

There are ways and means of winning championships. Ross Dunkerton did his sums and found the fledgling Group A category the route to take for his fifth ARC crown. The victory gesture says it all. Greg Yard

ALPINE GOLD

ROSS DUNKERTON — a dab hand at improvisation — has won the 1983 Australian Rally crown. Dunk emerged from a rack of eight title candidates in the deciding Enka-Fill Alpine Rally in the Bright district of north-east Victoria.

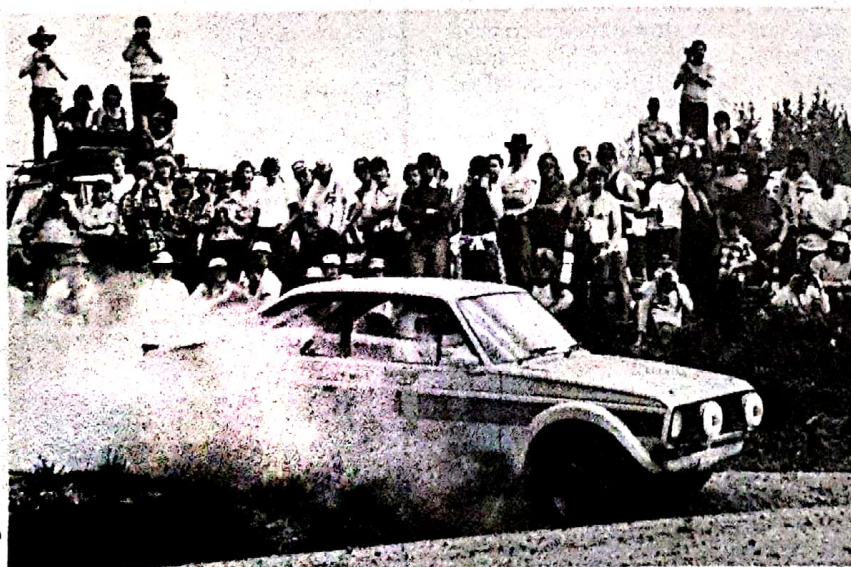
The Western Australian battler enlisted the David Kortlang ex-Precision Driving Team Commodore for the finale, recognising the Group A category as his only route to title success. The move paid high dividends. Ian Hill with navigator Phil Bonser

won their second championship event this year, thwarting suggestions that their previous win was attributed to local knowledge in the forests around Gosford during the Dunlop 2GO event. Their Alpine win was the result of a terrific tussle with Hugh Bell and Paul Paterson, and it wasn't until the final special stage that the winner of the 1983 Alpine was decided.

Ross Dunkerton snatched his fifth Australian Rally Championship crown, finishing eleventh outright and first in Group A, driving a Commodore which survived a protest on its Group A eligibility.

The Enka-Fill organisation joined the Light Car Club in celebrating the Diamond Jubilee of the Alpine Rally, and the small township of Bright had its population boosted 300 per cent as 95 competitors gathered to pit themselves against 720 kms of the most demanding rally trails. Only 50 were to finish.

The Datrally Developments Bluebird of Geoff Portman and Ross Runnalls was first on the road but, five sections later, was back on the trailer. The lowered front-end had grounded itself once too often, and



Greg Yard

Ian Hill added a second ARC round to his victory on home ground in the earlier 2GO. He came home too strongly for Hughie Bell although the result was in the balance until the dramatic final SS.

IAN HILL charges his Escort to victory while the Championship falls to **ROSS DUNKERTON** in unique circumstances.

Report from
GREG YARD.

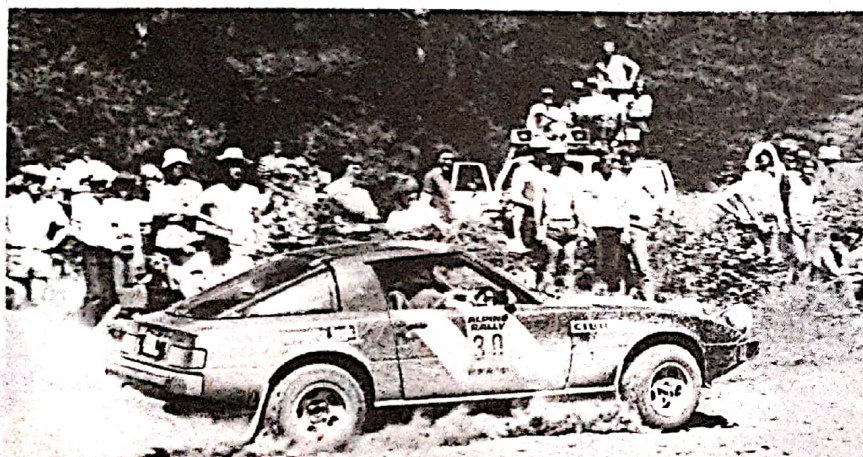
the oil pick-up in the sump had been snapped.

By Special Stage 6, a pattern was emerging: the Carr-Gocentas team was dominating. They had won five of the six stages and obviously wanted to go out on a high note.



A loose bonnet pin on the Japanese Connection Celica did little to halt the push-on attitude of Western Australian Gil Slater.

Greg Yard



The Group A Mazda RX-7 of Peter Johnson/Geoff Jones gave a good insight to the future, and Dunkerton something to chase.

Clive Slater and Steve Owers had to stop for 3½ minutes to replace a fan-belt in the Japanese Connection Celica. John Berne, with navigator Bruce Fullerton, hit a stump hidden behind a caution board, the BDA Escort limping out of the section, necessitating suspension replacement.

Hugh Bell and Paul Paterson were well on the pace, the Pedders Mazport Datsun in the top five. A small off had cost 20 secs, and a broken A-arm was replaced.

Championship leaders David Officer and Kate Hobson had to win this event to win the title, but were placed second. A cracked front brake disc on the Saas Coltspeed Galant was replaced. Bell was third; Hill's Gosford Dynotune BDA Escort, once second, was now fourth.

The 2.1-litre Datsun 120Y owned by Nissan mechanic Jamie Drummond, and crewed by George Fury-Monty Suffern, followed, George complaining about lack of power. Brian Smith-Peter Mignot had the Bertil Motors Galant up to sixth.

Carr had fastest time on 10 of the 12 stages completed, and was experiencing no problems in the Fiat.

The Division Two run to Albury saw several retirements.

Three sections into Division Two, and Smith was out — as was the Datsun 180B SSS of Chris Brown and Noel Richards, with a blown diff. Four sections later, Ian Swan would retire, along with Ron Cremen in the twin-cam Corolla.

Carr continued to extend his lead, the soft Pirellis working well. Hill was pressing hard, and the South Australian crew of Barry Lowe-Ted Dobrzynski was trying — evidenced by the cracked and sometimes missing panels on the Autosport Dazda.

The Bandiara Army Base section almost spelt disaster for Hill: the clutch had slipped, and an inspection at the Albury-Wodonga meal break showed no signs of wear.

Parts were replaced, and it was re-installed. They were back into second place, 2½ mins behind Carr and three secs in front of Officer. Fourth was Bell, then came Fury, Queensland Murray Coote in a Datsun 1800 coupe, Lowe, Ian and Ross Greenwood from Canberra in a Mk1 Escort, Rod Jones and Marc Blume in the Giddings of Bathurst Datsun, and Victorian Chris Wall-Jim Maude Datsun.

Slater had worked his way up from 45th to 19th and, leading Group A in a Mazda RX-7, were Peter Johnston and Geoff Jones, two mins clear of the Russell Worthington-Gary Kabel

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Any wonder Greg Carr talks about retirement? The Canberra flier was outstanding in the opening stages of the Enka-Fill but the Fiat could not survive the continued front-end pounding to which it was subjected.

Mazda 626 and a further 1½ minutes to Dunkerton.

The cars then transported back to Bright with a 9-km section known as Division Three. Bell was very quick, beating Carr by 5 secs, and Hill by 23 seconds, now to be second outright.

Sunday morning, 8.00 am, Division Four, and Carr had dropped seven minutes in SS23 with a gearbox failure. The next section he blitzed the field, then the diff blew up. A new one was installed, but the race against the late time had been lost by two mins, and they were ungraciously dumped out of the event. The retirements kept growing as Coote hit a log bridge and rolled, Greenwood entangled the Escort in trees, and Wayne Stapleton-Mal Sinfield rolled the Lancer a staggering 10½ times through a timing marker when a rear axle snapped at 160 km/h.

Hill and Bell were neck and neck, separated by 10 secs. Officer's diff was not working properly and he was gradually losing time to the leaders.

Slater was still charging through the field, and Peter Glover was making a late run after earlier problems. Berne could not rev the BDA Escort over 6000 rpm as the fan-belt would have flown off because of the stripped alternator bolt which, at each service, was taken out and more Locktite added.

Fury had taken a few fastest times and was looking to be a threat when the motor dropped a valve and stopped with only three sections to go. Lowe put the Dazda on its roof at a photographic point. It was quickly turned over but took five minutes to get started again, robbing him of a possible fifth outright placing.

At the Ovens service, and with two sections to go, an exhausted Ian Hill had taken 31 secs from Bell in the toughest section of the rally, which comprised 26 kms of first and second-gear bends all the way.

Meanwhile, Dunkerton, who had

started Division Four in 33rd position, had been taking time off both Johnston and Worthington — which he had not done in any of the previous three divisions. Running so far down the field, Johnston had no idea of his section times to compare. Maybe the tyres purchased from the George Fury crew made all the difference to the Commodore, but suddenly Dunkerton was making up time.

Braithwaites, rain-affected, had to be shortened, but there remained some large puddles, in one of which the Escort stopped with water in the ignition. It took one full minute to restart it. The win had been washed down the drain and, as the seconds ticked by, second place wasn't looking too promising.

Bell, now leading by 57 secs, started the section behind the Escort. But Bell was struggling early in the section after hitting a rock and bending a tie-rod.

The ill-handling Datsun struggled to the finish control, dropping 1 min 6 secs to Hill and, this time, not only swapping the lead but also the win.

Officer finished third, 1 min 40 secs behind, and still 6 mins ahead of Slater, 2 mins to Berne with a steady drive, then came four drivers separated by 1 min 50 secs — Chris Wall, Rod Jones, Peter Glover and Steve Ashton who just hung in there all weekend with Barry Lowe rounding off the top 10.

Group A entrant Peter Johnson took second place in the championship after the controversy which surrounded Dunkerton's final clearance as winner of that class in the Alpine.

David Officer is third in the title, with Geoff Jones the winning navigator from Kate Hobson.

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