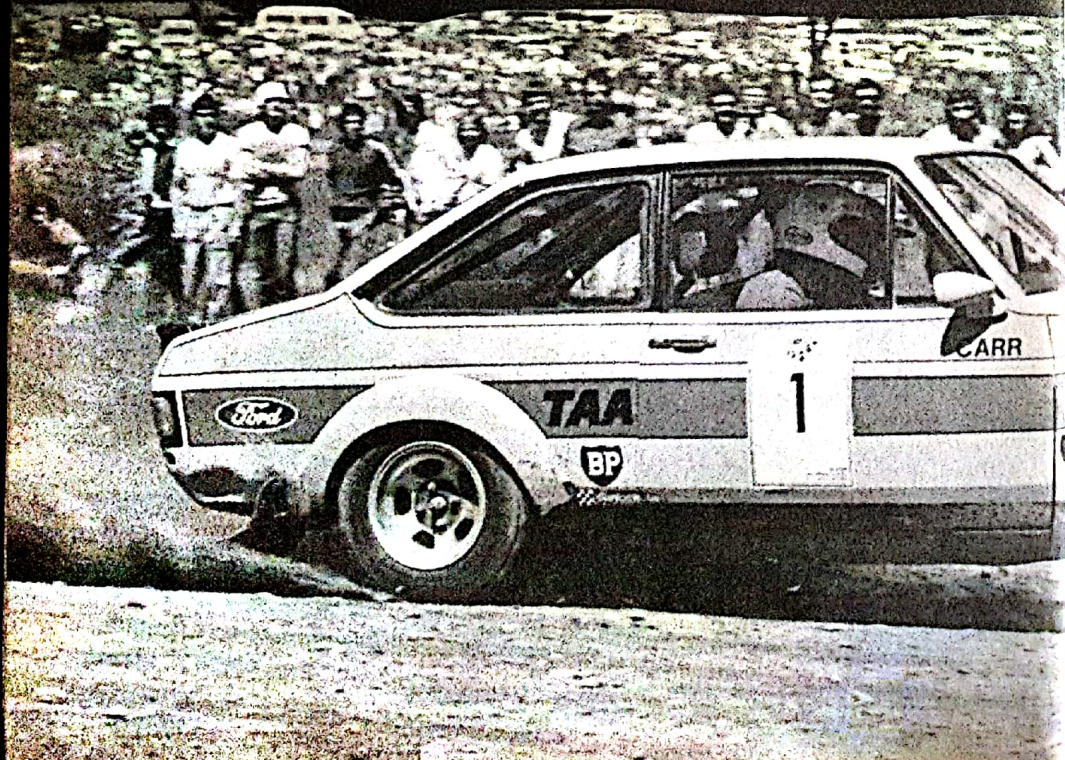


Greg Carr takes his fifth Alpine Rally but Fury proves his worth — Nick Munting covers the rally, photos by Paul Hogie.

SWAN SONG



Below: Greg Carr made few mistakes enroute to his last Escort win, and his fifth Alpine Rally.
Right: Fury was brilliant in the Datsun Stanza to take second.



IT'S FOUR O'CLOCK in the afternoon. The Escorts of Greg Carr and Colin Bond have been serviced after a marathon loss of points through the toughest ever Alpine Rally stage. Geoff Portman has all but destroyed the Autosport Datsun, and George Fury has even been using the odd bank to reshape the rear end of his "factory" Stanza . . . and Bob Watson is lost, to be found again as the division is cancelled with just 50 contestants starting the hellish roads it contained.

For some, it is a triumph; it puts Watson back in the race. For others such as Portman, well . . . he's upset, but he can keep going — just.

The 1980 Alpine Rally was the last of a great line of internationals — the event in 1981 to gain ARC status which will elevate its stature, which is odd in a country where an international should be the larger event.

In '80, the Fords dominated again (it's a classic case of "Castrolitis" in Alpine country), and Datsun came back again with George Fury who, after some years of neglect, here split the Fords, and the top Victorian and NSW privateers, eager to try their



Colin Bond drove hard for third, but an early excursion into a tree did little for the Escort body work!

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proress against the low budget "factory" drivers (in preparation for their anticipated low-key Manufacturers efforts in '81) came out in droves. Portman, Bell, Clark and the emergence of some new names in Fraser and Thompson were all good.

The event entries numbered some 105 – a sorry sight for organisers of the earlier-run Southern Cross Rally. Attention was focussed in three areas: the "official" Datsun Team, entered with George Fury and Monty Sufferin; the privateer Datsuns; two 1600 derivatives entered for the Portman/Runnals Autosport Team, and Hugh Bell (Pedders 1600) and, of course, the scourge of the Alpine Rally, Greg Carr/Fred Gocentas in their "swansong" for Ford, together with team boss Colin Bond and John Dawson-Damer.

Bob Watson fronted his Turbo Peugeot V6, the Brown brothers their Datspars 180B, and Murray Coote brought his Escort down from Queensland. The names ran on in a Who's Who of eastern Australian rallying. . . Warwick Smith, John Sproule, David House and Jim Uttleyamore.

Few entries failed to appear – Tony Masling's Stanza the main one – but conditions would see some highly graded crews out in a record short time once the proceedings were under way.

Stuart Lister and Tom Snooks had an interesting, traditional Alpine mapped out – a shortened event this year, operating solely from Bright and starting on the Saturday morning for two divisions through Saturday, then another for Saturday night and a fourth set down for Sunday morning, culminating around midday to early afternoon.

However, the best laid plans, etc., saw one division deleted and massive distances chopped from the remainder and, even so, thanks to the forestry help and the dedication of Director Lister, the event was a success and, despite the grumbles from some competitors, was well run.

The 9.00 am start at Bright was a grand affair with most of the town turning out to watch the spectacle. Carr led the complete field away, arriving late to do so, and Fury nearly stole the start! This was to be the Ford revenge for the Southern Cross Rally, or so the pre-event blurb ran. Certainly, the general outlook and consensus of opinion was "theirs".

The initial sections were not diabolical but they were slippery. Leader on the road, Carr was able to move the Escort into the leader board as well, taking some forty seconds from Fury who was using his "glass case" motor – a veteran of the '79 Southern Cross and previous events.

The slippery conditions created havoc . . . Bob Watson went off and was forced to winch on, baulking Murray Coote. At SS6, the picture was Carr going away in the now diabolical conditions while Geoff Portman held second, one second from Bond, and Hugh Bell right behind. The Brown brothers were taking it easy initially, and Ian Hill and Mike Bell took turns in overshooting intersections. Warwick Smith lost a tyre, and then his gear knob, and Peter Johnston had a wire come off the alternator.

Two unexpected turns of events then occurred. Fury failed to appear

From Myrtleford, through Yackandandah, the rally ran on to Tallangatta and division end.

There an incredible turn out of locals, rain, and a great meal, saw Greg Carr in the lead despite an off that reshaped the Escort's nose and required the winch to put them back on the road.

Now some five minutes behind, Geoff Portman held the rest at bay, the Autosport 1600 firing well, and Geoff's support crew swarmed around the course to encourage the "local" forester. Colin Bond, at this point, was just two seconds behind Geoff, the

Coote had slowed, determined to stay on the road.

The major retirement at this point was a disappointed Hugh Bell, the Pedders car out after first breaking a tie rod then experiencing an off that left the radiator unable to do much for cooling the engine. Fury had quietly (!) motored back to fourth, and the Browns pulled out. John Sproule also failed to appear after blowing his motor. The new forestry areas had been trying for some, but the battle at the back of the top ten was interesting, the NSW/Canberra crews vying for honours against the Victorians, vastly improved this year. Peter Johnston, Hill/Heaney, Warwick Smith and Peter Clark were all within seconds of each other, and Doug Thompson was in there as well.

Behind Fury, the order was Coote, Thompson, Smith, Clark, Johnston and Fraser, with some relatively unknowns creeping in as is traditional in this event.

What happened next was totally unexpected. The field, fresh from the lunch break, was ready for action and away it went, into SS15. Greg Carr was the first casualty, taking a stump and being forced to winch on for a maximum, then Portman went off and, to the amazement of those watching, drove carefully down the bank around the scenery and rejoined the road further on. Then, a short time later, he backed the car heavily into a bank and/or stumps . . . losing little time but putting the car over the next corner and off the road properly! Colin Bond stopped temporarily for a dud coil, and Fury revelled in the conditions, the nimble Stanza making up time all the while on the leaders . . . Coote backed off, his car one of few without body damage, and Clark spoiled his copy book with a "little un".

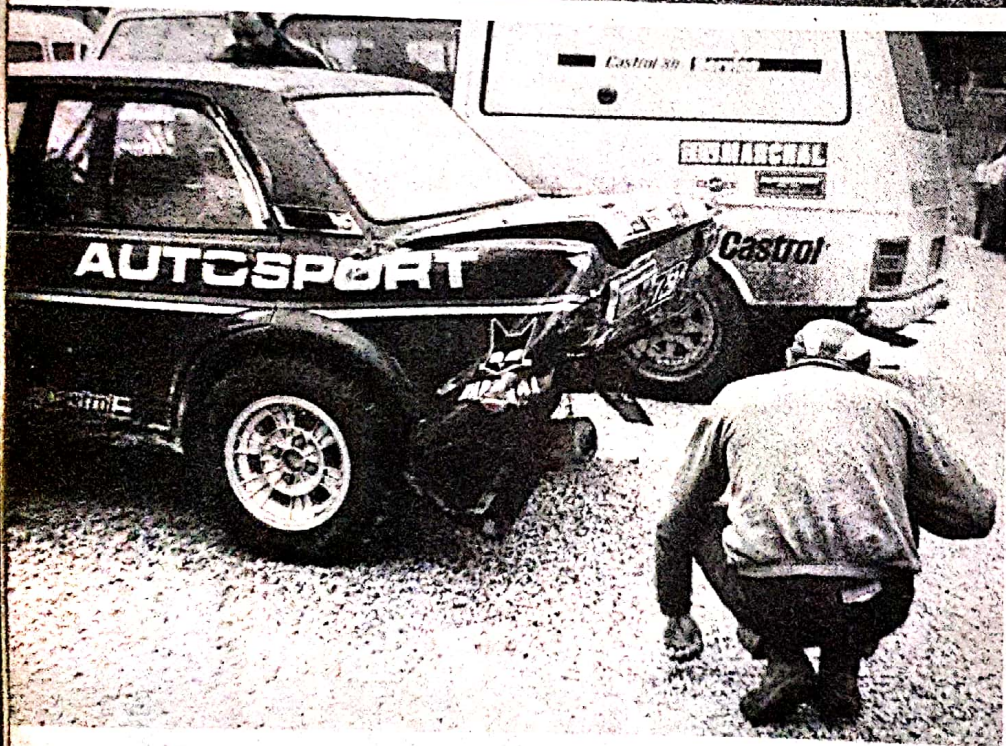
Watson went missing and was presumed lost, then, after some 50 cars had started the division, the radio links gave us the message that the division was cancelled!

For some, it was the end of the road. We had cars bogged, hopelessly, and some, like David House, had fallen off the mountains and become lost in the valleys below. In House's case, his Datsun was history, rolling heavily out of the event, while Graydon was also missing. Indeed, we found later that he'd disappeared in the first section of the event!

Bob Waterhouse, Graeme Whatman and Bob Uttley more were all out of the event and, down the field, so were some six others.

Careful and quick work by Stuart Lister (with the help of some competent foresters) saw three sections bring the field back to Bright for an early night. The scene there was incredible. Portman's car, still in second, looked like a refugee from outer

Right: Bob Watson performed well in the Turbo Peugeot but finished well down. Below: Portman was fourth but only after re-arranging the tail of the Autosport Datsun.



and, when he did, the Stanza was dripping copious amounts of oil. A notorious hump had forced the Stanza to land heavily on revised suspension, breaking the sump on the anti-roll bar. Luckily, a chance meeting in the forest with a spectator netted the Datsun duo two pints of oil and they limped to the service point for repairs, eventually regaining the field in a lowly ninth position.

Another shocking run at this point befell "hot shot" newcomer in Victoria, Shane Blanford, whose Datsun was running rich and fouling plugs, costing them many places.

time lost when he found a tree at the bottom of a steep hill and, with the surface affording no traction for braking, he slid sideways, jamming DD in his seat. "It was really very slow," said Colin, "about forty ks, maybe." The roof was dented, the door a write-off and John Gray's remarks unprintable, but the crew patched the damage, determined to throw the car back into the fray.

Colin's tree claimed others. It ended the Brown brothers brave run. They hit nose-first and removed their driver's front guard! Hill also experienced a minor off, and Murray

space, the boot aiming at the stars, but, according to Geoff, the handling was unaffected.

At Bright, the top ten were: Carr, Portman, Bond, and Fury (all battered), Murray Coote (no dents?), Warwick Smith, Peter Clark, Doug Thompson, John Fraser and Peter Johnston.

Sunday, at last, was really a day of reckoning. Portman was worried: the slick conditions were drying fast, and his car was not as powerful as those he was fending off. Geoff was worried that Bond and maybe Fury could catch and pass him. Bond was confident, and Fury very cool . . . and maybe too calm?

Carr, as convinced as ever that he was unbeatable, was right in such judgment. His lead was safe, save for the unseen or unexpected, and the Sunday run was well known to him.

First on to the traditional Bright speedway was Greg Carr, after an emu bob by drivers, crews, spectators and townspeople had swept the track for tacks dropped by locals to prevent the local bikes riding there.

Greg was fast — very fast — and he was neat. Portman, some four seconds slower, then Fury (on his second try after a timing failure) swept past Carr by a full second. Fury's time of 1.04 was a portent of what was to come — this was to be Fury on Sunday. Bond just wasn't in the race this

day, and his circuit time of 1.13s showed this.

Over the following sections, Fury opened out in a do-or-die bid for the lead — or second, whichever he could garner. SS28 saw Carr again, one second slower than the Datsun — then it happened . . . two seconds in SS29, 17 seconds in SS30, his time of 39 seconds taking him past Bond on 1.14 and Portman on 1.03, and these drivers were far quicker than anyone else!

Fury just kept on going, the Ford of Carr even losing ground, but Greg could afford this, and a finish margin of 4m 53s gave Greg Carr his fifth Alpine. However, the third place for Colin Bond was a bitter personal disappointment. He'd come through to beat Portman but superb driving by Fury had beaten them both. Colin was some 25s ahead of an equally disappointed Portman at the finish, Murray Coote claiming fifth, and a delighted Peter Clark in sixth place.

Doug Thompson finished just six seconds in arrears to Clark, but both crews relegated Warwick Smith to eighth place. He, in turn, was four seconds behind Thompson!

It was as close as that . . .

Thirty-two seconds down the road were Ian Hill and Ann Heaney, chased home by John Fraser and Ewan Higgins. In twelfth place was the Peugeot

Turbo of Bob Watson, the deletion of the Saturday afternoon division his salvation, and the canny Victorian running carefully and quietly to the finish, determined to stay on the road.

The frustrations of the season were taken out after the rally as, after the presentation, the annual (and last?) Datsun versus Ford cricket match was played, culminating in a mock brawl which, in turn, led up to the official presentation on Sunday night.

The event was a great win for Greg Carr — if his swan song for Ford. The "silly" season rumours tell us he's looking at various rides for '81, the best of which could be in the new Mazda RX-7 (a new model is due shortly with rear wheel disc brakes) which could well lend itself to rallying . . . The expertise is already here so, among the wild rumours, this one is worth listening to.

For Colin Bond, the news later in the month that Ford have withdrawn was not what he'd have wanted to hear. For Fury, his second place was a minor triumph but his Motogard and ARC results will be remembered.

In 1981, the Alpine goes national. It will probably still see the most competitors and the best roads and, if it is dry, then the dust and heat will replace the mud and rain of 1980, but we'll still be there — it's the rally you just cannot miss . . .

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