

THE START OF RALLIES

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1969 the Shell Silver Fern rally, starting in Taupo and running for 4 days and nights, with a nights rest in Auckland at the half-way point, and finishing in Wellington.

The Northland Car Club [I like to think] led New Zealand in the number of hillclimbs held per year and also was strong in car trialling. A bunch of us got together at Bruce Pullmans house and discussed entering this event, which looked like a combination of trialling and hillclimbing.

Four cars entered from our club. Neil Johns, Glen McLean Triumph 2000 Mk1 Pi, Bruce Pullman, Brian Skudder Cortina Mk1, Noel Millar, Malcolm Pullman Isuzu Bellett and Max Atkins, Bruce Burling Datsun 1600.

Bruce converted a standard Mk1 Cortina to GT specs and I stripped and checked through the gearbox and we fitted an oil cooler. We did have some problems with severe steering vibrations, which after adjusting and replacing everything in sight mysteriously disappeared! Then we're off to Taupo. At Taupo there was a slight leak, quickly fixed, at the oil cooler, then we lined up to start.

The first stage everybody went through twice which was a good way to settle in particularly as Bruce and I were going to drive alternate sections. This was good fun but actually not very practical because one of my strengths was map reading and Bruce was a very good rally driver.

However we were doing well, up in the top ten when disaster struck. Early in the second night with Bruce driving we were howling flat whack down this straight when the road disappeared over a brow down to the right, then hard left onto a one-way bridge and then hard right off the end of the bridge. I am convinced if I'd been driving we wouldn't have made the bridge, but Bruce threw us onto the bridge, a quick punch on the brakes then tried to throw it within a one-way bridge for the hard right off the end. We didn't quite make it and slammed into a bank with our left front corner. Crikey staggering out of a car in the pitch black to put out the safety triangle was an experience.

The sway bar mount was torn out of the chassis [and this locates the lower control arm] so we tied the sway bar to the bumper with fencing wire and carried on. The boot lid was distorted letting in exhaust fumes and I finished up barfing at every stage finish and wished somebody would just shoot me and put me out of my misery.

But we pressed on, welding up the sway bar mount at a rest halt and eventually finished seventeenth.

Grady Thompson Holden Monaro V8 won with Johnsey 2nd. I remember seeing Paul Adams Cortina GT broken down one stage and I'm sorry I don't know the placings of the other club members. I have been a co-driver for Graham Wright, Bruce Pullman and Neil Johns and I have nothing but admiration for their skill.

I am also proud of how Northland Car Club members have continued to do well in rallying and the rally that is organized annually in the Whangarei area is a credit to the Club and it's members.

Brian Skudder



Noel Millar, Malcolm Pullman
Max Atkin, Bruce Burling
Bruce Pullman, Brian Skudder
Neil Johns



N. Johns with his Triumph 2.5 P.I.

Working on their Corina GT are left to right, B. Pullman and B. Skudder

Promotional photo of Neil Johns Mk2 Triumph Pi



Neil Johns, Rowan McLean on the Heatway Rally.