

# BLACK STUMP TOUR OF THE CENTRAL WEST

## EVENT REPORT

Whilst most eyes were on Corsica and the World Rally Championship this weekend, another rally event was being held in Australia

The Black Stump Tour of the Central West was the third event of this type run by the Historic Rally Club of NSW & ACT, and was based in Parkes, NSW. In 2019, the event was run under the new CAMS road rally rules. The three day event comprised of some 1400km of closed road sections, khanacross tests and navigation tests with minimal transport - a mix of rallying tests from the 1960s to the current day.

Cars entered were primarily historic, the oldest car being a 1955 Peugeot 203 of Gerald Lee and Ian Reddoch, but modern 2WD cars were also invited to compete, including a Peugeot 205 and Mitsubishi Mirage. The caliber of crews was also strong, with entries from New South Wales, Victoria, Queensland and Tasmania. Former Australian Rally Champion Bob Watson headed the field with a number of former and current state champions and endurance rally experts throughout the field.

The event comprised of numerous sections.

- **The Road Runner** – scored on the event's speed tests.
- **The Barry Ferguson Classic** – for expert level navigators.
- **Elementary Navigation** – for introductory level navigators.
- **Back to the 60s** – navigation sections run by the entire field.
- **The Night Owl Trial** – a navigation trial run on the first night of the event.

### DAY 1

The rally started in Parkes on the Thursday, with the first day comprising of a run to Narromine and Peak Hill with four closed road sections in the Cowal State Forest. The Volvo 242 of Ian Swan and the Mitsubishi Mirage of Stephen Turner shared the first stage win, before the modern Mirage won the following three tests, with Mike Batten and Peter Reed (Datsun 1600), Graham Wallis and Brian Ward (Peugeot 205) and Steve Blair and Stuart Snooks (Datsun Sunny) all applying pressure to the leading duo. Unfortunately the leg claimed the Ford Cortina of Gwyn Mulholland and John Fraser, their Ford Cortina Mk 1 succumbing to a lack of the required number of gears.

Departing Peak Hill at dusk, crews were faced with the Night Owl sub event, a challenging navigation run in the dark with many road realignments throwing challenges up for the crews. Alan Upton and Mark Laidlay (Datsun 1600) showed their class by only dropping 75 points for the leg, with second place shared by Queenslanders Don Gibson and Laurie Garth (Peugeot 504), Wallis/Ward and Blair/Snooks).

Challenging navigation spelled disaster for the leading Road Runner crews of Turner/Newton and Swan/Lee, who both became lost early in the Night Owl and were unable to make the start of the test. This allowed the trio of Batten, Wallis and Blair to close the gap to the two leaders during the night stage.

## **DAY 2**

The second day dawned warm, with a long and more difficult day of 8 speed sections, as well as numerous navigation tests between Parkes and Condobolin. The Gibson Peugeot 504 remained in Parkes during the morning for exhaust repairs, whilst the Swan Volvo retired with broken wheel studs during a navigation section. The first 3 speed sections were in the tight and technical Murda State Forest, before more tests at Elwick Farm. A heavy rainstorm forced the cancellation of the Elwick Farm tests, as leading crews found the conditions diabolically slippery. Amazingly, five kilometres down the road, the Murda State Forest remained dry, so four tests were still completed for the day.

With Ian Swan retired, the Turner/Newton Mirage blitzed the field winning all four tests in his Mirage, with the Wallis/Ward Peugeot running a close second. Whilst Blair and Batten continued an intense battle for third and first historic car. A close day of competition in the Barry Ferguson Classic navigation was also had, with Blair/Snooks showing their class by winning the day on 29 points, with Upton/Laidlay on 60 and the booming Ford Falcon of John Cooper and Ross Warner finishing just behind on 62 points. Sadly Bob Watson and Classic Outback Trial Director, Phil Bernadou retired with overheating problems.

## **DAY 3**

The third day consisted of a loop around Parkes, with more navigational tests, punctuated by closed road sections in the Blow Clear and South Strahorn State Forests. The immaculate Saab 96 of Doug Fernie and Paul Patterson retired (supposedly a gearbox linkage?)

Further rainstorms over night created more tricky conditions for competitors with plenty of standing water to contend with on the navigation and speed sections. Those running first on the road would find the going tough, with the red dirt in South Strahorn not providing much grip for the early runners. An impressive drive by the Datsun crew of Upton/Laidlay saw them claim their first stage win, and not fall out of the top 3 all day. Turner/Newton would hold on for the outright win from Wallis/Ward, with the top 3 historic cars being separated by minimal points. The newly built Datsun Sunny of Blair/Snooks took the win from Batten/Reed, with Upton/Laidlay's late charge displacing Rob Mifsud and Mal Sinfield's Datsun Stanza for third.

In the Barry Ferguson Classic navigation, Blair/Snooks continued to be the class of the field, only 4 points on the final day, and 47 overall. Upton/Laidlay finished second on 156 points and Batten/Reed finished in third.

The Back to the 60s event was a tight finish, with the top 3 crews only dropping time penalties during the event, and being separated by only 3 points. In the surprise of the event, road rally rookies Turner/Newton claimed the win by one point from Blair/Snooks, with Wallis/Ward finishing in third.

The "most important prize", the Barry Ferguson Interstate Challenge Trophy, was awarded to Victoria over NSW, with the combined five best Road Runner and Barry Ferguson Classic scorers contributing to close 16 – 14 point win.

The event itself was a credit to the Historic Rally Club of NSW / ACT and it ran smoothly over the three days. Directed by Australian Rally Hall of Fame member Dave Johnson, who along with Clerk of the Course Arthur Evans, set a challenging but enjoyable course for competitors.

## **RESULTS.**

### **Barry Ferguson Classic**

1. Steve Blair / Steuart Snooks – 47 points
2. Alan Upton / Mark Laidlay – 156 points
3. Mike Batten / Peter Reed – 241 points

### **Road Runner (Historic Only)**

1. Steve Blair / Steuart Snooks – 44 points
2. Mike Batten / Peter Reed – 59 points
3. Alan Upton / Mark Laidlay – 74 points

### **The Night Owl**

1. Alan Upton / Mark Laidlay – 75 points
2. Don Gibson / Laurie Garth – 120 points
2. Graham Wallis / Brian Ward - 120 points
2. Steve Blair / Steuart Snooks – 120 points

### **Back to the 60s**

1. Stephen Turner / Mitch Newton – 11 points
2. Steve Blair / Steuart Snooks – 12 points
3. Graham Wallis / Brian Ward – 14 points

Scheduled for about the same time again next year.... End of March