

"Over the hills and far away"—so went the

1952 ALPINE TRIAL

Another Alpine has come and gone, and it is our happy duty to conclude our year's contributions to "A.M.S." by reporting what we have no hesitation in saying was a most testing, enjoyable and even thrilling event, well worthy of being ranked as a classic, and a great credit to its directors, Bill Leech and Bill Hicks. The Alpine is unique in many ways; for not only is it a day-and-night affair, and longer by far than anything of a similar kind in this State, but it also traverses some of the most impressive country in Australia, and for many miles its course runs far from the insanity of civilisation.

Upon its participants it makes not inconsiderable demands of stamina and determination, and upon the competing cars it lays a stern yardstick of reliability and fortitude. No tour for Sunday-afternooners it, as our American contemporary might say; if you merely finish the Alpine you have achieved something. If you finish, as did eight of this year's field, with a "Clean sheet," you are in the top bracket of trials' types; whilst if you win the thing, even your fellow-competitors will concede you the right to look smug—at any rate till the next Alpine comes up.

This year the crews, which numbered 32 at the start, were greatly favoured by the weather, which was fine, clear and cool, a remarkable circumstance in a State where the skies seem abnormal if they're not weeping. All cars were subject to minute scrutiny at the start by Jim Leech, and Lex Denniston and Bill Hicks despatched contenders on the 72-mile journey to Ranceby, where Bert Chalmers waited in the gathering dusk.

Times allotted for the trip were 18 mins. for the over 1,500 c.c. class

and 100 mins. for the small cars. We ourselves, forsaking our somewhat vintage flat-4 for this occasion, were in a Consul, and would not have found the 48 m.p.h. average too bad, were it not that we were escorted by an Ariel-mounted gendarme from Malvern to Dandenong. How frustrated can you get?

We were left with the necessity of going from there to Ranceby at an average in the high fifties, and there are children in Nyora and Poowong who are even yet talking of the Afternoon We Saw the Flying Saucer.

Stage 2 involved the passage of a darkening countryside to Ryton Junction, and we took note of Peter Ward's comments on this section last year regarding the "thousand corners" of the Grand (?) Ridge Road. We struck south like Shackleton, and made the stage (which carried 100 points) with something like 25 mins. to spare, arriving, to our astonishment, first of the field at the campfire built by Jim Berry and Barry Roach-Pierson (with "George" surveying the scene from a signpost).

Section 3 was again a 100-pointer, and required a return to the Princes Highway and a pleasant burn to Stratford. The 1 hr. 50 min. allowed was enough, we estimated, flourishing our dividers and multiplication tables and hastily swallowing three more anti-travel sickness pills, to back on our tracks a little, thus benefitting from a good road. So we went to Boolarra and Morwell, and thence to Stratford—Control 3.

Let us add that at no time did the miles pass so slowly as the minutes on this section, and by the time we sighted the Custom Ford in Doug Whiteford's hands, and

our team-mates in the Zephyr, we were some five minutes to the good.

At the Stratford Garage, Shire Engineer Bock acted as official and provided refuelling facilities—a felt want at this stage. From Stratford the route lay via Bruthen to Ensay, where Ossie Quintino presided over the supper-break control. This section required a 37½ m.p.h. average from the large cars, and a 33½ m.p.h. from the others, both of which meant that one couldn't sleep on the job, greatly though the road has improved since 1950. After a really pleasant supper—"d'you laake it blaack or whaate, loov?"—we left Ensay for Omeo, travelling for the first ten miles along the Doctor's Flat by-pass.

By this time we were running ahead of the field, which certainly gives one a psychological lift, or something, and we coped with our 43 miles in 80 mins. quite adequately, passing through a sleeping Omeo, and proceeding on down the Omeo Valley Road to Colin and Mrs. Scott's control at Hinnonungie, where they and John Bock conducted us over the traditional mountain goat's ascent. This was the dark hour just before first light, and alas! we were not vouchsafed the dreamlike beauty of Lake Omeo by dawn, a sight that is more than rewarding.

The hill climb, however, was eventually scrubbed, for the morning mists rolled up toward the end of the field and made it impossible to time. By this time, though, we were at the Alpine Garage in Omeo, stocking up with fuel for the high passage of the Alpine Road that now lay westward before us.

We were comforted by the assurance that "Mr. Leech had gone that way the day before, and he hasn't come back, so he's either over it or stuck up there somewhere"; the road we found rather better than two years ago, at least as far as Flourbag, but there was a lot of muddy patches from there on till we struck the pebble at Hotham.

It is difficult not to rhapsodise

about the sort of scenery that Hotham affords—mile after mile of purple mountain tops range away to the east and north, with great drifts of snow lying dormant on their shoulders catching the early rays of the rising sun. Chasms of immeasurable depth and frightening declivity plunge downwards from the very edge of the road, and, in the words of Clough, "Westward, look, the land is bright."

One of the snowdrifts lay right athwart the road at the Chalet, necessitating a tortuous detour in the heavy mist that shrouded the west of the mountain; but once across the Razorback and down amongst the trees again, the road lay clear and dustless after the rain, down the winding miles into Harrierville. Here Don Busch and Bib Stillwell awaited us, and had laid out a tricky sub-event, which came in very handy, as things turned out.

Next stop was Wangaratta, and the road along the Ovens Valley is surely one of the most enjoyable scarpers in the State; we were asked to do the 63 miles in 75 minutes, and, thanks to the proper degree of valve-bounce, managed this with 10 minutes to spare, a neat average of 58 or thereabouts. Fuel was again available here, then Bill Higgins sent us off to a sub-event near Benalla, staffed by Peter and Mrs. Lievesley, Ron Wilby and Ian Sargeant; from there a welcome hour and a half for an excellent breakfast and wash at the Broken River Hotel, Reg Nutt being control officer here.

Last stage but one was a fairly fast run to a novel control actually on the platform at Koriella, near Alexandra, and at this point Alan Watkin, in charge of the control, was entertained by the various approaches used by different drivers. At this late stage disaster struck two of the clean-sheeters—Alex Hay lost the use of the cogs in his 2½ Riley and Doug Whiteford, who had also been on the ball all the time, very neatly threw a complete tread from his near-side rear tyre.

Having used up all his spares, Doug gamely tackled the last section to Narbethong on the bare canvas, a terrifying thought to us, in view of the fact that a 46 m.p.h. average was needed. However he made the finish, arriving some few minutes after ourselves, and suitably astonishing Cam McLaren, Paul Ikingier, Graham Barr and co-director Bill Leech who checked the survivors in and carried out the final scrutiny.

Let us at this stage pay a special tribute to both the directors who worked late on Sunday and Monday nights checking the cards and hastening the results. With so widespread a trial, the mere return of official cards is a matter of days, yet the results were announced officially 72 hours after the finish, and may we say that those who think this unremarkable, should themselves run a trial some time.

Everyone to whom we spoke expressed joy and pleasure, but there were, it is rumoured, some dissentients, especially in the matter of sub-events. Well, let us stress that the devising of these matters is a real headache; for either you favour big cars or little cars, and it's very difficult to do neither. It is not feasible to omit sub-events as determinants of ties, and to rely on, say, sheer speed. That way madness lies, not to say danger.

For our part, we travelled quite fast enough, thanks very much. Anyway these events are NOT races. Another worry is the hand-japping of time-classes, which always favours the small capacities; whilst yet a third is the question of wolves in sheep's clothing, variations from standard being what they are.

The results showed that 24 cars finished, and no less than eight of these came in with clean sheets; this speaks volumes for their crews' driving and navigation, because nobody in their senses (and sporting motorists are always in their senses, are they not?) could say that it was easy.

Outright winner was Bob Fore-

man, who has changed his V type for a Minor, and who by the narrowest of margins collected the chief award. He and J. McDougall his co-driver deserve (and receive, so far as this commentator is concerned) the heartiest congratulations. Second outright, class winner and sharer of both team's prizes was our own Consul, piloted for the lion's share of the distance by Les Powell, a positive virtuoso at the wheel, though a novice at this trials business.

The Consul has a capacity of 1,508 c.c., which marks its performance as rather good, being up against the 2½-litre types. Third, also by a microscopic margin, was the Jones-Davison Holden—not the one—and fourth, the 1,100 Fiat driven by D. L. Anderson and Geoff Lord.

There were two team's prizes, one an open competition and the other between teams representing the major sporting clubs. Both of these went to the team composed of the Consul aforesaid, the Zephyr with Maurie Monk and Alan Pilkington, and Owen John's famous 2½ Riley, twice an Alpine winner, and navigated this time by Ern Abbott. We append the full results hereunder, and wish a Happy Christmas to all.—D.K.T.

Results:—

Foreman-McDougall (M/Minor) ..	654.92*
Powell-Thomson (Ford Consul) ..	654.64†
Davison-Jones (Holden) ..	654.54
Anderson-Lord (Fiat 1100) ..	654.48
Summers-Hoinville (Singer 9) ..	654.38
Terdlich-Seed (Morris Minor) ..	654.08
Pilkington-Monk (Ford Zephyr) ..	654.04 †
Escott-Leighton (Morris Minor) ..	654.00
Barnes-Irvine (Citroen 15) ..	653.86
John-Abbott (Riley 2½) ..	644.04 †
Lane-Hawker (Sun-Tal. 90) ..	643.86
Whiteford-Wilcox (Ford Custom) ..	628.08*
Bailey-Benson (Holden) ..	621.62
Anti-Hill-Blair (Mercedes-Benz) ..	617.62
Tingate-Tingate (Riley 2½) ..	592.34
Gray-Adeney (M.G. TC) ..	587.05
Luxton-Russell (Citroen 15) ..	578.42
Eldridge-Drinum (Austin A70) ..	574.36
Sinclair-Irving (Hillman Minx) ..	546.62
Phillips-McMillan (Ford Pilot) ..	533.52
Horner-Hamilton (Porsche) ..	532.50
Baillieu-Rees (M.G. TC) ..	497.09
Burnett-Davison (Citroen 15) ..	481.52
Hawkins-Hall (Austin A40) ..	389.98

(No other competitor finished)

* Class winner. † Teams prizes.