

ALPINE DINTA'S

DAVID OFFICER, ACCOMPANIED by his wife of just a few months, Kate, clinched his first Australian rally title with a fine win in the final round, the Enka-Fill Alpine Rally.

The OFFICERS, DRIVING THE SAAS-Rallyquip backed 2.4 litre Galant led for most of the event and held off a number of challenges to record the historic win. For David is was not only his first ARC but also his first Alpine victory while for Kate is represented the first ever Australian motorsport title to be won by a woman. It was also the first ever ARC won in a Mitsubishi.

Officer, arguably the most consistent of all ARC contenders this year, took victory by 53 sec. from former ARC title holder George Fury in the potent Datsun 120Y owned and built by Nissan works mechanic Jamie Drummond and navigated by Monty Suffern.

Third home was Queensland driver Murray Coote in his incredible 2100cc Datsun 1200 coupe, 8 mins 27 sec from behind Fury, while fourth was sensational South Australian Dazda Pilot Barry Lowe a further 5 minutes in arrears.

THE ENTRY

The field for the 61st Alpine Rally was to say the least sen-

sational with, in all, 99 cars entered, the best response for an ARC event this year.

Around ninety cars faced the starter's flag with those not making it to the starting line including Peter Nelson in his Triumph TR-7 V8, Rod Jones in his Datsun and Warwick Stansfield in his Stanza.

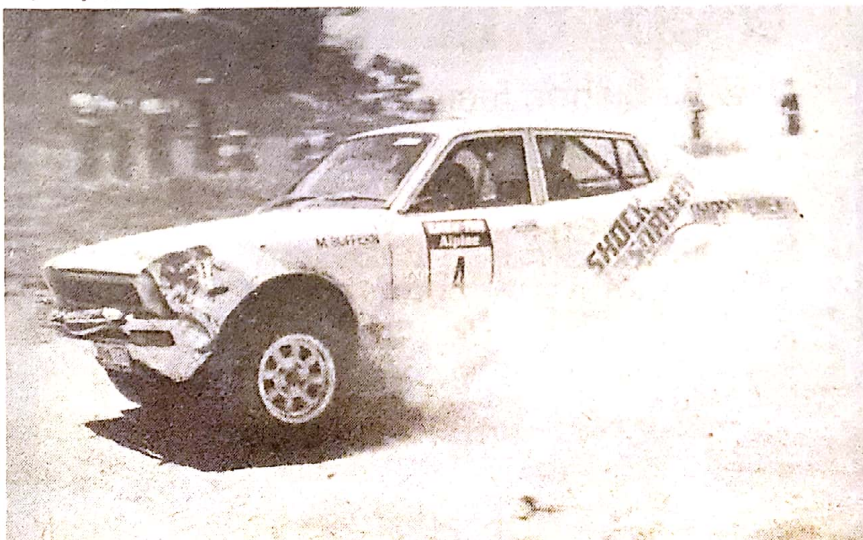
The field contained 14 National Classified drivers with Greg Carr, five-times winner of the event, taking the number 1 door patch. Geoff Portman was at 2, Officer 3, Fury at 4, Ian Hill at 5, and High Bell starting at 6 pm.

Ed Mulligan was the first of the PRC cars, starting his RX-7 at position 7 with the apparent main challenger to him for the PPC category, Wayne Bell in the borrowed Fiat Superbrava normally driven by Caroline O'Shannessy, right behind him at 8.

The other main contender for the PRC prizemoney was Jim Middleton in his now well used Commodore V8 and for this event the big car was coming out of the starting blocks at position 41.



ABOVE: The Glennie Datsun 200B blasts through a dusty section. **BELOW:** Bearing the signs of early confrontation, Fury's 120Y pushes on. Pics by Gavan Hatfield.



The main focus of attention was on who would take the coveted ARC crown — would it be pointscore leader Ed Mulligan, with 90 points from the bonus given to PRC cars, or would it be Dinta Officer, the hard driver who wanted his first crown so desperately. Not forgetting Greg Carr, who after a drought of good luck which stretches back to his first and only ARC crown in 1978, was equally motivated for victory.

Nissan Datsun was by far the best represented of the marques with 38 cars, followed by 14 Mitsubishi's, 14 Fords, 12 Mazdas, 6 Toyotas, two each of Holdens and Fiats and a lone Volkswagen and Peugeot.

DIVISION ONE

Early on Saturday morning the cars were being prepared for the onslaught on Victoria's North Eastern forests, the crews first having to face the fast Bright Dirt Circuit on the edge of the town that becomes Rally HQ each year.

The condition of the track for the 2 laps each driver was to face was a little rough in places, which made for some cautious pedalling and some upsets. Fastest time around the track fell to Ian Thorp, a Victorian grade 2 driver in a Datsun 1600, while second fastest fell to Howard Grove, a grade 3 from NSW in a powerful Dazda. None of the top contenders figured in the quick times as the track improved with use.

Into the forest and the Ovens plantation for some heart-in-mouth forest racing along the high narrow ridge roads, a feature of which are the giant drop offs with very little to break your fall apart from oxygen and dirt!

Greg Carr was immediately into step with a quick time over the mountainous stage in the Fiat's last rally appearance in this country.

From Ovens the rally headed North toward the historic town of Beechworth via some very tricky shire and quarry roads. A testament to the difficulty of the shire roads used was in

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stage 2 when George Fury was caught out by a sudden right hander on a particularly slippery surface, clobbering a tree with the Drummond built 120Y and being forced to winch back on to the road.

Barry Lowe was by far the luckiest on a similar piece of road clearing a path between 2 trees and taking out a wire fence before safely negotiating a path back onto the road through a paddock with very little time loss.

Portman was having trouble as well. In a tricky tight section through a disused quarry, the Bluebird's ignition was doused and the car came to a halt costing him some valuable time. Despite the unscheduled stop, Portman was able to continue on through the division setting some very fast times.

Into the Stanley plantation where crews and spectators alike were treated to some very fast and picturesque roads in classic Alpine country. Portman's driving was excellent and despite the earlier swim in the quarry he continued to set fastest times, placing him in the lead of the rally following a mishap for Greg Carr which dropped the Fiat driver back a number of places.

Carr had tipped the car on its side on a rough and rutted piece of road but was able to continue with very little damage to the fragile Fiat. The excursion meant however that the Carr/Gocentas team were dropped back to 8th place at the division halt in Beechworth.

Hugh Bell who had been driving the Pedders Mazda RX-7 so quickly, came a cropper on a fast and deceptive downhill stage finish, wedging the car between a bank and a tree and damaging it sufficiently to force retirement.

Ian Hill was driving strongly in the well-prepared and maintained ex-works BDA and was into fourth place. But that was to be shortlived, as in the stage prior to the mealbreak the Escort stripped teeth from the differential putting the Gosford

driver out of the rally at the Beechworth halt.



At the Division end in Beechworth it was Geoff Portman despite his problems leading the rally by 20 secs from Officer in the Galant who was 18 secs ahead of the retiring Ian Hill, with West Aussie Clive Slater in the Japanese Connection Toyota Corolla 47 secs behind in fourth and Murray Coote breathing down his neck just 7 secs in arrears rounding off the top five.

The remainder of the top ten was made up of Lowe in the Dazda, young 20-year-old Bathurst hot shot Greg Brown in his Datsun, Peter 'Pud' Thompson in the potent 240 RS Stanza, Greg Carr and Peter Glennie in the Murray Coote prepared 200B.

The service area in Beechworth was a hive of activity as the service crews battled with the cars and the clock in the slender 30 minute time allowance they had to repair the damage inflicted on the machines to this point. Victims of the conditions in the first division included Ian Hill, Hugh Bell, Bob Watson in the R5 Renault Turbo with mechanical failure, Gregg Hansford in the BF Goodrich/Ian Boetcher RX-7 with a

broken diff and Jon Waterhouse with a blown apex seal in the Mazda's motor.

DIVISION TWO

From the break it was out to the marvellous Flat Rock Road through the Beechworth Prison Farm, a slippery but very fast shire type road and then back into the plantation around Stanley for more of the same Alpine Forest running crews had become accustomed to before lunch.

The temperature had risen dramatically from the cool of the morning and drivers were contending with the unpleasant dust and heat as they battled to complete the division.

Short sharp stages were the order of the day and Officer and Portman were having a battle royal with the Galant driver gaining the upper hand and hauling in the 20 sec deficit to the big Bluebird, while Portman was also contending with the problem of breaking axles.

Albury driver Roger Moll was lucky to escape serious injury after spectacularly end-for-ending his Datsun Sunny on a treacherous uncautioned downhill left hander. Moll's na-

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vigator, Greg Austin, escaped with a broken toe whilst Moll was unharmed.

Clive Slater had the Japanese Connection car really percolating and was moving up on Portman and Officer while Fury was also moving up on the leader board after his early problem in Division One.

Portman was having to contend with the Bluebird's voracious appetite for half shafts the car having eaten two of them by the end of division 2.

The PRC class was interesting with Wayne Bell in the Fiat leading Middleton (having a trouble free run in the Commodore) ahead of David Adams in the ET Nissan Turbo and Mulligan in the Mazda.

Greg Brown lost his top ten placing when he crashed his Datsun out of the rally while Brian Smith in his Mitsubishi Sigma had rolled.

Howard Grove in his Dazda had been posting quick times but this was to finish when the car rolled in the 4th stage of the division on a tight left-hander, putting him out of the rally.

After 5 stages in the Stanley Plantation it was back toward Bright with a long transport broken by a short 2km stage and then a blast through the old Porepukah Quarry taking crews to the evening meal break. An hour's halt in Bright and there was still plenty of work for the crews to complete on the cars that were still in the event.

The leader board saw Officer

leading by 9 secs from Portman with Greg Carr recovering from his early setbacks to be in 3rd just 32 sec behind Portman, while Fury was 3 min 33 behind in fourth with Barry Lowe fifth, down 21 secs.

Following Lowe was Coote, Thompson, Albury Escort driver Gordon Douglas and Queensland Stanza pilot Denis Brown.

DIVISION THREE

The night running was to be confined to the hills close to Bright in the Braithwaites and Porepukah plantations and the spectacle of around seventy sets of extremely high powered driving lights in the hills around town was an incredible sight.

Carr continued to take time from Officer who was now driving a well measured rally to try and ensure a victory. Carr had the Fiat moving and was determined that this was to be his sixth Alpine and his second ARC title, and with the retirement of Portman mid-way through the division with yet another broken half shaft, the Fiat driver was brought just that little bit closer to his target — Officer.

Retirements continued with Wayne Bell going out late in the division with electrical problems in the Fiat and handing the PRC lead over to Jim Middleton in the Commodore while David Adams, who despite problems with the turbocharger on the ET, was driving very quickly to be in third.

Others to retire included Clive Slater with Phil Horan in the ex-works Stanza with a

broken exhaust and Jim Kennedy in his rotary turbo 626 Mazda with engine problems.

Fury had a lucky moment with the 120Y when the alternator bracket bolt came undone causing the lock device on one of the oil lines to loosen, draining the car of oil. However the fault was noticed before the engine was damaged just a chip shot away from destruction.

When cars were driven into Parc Ferme at the end of the division in Bright, it was Officer clinging to a slender 9 sec lead over the flying Carr while Fury was in third 2 min 44 further back in third, in turn 4 min 13 sec ahead of Lowe in fourth, 14 secs in front of Coote.

The top ten was completed by Thompson in the Stanza, Peter Glennie in the 200B, Gordon Douglas, David Jones in the ex-round Australia Commodore and West Aussie, Rolly Waters in his Escort RS 2000.

DIVISION FOUR

The long final division is the traditional sorting out time in the Alpine and this year was to be no exception.

Carr immediately took the initiative by setting a fast time on the dirt circuit and then taking time off Officer again in the first forestry stage in Ovens Plantation. But as soon as Carr hit the lead the Fiat expired, putting a conrod through the side of the block and ending the Canberra driver's bid for the title.

It was now virtually Officer's rally as long as he drove sensi-

bly and quickly enough to maintain the gap back to Fury.

Main retirement for Sunday was Peter Thompson, who crashed the Stanza out of the event.

From the Ovens Plantation it was across to the south of Myrtleford for some hot, dusty running.

Barry Lowe was dropping late running time to stay in the event, and thus was dropping down the running order. Although the Dazda had mechanical problems, he was determined to bring the beast home in the top five.

Gordon Douglas had trouble with his Escort late in the Division, which dropped him out of the top ten.

Fury was pushing on hard, and ripping time off the cautious Officer — but the gap (2 min 51 sec at the beginning of the day) was an awful lot to bridge...

With the last forestry stage in the Braithwaites Plantation, the gap from Officer to Fury was narrowed to under a minute but the short stage was not long enough for Fury to bridge the gap and he returned to Bright 53 secs in arrears of Officer.

Fury had a giant lead over third placed Murray Coote, who had driven well all day to move to third ahead of Barry Lowe who was 3 min 14 behind in fourth with Peter Glennie fifth, down 5 min 3 sec.

David Jones drove a fine rally to have the big 6 cylinder Commodore into 6th and Denis Brown drove into 7th in the Stanza ahead of Waters in the Escort and former Victorian Champ Garry Harrowfield in his Datsun 1600 and Karl Robertson in his BDA Escort 10th.

Jim Middleton clinched the PRC class from David Adams who suffered overheating problems but still managed to finish within a minute of the Commodore while Mulligan took third in class, 3 min 50 behind Middleton.

For Officer a fine victory and a well deserved first ARC title. The hope is that this fine Victorian can find support to keep rallying next year.

— JON THOMSON

BELOW: Murray Coote bounces the Datsun 1200 off a bank as he heads for a fine third place.

