



Bob Watson/Jeff Beaumont head for victory in the World Championship winning Renault Alpine.

## "DON CAPASCO" THRILLER TO ALPINE!

Story by BARRY LAKE

**W**HAT better car to choose for Australia's first full European style rally than Europe's top rally car? That is just what Bob Watson did when he persuaded Renault Australia to lend him and Jeff Beaumont the Alpine Renault that was brought to Australia for a tour of the motor shows. The little blue French car showed a surprising turn of speed, strength and reliability to win what proved to be a very competitive, fast and tough event, the "Don Capasco" Rally on March 31, run in the magnificent forests around Canberra.

Second place went to Stewart McLeod/Adrian Mortimer in their new Datsun 240Z. Just as this pair had gone close to winning the first round of the Australian Rally Championship in Perth the previous week, so they also looked set to win this one when they had a big lead at the end of the first division. A slight excursion, however, bent the rear suspension during

the third division and they were lucky to get to the finish at all, let alone stay almost two minutes clear of Bob Riley/Adrian van Loon, who placed third in one of Mitsubishi's Lancers, ahead of team mates Barry Ferguson/Wayne Gregson in a similar car.

The rally had been designed mainly as an attraction to spectators and as a TV

spectacle, and from this point of view it a resounding success. Though there is accurate way of assessing the number spectators who attended the Saturday Sunday daylight divisions, as well as night division on Saturday night, it may have run into several thousand — and you know how many more watched it on excellent and very professionally produced TV coverage. There were ten minutes "spots" between regular shows all through the weekend, plus a 50-minute special on the Saturday night, and the whole lot has been combined and edited to make a number of various length films for future use.

Full credit must go, not only to Peter Lang, but also to his assistant directors from the Southern Districts Motor Sports Association, Graeme Elliott, Dan Scorpecci, Geoff Sykes and Terry Bain — well as the many well-briefed officials who not only did their jobs efficiently but with consistency throughout the rally. Timing was done to the nearest second, first time this has been done for a competition in Australia and, although the CAMS electronic digital clocks did not quite make the deadline, there seemed to be no problems with the older style clocks.

The TV coverage was incredibly good and some of the other channels could probably learn something by studying CTC-7's technique, for it was a far more professional approach than we see in telecasts from Calder and Oran Park. Announcers were Peter Lang himself, Hagon and RCN's Jim Sullivan and they certainly did a good job of keeping viewers informed and entertained.

The 35 starters (kept to a small field by the organisers to enable more efficient telecasting) left the Canberra City Centre amid large and enthusiastic crowds and a direct telecast, from noon on Saturday, the first of three divisions, each approximately 250 kilometres. The first and last, competitive section of the division was only a few miles out of the city and, in fact, competitors — if they could find the time — were able to look out over the city from these sections.

The early pacesetters were Watson/McLeod, David Lang/John Trumpp (Gerry Ball Tuning Datsun 1600), Ferguson/Riley, Colin Bond/George Shephard (Torana XU1) and Peter Brock/John Gocentas in the Holden Dealer Team Holden Kingswood V8. Watson had a problem and nosed into a bank with the engine stalled — then found that the starter would hardly wind the engine over. It eventually fired, but when he speared off the bank again later on a tight left-hander, Watson caught many other drivers out, too, as the starter would not work at all. Watson took a little more warily after that to ensure he did not get into a situation from which he could not extract himself.

Barry Ferguson/Wayne Gregson had the Lancer going well, took a fine fourth place in the GRANDE



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This gave McLeod the opportunity to gain the upper hand. Still not happy with the brutish handling of the 260Z, McLeod nevertheless threw it around the tight forestry tracks in fine style to take the rally lead. Bond was running the Pat Cullen Garage XU1 that Peter Lang is using for the NSW Championship rounds. He found that the Goodyear Ultragrips did not suit the type of surface encountered, so he fitted a set of the latest Dunlops, narrower than the Goodyears and with a new tread pattern, and found they improved his times tremendously. They felt safer, too, although he still made fastest time on only one section.

Riley and Ferguson scored two fastest times each, and George Fury/Monty Suffern (Datsun 180B) were well up in the running all the way. Brock was doing some phenomenally fast times in the big Kingswood, albeit at the expense of giving the car a real caning and he eventually ran out of late time on the division after pulling the bearing retaining ring off a rear axle and later breaking the front suspension — but, boy, did the spectators love him! David Lang was third fastest on the first two sections, second fastest on the third and was second outright to Watson when he tripped and fell on the fourth competitive section to add another wrecked Datsun to the Lang collection.

As they started the night division McLeod led Watson, Bond, Riley, Fury, Bruce Cheesman/Tom Snooks (Datsun 1600), Brian Bell/Chris Coleman (Datsun 1600), Des West/Dan White (Torana 3300), Murray Finlay/Brian Mephram (Escort Twin Cam) and Neil Weston/Peter Berriman (Datsun 1600). Watson and Bond were both applying the pressure to McLeod, being fastest and second fastest up Two Sticks Road to lop a few seconds off the Datsun's

lead, but Bond was out on the very next section with a broken diff housing. Now the ball was in Watson's court and he responded by taking four fastest times of the 12 sections on the night to emerge as the leader of the event. Brock took four fastest times as well, although they could do him little good after his maximum score in division one. The Datsuns of Cheesman and Bell both fell from the top placings, Bell's breaking a suspension ball joint near the end of the night and Cheesman's suffering first differential failure, then a broken driveshaft and finally a broken tie-rod.

Now the order became Watson, McLeod, Riley, Ferguson, Fury Greg Carr/Graham Moule (Gerry Ball Datsun 1600) leading the Clubman section despite a blown head gasket since the beginning of the rally. Weston, West, Tom Barr-Smith/Rob Hunt in one of the three South Australian Marina Sixes that won the Teams' Prize, and Finlay.

The third division, in daylight on Sunday, was virtually a repeat of division one and although the times had been reduced because some had been cleared on the first run through. McLeod, in his efforts to fight back against Watson, overdid things on a corner and bent his rear suspension. From there on he made constant stops during transport sections to effect repairs, keeping it all together with a winch in the meantime!

Watson now had things his own way and went on to nine fastest times on the final division to win the event despite finishing the last section on a flat tyre. McLeod retained his second place even with the car crabbing badly and finished with all but a few minutes of his 90 minutes late time used up in transport sections.

Ferguson was fastest on five sections in his efforts to peg back Riley, but to no

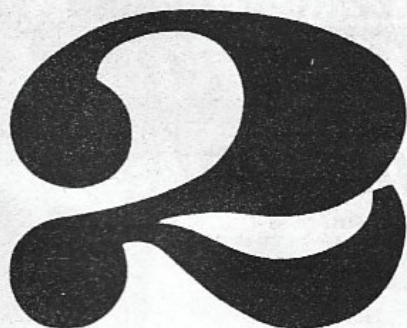


OOPS — almost too far on that one for the Des West/Dan White Torana.

DON DRAYTON  
 avail, for Riley also posted two fastest times and retained his third place. Fury also had two best times to take fifth place, then came Carr and West, followed by the two little cars of Murray Coote (the Queensland navigator having his first ever drive in a rally)/John Hall (Datsun 1200) and Gerry Meehan/Graeme Gillies (Toyota Corolla) — both having put in remarkably consistent performances, while Barr-Smith rounded off the top ten after Finlay and Weston dropped back in the final division with mechanical failure.

#### RESULTS

1. Bob Watson/Jeff Beaumont (Alpine Renault) ..... 42m16s
2. Stewart McLeod/Adrian Mortimer (Datsun 260Z) ..... 49m22s
3. Bob Riley/Adrian van Loon (Mitsubishi Lancer) ..... 51m31s
4. Barry Ferguson/Wayne Gregson (Mitsubishi Lancer) ..... 52m35s
5. George Fury/Monty Suffern (Datsun 180B SSS) ..... 53m52s
6. Greg Carr/Graham Moule (Datsun 1600) ..... 73m42s
7. Des West/Dan White (Torana 3300) ..... 78m25s
8. Murray Coote/John Hall (Datsun 1200) ..... 89m52s
9. Gary Meehan/Graeme Gillies (Toyota Corolla) ..... 92m45s
10. Tom Barr-Smith/Rob Hunt (Marina Six) ..... 94m07s



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