

RALLY REVIEW

The 1977 Proposals

WHEN the CSI succumbed to outside pressures in the late 'sixties and created what was then called the International Rally Championship (not until a few years later was the series given the added respectability and status of "World") the choice of events was simple; one merely took the few established rallies of recognised toughness, calibre and popularity, and lumped them together into a series. Deciding which were worth including and which were not was an easy matter; their reputations took care of that.

But in the intervening years the selection process has become more complicated, for the CSI, through its Rally Working Group, has set up an inspection system which is guarded jealously since it affords the opportunity for members of the inspectors' panel to visit rallies all over the world at the expense of their organisers.

Reputation among competitors, the main criterion for judgement on any rally, is ignored and the reports of two visiting CSI inspectors are taken as the only worthwhile evidence of the acceptability of an event as a World Championship qualifier. Not only is this practice an expensive one for organisers, who have to foot the entire bill for inspections, but it is dangerously single-tracked. With everything resting on the opinions of two men whose personal likes and dislikes can so easily colour their judgement, it can often happen that a subconscious bias against a country caused by some unfortunate mischance at the airport of arrival (a lost suitcase, for instance) can, by sheer human failing, result in a less than favourable and perhaps unjustified report of the event being inspected.

Quite naturally, organisers are keen to have good reports and some of them do what they can to see that inspectors have red carpet treatment—the more affluent the organisers, the deeper the carpet pile. The attentions of the inspectors are directed towards the good points, whilst the bad ones are quietly kept as much in the shadowy background as possible. With inspectors chosen from among the more regular, experienced competitors, such selective tactics would not be possible, particularly if the competitor-inspectors were chosen at random. In Britain, the RAC sends report forms to competitors on British events, and their identities are not automatically revealed to organisers. Such a system works effectively, and we have every reason to believe that a wider range of opinion would lead to more reliable inspection reports less likely to be affected by bias, particularly as several members of the present panel of inspectors are themselves organisers of rallies in the World Championship.

Having thus disposed of how inspection reports are compiled, we now move to how they are finally dealt with. Selection is done by the Rally Working Group and this then goes to the CSI itself for ratification. That took place this year during the CSI's annual October congress in Paris, attended by dele-



To a backcloth of sea and rugged coastline an Alpine-Renault 110 hurtles along a typical Tour de Corse road.

gates from all over the world. A considerable amount of lobbying took place both for championship status and for votes for committee membership, and the charged atmosphere at the time was particularly noticeable. Finally, among the other products of the congress, a list of qualifiers for the 1977 World Rally Championship for Makes was produced. We have no comment to make on its content, but there is certainly room for considerable (and manifest) improvement in the manner in which it is compiled.

Of the European Championship we can say little except that it remains a complicated and top-heavy series of no less than 43 events, again with a points system based on coefficients varying from one to four. The main point in its favour is that it is for drivers, not makes of car, which means that at least there can be a live person to receive the laurels at the end of the year.

There has been much lobbying over the years for the World Championship to be for drivers as well as cars, so that the sport would benefit from the public recognition of a World Champion. The CSI, perhaps under pressure from car manufacturers, have steadfastly turned this down, but for 1977 they have cast a sop in the direction of the campaigners for a World Championship for Rally Drivers by putting up what they have called "The FIA Cup for Rally Drivers", a silly title if we have ever heard one. A champion should be called just that, not merely the recipient of yet another FIA cup. In any event, how many men in the street would know what the FIA is, we wonder?

To make matters worse, the cup will be awarded from results of rallies in the World Championship, the European Championship and a third series of just four events, various coefficients again being employed to further complicate matters. What ordinary enthusiast will be able to follow such a series without keeping complicated charts? Far better that a short, crisp series, with simple points allocation, be used to find a World Champion

so that all may follow progress with ease.

For some years the weekly newspaper *Motoring News* has kept the score of points which might have been allocated in a World Championship for Drivers, based on the simple list of events in the world series for makes, and using the same coefficient-free points system. Thus they have arrived at a sort of unofficial World Champion. We have, in the past, expressed agreement with this and we were pleased to see, at the end of 1975, that publications in other countries followed suit. We trust that they will do likewise at the end of 1976, and successive years until the CSI agrees to make it possible for someone to become an official World Rally Champion.—G.P.

WORLD RALLY CHAMPIONSHIP, 1977

Jan. 22nd-29th	Monte-Carlo Rally	MC
Feb. 11-13th	Swedish Rally	S
Mar. 1st-6th	Portuguese Rally	P
April 7-11th	Safari Rally	EAK
May 1st-7th	South Pacific Rally	NZ
May 28th-3rd	Acropolis Rally	GR
Aug. 26-28th	Rally of the 1000 Lakes	SF
Sept. 15-18th	Créteil du Québec	CDN
Oct. 5-8th	Sanremo Rally	I
Nov. 5-6th	Tour of Corsica	F
Nov. 18th-23rd	Lombard RAC Rally	GB

Tour Of Corsica

WERE I ever to be asked by W.B. or D.S.J. to show them something about what present-day rallying is like, two events would spring to mind and I would be torn between throwing them in at the deep end by letting them loose in the African bush during the Safari, and taking them to the wild, craggy, often tempestuous island of Corsica for the rally which is undoubtedly the nearest thing to unspoilt, untrammelled road racing without actually being given that name.

The Tour of Corsica is appropriately named when you consider that it is an event which visits most parts of the island, but it is by no means a cavalcade of a touristic nature. The island's roads are narrow, tortu-

ously twisty and usually bordered by virtually unguarded drops as they climb and descend the high mountains, and it is on such natural roads, without the artificial blemishes of billiard-table tarmac, sky-high advertising hoardings and those ugly barriers, that the whole contest takes place.

Add to this the unpredictable, sometimes violent autumn weather, often bringing gales, storms, floods, landslides, uprooted trees, mud, shale, sand, carpets of soggy leaves and sometimes even ice and snow and you will be part of the way towards appreciating that this is no event for the faint-hearted. The meat of the contest lies in the special stages, but the inter-stage sections are by no means easy and a stop for the simplest of tyre changes or a quick refuelling job has to be done with maximum urgency. The police do a fine job keeping the roads closed, but since all Corsica seems to stop for the event the problems in this direction are few.

It has been perfectly obvious for some years that the organisers of the rally wanted to run an event as close to a real road race as they could get without actually breaking any laws. To do this, they simply took the basic structure of a rally, gave it the character of a race and called it the former rather than the latter. We have often likened it to something approaching the Targa Florio, but this year the organisers came out into the open with their ambition to create in the Tour of Corsica what the enthusiasts in Brescia some fifty years ago eventually built into the Mille Miglia.

The surprising thing is that there do not seem to be obstacles in their way, which is a refreshing change in times of strangling controls and restrictions. Last year, the Tour of Corsica organisers reduced the number of their special stages but increased the lengths of two of them to something like 150 kilometres apiece. This year they ran four such long stages which, together with five shorter ones, produced an average stage length of 80 kilometres, making most other European special stages, particularly those in Britain, look puny by comparison. In 1977 the progression may be continued with six long stages, and eventually the competition may be divided into eight stages, each using the towns of Bastia and Ajaccio for start or finish but each having different routeing, turning the whole thing into a highly competitive road race from beginning to end.

The size of the island is against having a true point-to-point, but by dividing it all up into something like eight parts it would be the nearest thing imaginable to a road race whilst still within the sporting (and legal) definition of a rally.

There was a time when the mountains of Corsica echoed the roty sounds of prototypes, but World Rally Championship status put an end to that, for the CSI permits cars of just groups one to four to take part in its championship qualifiers. Of course, rallying is just a little more than a pastime for saloons nowadays, and in Corsica this year there was the usual array of Stratos, Alpines, Porsches and the like, all of them capable of providing optimum performance on the surfaces and in the conditions which they had to face. Perhaps, then, a less restricted formula would serve no useful purpose on the

grounds that a car built between no specific margins would be no better performer in the hard, autumn weather of the Corsican mountains than those which are being used there at present.

The rally runs for some 26 hours, from mid-Saturday to just after mid-Sunday, with a very short stop at half distance. Headquarters, where both start and finish are located, alternate year by year between Ajaccio in the South-West and Bastia in the North-East, both coastal towns with car-ferry terminals and international airports. This time it was the turn of Bastia where conditions were so blustery that at the airport they had to rope aircraft to steel rings let into the concrete surface of the apron. They have learned the hard way about such matters.

One doesn't usually associate tarmac events with the need for stamina and endurance, for the ability to keep fatigue at bay is usually required only for the longer rallies such as the Safari, the Morocco Rally and those of years gone by such as the Liège. But crews have to work so desperately hard during the 26 hours of the Tour of Corsica, without the breaks of the stop-go events more common in Europe, that they usually finish completely exhausted but nevertheless immensely satisfied. It is a rally almost from the pages of classic motoring history, where competitors pit themselves against whatever the organisers and Mother Nature contrive to serve up, without a single thought of shying off because something or other is too dangerous. What would some racing drivers say, we wonder, if they were asked to compete on a circuit so high in the mountains that leaving the road on any one of countless unguarded bends would be akin to falling off the edge of the world?

Before the Tour of Corsica, Lancia led the World Championship fairly comfortably, but not decisively, from Opel. In 1975 there was exactly the same situation, and in both cases the result served to clinch the series for the Italian team. But it wasn't the ideal result for them in 1975, for their own cars retired and the event was won by a Stratos prepared and entered by Frenchmen and driven by Frenchmen. That undoubtedly dulled the edge, and it would have been so much better for them had the whole thing been an Italian job.

This year the same situation arose, for when the event settled down it was Sandro Munari, Lancia's number one works driver, and Bernard Darniche, the Frenchman who won the previous year, who pulled out an impressive lead over the others. Both were in Stratos, of course, Darniche with 12 valves to his engine and Munari with the extra power produced by 24.

Munari kept a small lead over Darniche until a matter of a few hours before the end when a valve failed in the works car. The resulting misfire (although to us it seemed to burble away healthily enough when it got to the finish) let Darniche into the lead, but it then transpired that the Frenchman had been ten seconds late at a road control (as opposed to a control at the end of a special stage) and since road time was lost on whole minutes, not seconds, it brought a penalty of one minute. The result was that Munari beat Darniche by the slender margin of 16 seconds,

making the Italians immensely happy but causing a few murmurs of doubt among some French observers.

For Opel, still holding second place in the championship mainly by virtue of the efforts of privateers over the year, it was another disaster, the Kadett of Röhrli going out after shedding fan-belt after fan-belt and that of Nicolas losing a wheel after the studs sheared. Rather interesting was the entry by the Peugeot factory of four of their little 104ZS f.w.d. cars, two of which managed to finish tenth and eleventh among the eleven finishers. The point of this exercise seemed clouded, for BMC raked in all the glory it was possible to gain with Minis a long time ago. However, it seems that the 104ZS may be given a sporting image intended to appeal to young drivers, so perhaps it is a case of paving the way.

With the World Championship settled, the final round in the British forests will be a no-holds-barred contest with no one indulging in tactics to weigh series points against the kudos of overall placing. But that event will be just over before this issue of MOTOR SPORT appears in print, so there is little point in saying more. Of Corsica, we can only add that whether your interests are in rallying or racing, it is an event that cannot fail to capture your imagination.—G.P.

GENERAL CLASSIFICATION

1st	S. Munari/S. Maiga (Lancia Stratos (4))	8 hr. 23 min. 55 sec.
2nd	B. Darniche/A. Mahé (Lancia Stratos (4))	8 hr. 24 min. 11 sec.
3rd	J.-P. Manzagol/J.-F. Filippi (Alpine-Renault 310 (4))	8 hr. 49 min. 14 sec.
4th	J. Ragnotti/J. Jaubert (Alpine-Renault 310 (4))	8 hr. 59 min. 28 sec.
5th	J. Almeras/C. Delferrier (Porsche Carrera (3))	9 hr. 19 min. 10 sec.
6th	P.-L. Moreau/P. Baron (Alpine-Renault 110 (3))	9 hr. 41 min. 33 sec.
7th	D. Rognoni/G. Dini (Porsche 911S (3))	9 hr. 48 min. 48 sec.
8th	J.-C. Sevelinge/J. Sevelinge (Opel Kadett GT/E (2))	9 hr. 56 min. 31 sec.
9th	H. Greder/"Celigny" (Opel Kadett GT/E (1))	10 hr. 06 min. 28 sec.
10th	H. Mikkola/J. Todt (Peugeot 104 ZS (2))	10 hr. 13 min. 51 sec.
11th	C. Laurent/J. Marché (Peugeot-104 ZS (1))	10 hr. 34 min. 35 sec.

97 starters — 11 finishers.

SAFETY DEVICES

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for the Prudential. His name was John Aley, who just happened to be a rather well-known saloon car racer of the day. This one-time European Saloon Car Champion upended his works DKW at Oulton Park, flattening the roof, so he and Wilkinson devised a roll-bar to hold the roof up if Mr. Aley should decide to up-end the car again. Later the two and Bill Blydenstein collaborated in the production of £400 Mini racers into which they put roll-over bars, from which developed a roll-over bar business. Wilkinson sold his business and returned to New Zealand in 1968, but came back to join Aley at the latter's request in 1970. This coincided with the introduction of FIA roll-over bar regulations, Wilkinson designed the first FIA bars and suddenly Aley had big business. Wilkinson remained Aley's roll-bar expert until Aley sold his business in 1972, thus forcing Wilkinson into business on his own in September 1972. Willis, the admin. part of the partnership, joined him straight from college. In four years they've built up quite a success story on other people's potential accidents.—C.R.