objectives in order to measure the future success of the ARC in a new format.

The Key Performance Indicators were:

1. To achieve a total of 20 competitors in 1983 and 25 competitors in 1994 who competed in more than 3 rounds of the ARC (based on coefficient 10 & above events).
2. An increase in the number of first time (new competitors) in coefficient 10 and above events in states other than their own.
3. For 1993, to obtain a 30% increase of the print media exposure over that generated in 1991 and a further 15% increase for 1994.
4. For each event to achieve a higher mark in the observer's report each year and for competitors to have no hesitation in saying yes to the question, was there a substantial improvement in each event over the previous year.
5. To increase the interstate competitor numbers in all rounds of the C10 and higher ARC events.

WHAT ABOUT THE FUTURE OF PRC?

The opportunity also arose for the NRC to reaffirm its commitment to PRC and in doing so, advised of a guarantee of a 6 year span for PRC in the majority of rounds of the ARC, in fact until DECEMBER 1997. The only exception to this will be Rally Australia, whose vehicle eligibility is controlled by FISA.

PRC in a post 1997 environment is in all likelihood going to be continued, provided that the demand still exists and to that end the NRC promises a decision on PRC, post 1997, will be announced by 31 December 1995.

SO WHAT IS THE COEFFICIENT SYSTEM?

By far the most controversial proposal in rallying since the introduction of the PRC Regulations in 1983, the NRC's initial proposal for the ARC was to be based on 3 events in each state ie the existing ARC event, a 'major' round of the State Rally Championship, and another open event (whether SRC or otherwise) included in the proposal was Rally Australia, Australia's round of the FIA WRC and the International Esanda Rally in Canberra.

Discussions between State Rally Panels and NRC members, together with replies from the discussion paper indicated that the 'other event' to be scored as a 2 coefficient was not only confusing the issue, but in some of the lesser populated states it would simply not be possible for such an event to be chosen due to lack of suitable events in the time frame suggested (ie that non-coefficient 10 events be conducted prior to July each year).

The NRC also acknowledged that in the states of Victoria and NSW there are a number of events capable of sustaining coefficient 5 status and it was keen to promote these events into a modified formula for the ARC.

Therefore, it appeared logical to simply drop the C2 events, in favour of an extra C5 event in Victoria and NSW.

Having established the 'National' events, the NRC then turned to the question of the FIA WRC status event and its possible inclusion in the ARC, post 1992.

In the time which has elapsed since the initial distribution of the discussion paper, in which a healthy number of the replies suggested Rally Australia should not have a place in the ARC, for various reasons (cost, incompatibility of the rules and eligibility of the cars) the NRC noted that there had been a considerable amount of discussion between the organisers of Rally Australia and the effected competitors which culminated in Rally Australia offering what is described as a 'level playing field' to all eastern state competitors in the form of a \$5000 subsidy.

This initiative, a promise of support of increased media coverage for Australian competitors (including most importantly, television exposure) and a \$25 000 incentive programme which will be piggy-backed onto the 1992 ARC, has turned many of the competitors not only into reassessing their options but to affirm their desire to be a serious contender for a start in what many overseas competitors believe is the best organised and presented rally in the whole world!

Vehicle eligibility was also a big issue in determining if Rally Australia warranted ARC status. At this point, the NRC members grabbed their lap top computers! Examination of records of the ARC results in the past 3 years showed clearly that the majority of competitors who have competed in 3 or more ARC rounds (in a given year) will indeed be driving FISA Group A or Group N eligible vehicles in 1992 - even Toyota's Neal Bates reckons his new GT-Four Celica will probably be eligible for this years Rally Australia.

In view of this development, perceived problems of having Rally Australia in the ARC were vanishing quickly - the NRC acknowledges that the situation will never be ideal - but it is confident that the many advantages of having Rally

Australia in the ARC will outweigh what disadvantages there may be perceived. Having established the physical framework of the ARC, the question of; 'How many rounds can I compete in and how many rounds will count?' was discussed.

In this case the overwhelming responses from the discussion paper showed that all rounds should be able to be competed in. This has the added advantage of being administratively 'cleaner' and takes away any necessity for competitors to have to nominate which events they may do prior to commencing each year's competition.

The next obstacle for the NRC to overcome was to determine how many rounds should count for the final points score. This was ultimately determined as being 6.

WHY SIX ROUNDS TO COUNT?

Firstly, the NRC believes that to have more rounds count would make the whole series far too expensive for those competitors who may be competing at one-step-down-from-outright-championship-contender level, as it is ultimately these competitors who will benefit greatly from the coefficient system.

Secondly, it assists where possible, those competitors who may be still competing in a PRC in that they may compete for practically the same amount of coefficient points by running a carefully planned year.

Thirdly, to have a lesser number than 6 would tend to skew the ARC results too heavily in favour of the high coefficient rating events - the Esanda Rally of Canberra and Rally Australia.

At this stage a clear picture began to emerge.

Much of the 'housekeeping' matters had now been resolved, including:

- * All non-driver and co-driver championships, ie Class, Manufacturer etc. will be based on the same coefficient multiplication factor as the driver and co-driver championship.
- * Only CAMS licence holders will be eligible to score points - any international (driver or co-driver) will be ignored and their places will be filled by the 'next in line'.
- * To score points in the Manufacturer's Championship, both crew members must hold CAMS licences.
- * The Manufacturer's Championship will continue to be for Group N exclusively.

In regard to the lower coefficient (C5) events, it will be pretty clear to each State Rally Panel, which events will fulfil that role. NSW and Victoria will have two C5 events each.

The ultimate choice of these events will be determined by the NRC, following recommendations from each State Rally Panel.

Very few additional obligations will be placed on C5 events. However it is seen as being essential that for all C5 events the starting order be approved by the CAMS Rally Manager and that the CAMS National Office receives (faxed) results by 9.00AM the morning following each event, in order to produce a media release and to update the points score in the whole Championship.

All events will have a 'participation fee' which will largely provide the services by which the ARC series will be improved. For example, all ARC registered competitors will receive a regular points score and newsletter, a cloth badge, the series will have a professional media monitoring service appointed and a national awareness campaign of rallying will be undertaken.

These measures are essential in order to tell if the coefficient system is improving the sport.

There is no doubt in the minds of the NRC members that not every member of the rally fraternity will be entirely happy about the future format of the ARC.

Nevertheless, the NRC is confident that all competitors and organisers will ultimately benefit from the introduction of the proposed coefficient system.

In summary, the NRC members unanimously believe that the introduction of the coefficient system, including Rally Australia as a flagship will:

- * increase the number of regular competitors competing in C10 and higher ARC events,
- * increase the number of competitors in Rally Australia, and encourage existing Rally Australia competitors to contest the ARC,
- * increase the number of interstate competitors competing in C5 and C10 events and
- * increase further and broaden public awareness of rallying and improve the standards of all rallies, be they ARC or otherwise.

This may not all happen overnight and it may be a tough row to hoe, then again change always brings some agony. As the athletes say: "no pain, no gain".

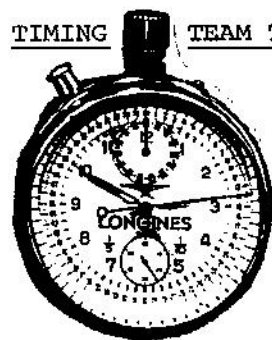
There are a few hurdles yet to be overcome - sponsorship of the series is one - but then again the indications in the market place say that the task of placing sponsorship of the ARC, irrespective of its format is going to be harder rather than easier.

There will be those members who still have not had their questions answered. For example, there is a highly theoretical model which says that an ARC may be fought out by two drivers who never compete against each other. This was considered by the NRC but was discounted because in reality it will not happen - man is just too competitive an animal for that to be the case.

Throughout its deliberations, the NRC kept a viewpoint of being flexible, both now and in the future. If something is not working and needs to be rectified, then so be it. The future of the sport is vitally important, the NRC has no desire to see rallying do anything other than continue on its rapid and recent path upwards, and will now critically examine the new ARC format to see if it is achieving its objectives.

BRUCE M KEYS
CAMS MANAGER, - RALLY

TIMING TEAM TOPICS



Phillip Island 23/24 May: State Racing Series, Round 2.

Another small team made practice difficult, but life was a little easier because of wet weather which effectively kept the Vees and HQ's spread out. ALF PEARCE, TONY DORNOM and DON HUMPHRIES made up the core of the team with day trippers on Saturday MICHAEL CALLINAN and SUE CURRIE and Sunday ROBIN BAASS, DAVID BAKER, JIM & PAM RIIS making up the very necessary extra members, together with assistance

from PIARC members we were able to operate satisfactorily until the Vees came out in dry weather and later when confronted with FORTY HQ Holdens that just don't separate.

These circumstances showed the weakness of our current teams which lack regular experience. Ideally we need to be able to call upon a regular number of timekeepers, thus developing expertise which will help with the difficult classes of racing, particularly at Phillip Island which is never easy because of the timing box location.

Next meeting will be at WINTON for SRS #3 where conditions are a little more favourable. Give ALF PEARCE a call (478 1134 AH) if you wish to join the team for this meeting, but also give consideration to becoming a regular member for the remaining three meetings for 1992.