

Car champs line up for the great rally

FIVE minutes — just 300 earth shattering seconds — in a rally car driven by a rally driver in rally conditions is enough to convince you of one of two things ...

You love it, or you hate it.

It's hardly joy this rallying business, being pulverised over some of the worst roads in the nation, bouncing from pothole to pothole half as deep again as the car, and travelling at a speed which based on some theory of relativity is near lightning-pace.

But brother! It is exciting, exhilarating, exhausting and extremely good motoring fun.

They will be at it in earnest this weekend when 90 of the best rally crews in Australia will engulf our sleepy little scenic town of Bright to take part in the great Enka-fill Alpine Rally which will decide the Australian Rally Champions of 1984.

They'll drive from 8 a.m. Saturday until about 1 a.m. Sunday and then line up again at 8 a.m. Sunday and finish about 4 p.m.



In that time, they will cover 450 km of special competitive rally stretches and another 800 km driving from stage to stage on the public roads in between competitive sections.

The competitive sections are closed to the public during the rally — not that too many sane motorists would want to use these horror strips anyway — but safety is foremost.

It is all right for the devotees to go like bats out of Hades at the risk of doing themselves grave harm, but not when Mum and Dad and the kids are out for a Sunday drive.

So, you're not sure that you've ever heard of this Enka-fill Alpine Rally?

It's been around for a long time. The first rally was in 1921. It ran for seven days over 1600 km and was described then as "one of the most, if not

By TERRY VINE

the most, strenuous automobile trial in the world's history of motoring."

Given that the world's history of motoring wasn't that deep then anyway, it was a pretty fierce description.

Early Alpines placed great emphasis on reliability, and just lifting the bonnet cost the crew two points.

Finishing the rally in those days was regarded as an achievement, and still is today.

Over the years, the Alpine has changed direction. In the 1950s, it was primarily a navigational and car reliability test.

Then, in 1963, it became the first fully non-navigational major trial in Australia. It led the way into a style of motor sport which saw the International Southern Cross, the Australian Rally Championship and the Castrol Rally born and blossom.

Navigators became co-drivers and vehicle reliability and speed driving skill became all important.

By the 50th running in 1970s, the first changes to the special stage format arrived.

The rally was set in the pine plantations of north-eastern Victoria, sections were shorter and tighter and provision was specifically made for spectators.

And so we have the Alpine of today.

David Adams loves the Alpine.

He and navigator Chris Randell have been rallying for six years. This weekend, they are running in a new Nissan Pulsar Turbo, which according to Adams is



DAVID ADAMS . . . "You just never know what's around the next corner or over the next rise."

still in the developmental stage.

"I haven't had time to prepare it well enough to win this year's Alpine" he says. "But next year it may be a different story."

Even so, he has fitted gas shock absorbers all round, heavy duty springs and strengthened the body work, which is all in addition to the normal rallying requirements of roll cage, special seats which wrap round you like a towel to stop you being thrown all over the place, double shoulder harness seat belts and the rear upholstery torn out to make way for an extra spare wheel and tyre.

Next year, he plans engine modifications dependent on how far he will be allowed to go, an increase in turbo boost, limited slip differential and a change in gear box ratios.



If all that sounds expensive, you're right. But, says Adams, it is nowhere near as expensive as racing on the road circuits.

To put it bluntly, driving in these cars on rally surfaces is as rough as guts. It's murder on man and machine.

But it leaves the heart racing like you wouldn't believe.

Imagine for a moment being on a dusty potholed road with the dust

hanging about like a London fog, and flying over the crest of a hill at full bore to find a hairpin bend 20 metres down the lane.

There is a frantic rush for brakes, gears, clutch, and steering wheel and, if you are the navigator, the first damned thing you can get hold of.

Then it's round the hairpin, tail out, car bouncing sideways all four off the deck in a shower of stones and dust, a final lurch, the straightening up and zoom! away down the track at full blast.

As Adams says: "That's the great thing about rallying. It could be a car or it could be an animal, or it could be a creek or a mud bog."

"But whatever it is, you've got to be good enough to get by it."

This weekend, there are three crews which will be fighting it out for championship honors — former champion Greg Carr of Canberra in an ex-works Fiat, David "Dinta" Officer, of Melbourne in a Galant, and Ed Mulligan of Sydney in a Mazda RX7.

Add to that field a couple more hotshots in another former champion Geoff Portman in a Nissan Bluebird and noted sedan car driver George Fury in a Nissan 120Y and you get a better idea of the variance of the drivers and their machines in an event like the Enka-fill Alpine.

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