

# HEARTBROKEN - 2018 AGL RALLY OF THE HEARTLAND

STORY : MIKE FORESHEW

PHOTOS : RYAN SCHEMBRI, JOHN DOUTCH, MWP SPORTS PHOTOGRAPHY

The first weekend in June saw the second running of the AGL Rally of the Heartland. Based in Burra, South Australia, it is a leisurely drive of just over 900 kilometers from Melbourne which, allowing for various fuel (vehicle and human) breaks takes just on 10 hours get there. Whilst the drive is long, competitors are rewarded with an event that is incredibly well run against some of the most spectacular landscapes Australia has to offer. The event is run over two days for a total competitive distance of a touch over 400 kilometers.

For this year's classic installment, three full and two and half crews from Victoria made the pilgrimage. Returning for a second year were the crews of Wallis/Ward in the distinctive Peugeot 309 and Snooks/ForesheW in the Datsun Stanza, the winning car from 2017. Tackling the event for the first time were the crews of Brett Williams/Andrew Ormesher in the BMW 325e and Nicola Testa with Nigel Waters (NSW) in the stunning Nissan 240RS. The other half crew from Victoria was Jenny Cole returning to call the shots with Phillip Kerr (Northern Territory) in the venerable Datsun 1600. All up, 21 crews lined up to start in what is becoming a great classic rally. Demonstrating its national appeal and in addition to the crews from Victoria, there were 6 crews from Western Australia, 5 from South Australia, 4 from New South Australia and 1 from Queensland.

Again, the weather was perfect with clear blue skies and dry roads but the missing component from the equation was a breeze to clear the dust. This would be an inconvenience during the day but a real issue for the night stages.

The first stage (Mt Bryan) starts off on the relatively smooth shire roads between paddocks transitioning to semi-desert conditions with a lot of dust. First Victorian into the stages was Jenny Cole in Datsun 1600 and she combined with driver Phil Kerr to deliver the 8th fastest time. The next Victorian crew out were Snooks/ForesheW in the Stanza. Heading into the stage, confidence was high following some encouraging times in previous events and despite the fuel regulator becoming clogged and causing the engine to starve of fuel in start control. A quick fix and all was fine with the car. Early pace was good but approximately 10 kilometers into the stage, the crew stopped believing they had a flat tyre. It turned out to be far worse with an upper control arm mounting coming adrift of the axle. They were recovered, and repairs would see them join later in the day.

Right : Snooks/ForesheW  
grab some air on stage 1



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The crew of Williams/Ormesher in the BMW were next to come to grips with the roads around Burra, setting 14th fastest time in the process. Nicola Testa was also competing in his first Heartland and together with Nigel Waters they set the 17th fastest time. The last Victorian crew into the stage was the pairing of Wallis/Ward in their second running of the event and set the 16th fastest time for the stage.

The second stage (AGL Wind Farm 1) was the first of several stages run along the ridgelines of the hills, using the access roads to the wind turbines. The stages around the wind farms require precision and confidence as the price for getting them wrong is high. Its not so much that you will hit something but rather you won't stop rolling for a week as there is nothing to stop you. Kerr/Cole continued their consistent performance and again set the 8th fastest time. Testa/Waters settled in nicely setting the 12th fastest time on the stage. Wallis/Ward set the 14th fastest time coming in just 12 seconds ahead of Williams/Ormesher with the 15th fastest time.

Stage 3 (Turbine Row) is similar to previous stage but provides some unique challenges not least of which arriving at a plateau where a turbine is located but no obvious indication where the road goes until you are right on it. Kerr/Cole maintained the consistent performance and set the 9th fastest time. The remaining 3 Victorian crews of Williams/Ormesher, Wallis/Ward and Testa/Waters set the 14th, 15th and 16th fastest times respectively, with a little over 30 seconds covering all three.

Stage 4 was the second time through Mt Bryan. Kerr/Cole continued to set top 10 stage times and continued with another 9th fastest time. Testa/Waters found some extra pace and confidence and this showed by coming in 14th on the stage. Wallis/Ward and Williams/Ormesher continued to duel with the honours going to the Peugeot crew setting 16th fastest time and the BMW in 17th.



Above : Kerr/Cole were a model of consistency and led the Victorian contingent

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Stage 5 was the second time through the AGL Wind Farm. Driving for pride rather than results, the Stanza of Snooks/Foreshew rejoined and were immediately on the pace setting the second fastest time, beaten only by the Audi Quattro of Mal Keogh. Kerr/Cole were a picture of consistency and set another top ten time for the stage. The Victorian gaggle returned but this time it was Williams/Ormesher (16th fastest) leading in Testa/Waters (17th) and Wallis/Ward (18th).

Stage 6 was Johnny Green and is a short stage near the center of Burra around what was once a copper mine. Its setting provides a natural amphitheater allowing spectators too see and hear the cars at their best. The crew of Snooks/Foreshew put in the 2nd fastest time with Kerr/Cole coming in with the 7th fastest. Wallis/Ward and Williams/Ormesher broke away from the Victorian pack setting the 8th and 9th fastest times respectively. Testa/Waters continued their measured drive coming in with the 16th fastest time. After a short service break, the light bars were fitted and crews prepared to tackle the big stages again but in a very different context.

SS7 was a re-run over the Mt Dare stage from earlier in the day. Whilst it was the same road, the darkness and the presence of moving chicanes (kangaroos) made it a completely different proposition. To make it even more difficult, the dust just hung and became thicker with each car over the stage.

Snooks/Foreshew took off into the stage buoyed by the competitive times in the previous stages. The dust was a problem but still saw the crew post a time inside the top 10, coming in 8th fastest. A picture of consistency was Kerr/Cole who set the 12th fastest time. Despite the choking dust, Wallis/Ward made good progress and posted the 14th fastest time with Testa/Waters in 16th and Williams/Ormesher posting in 18th.

The schedule called for a regroup and then a repeat of the Mt Dare stage again. The dust was becoming too thick and initially the gaps were extended to 3 minutes and then 5 minutes but was still not enough for the dust to clear. Unfortunately for competitors, the right decision was chosen to cancel SS8 and proceed straight to SS9 – North to South.

Right : Keogh - Audi. 'Nuff said.



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This was a relatively quick blast through paddocks along mainly shire roads. Whilst there was still dust, it was nowhere as bad as previous stages and normal hostilities could continue. Snooks/Foreshew continued to improve their performance posting the 3rd fastest time. Kerr/Cole continued their consistent performance posting yet another top 10 stage time. Wallis/Ward continue to find pace after dark and came in 14th. Heartland rookies Williams/Ormesher found some pace and posted the 16th fastest time to come just ahead of Testa/Waters. Cold and tired crews returned to Burra to prepare for the second day of competition.

Day 2 started with a breakfast of egg and bacon rolls put on by the local primary school. It was great to see both kids and parents helping out but also being exposed to rallying. It was a glimpse of what I believe was the community response to rallying in 1960's and 1970's. Whilst nowhere the sort of numbers from that period, it was nonetheless great to see spectators that weren't just service crews and families.

The first stage of the day was SS10 Burra Gorge. Starting to the south-east of Burra, the end of the stage finished on the aptly named Worlds End Highway. Kerr/Cole lead the Victorians away and posted yet another top 10 result coming in at 9th. Looking to continue their improvement from day 1, Snooks/Foreshew took to the stage with morale high. This wasn't to last though as approximately 5 kilometers in, the gear-box started to cry no more, dropping 4th and then 3rd gear. They made it to end of the stage with the 13th fastest time but then diagnosed another issue on the transport. which was traced to an out of balance drive shaft. The crew made it back to service but unlike Lazarus, there would be no return and the car was parked for the event. Williams/Ormesher found some mojo and lead the Victorian triumvirate with Testa/Waters and Wallis/Ward taking 16th, 17th and 18th respectively.



Above : Testa/Waters on AGL Wind Farm. Just spectacular ..... and the scenery was pretty good too !!!!!

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The next stage was a reverse of SS9 from the night before aptly titled South to North. Kerr/Cole led the Victorian charge posting yet another top 10 stage time. Williams/Ormesher continued to make progress posting 13th fastest but Testa/Waters wasn't going to let them have their own way and stayed in touch posting the 14th fastest time. Wallis/Ward overcame some issues and posted the 18th fastest time.

The next stage was a re-run of the AGL Wind Farm stage (SS12) from day 1. Kerr/Cole were still the fastest of the Victorian (Phillip had become an honorary Victorian) and for the first time posted a time outside the top 10, coming in 11th. Williams/Ormesher continued to post some competitive times. Wallis/Ward hit back and posted 15th fastest time, just 3 seconds in front of Testa/Waters.

SS13 was a repeat of the town stage, Johnny Green. Kerr/Cole got back on song and posted 8th fastest time. Williams/Ormesher were the next best Victorian crew with 11th fastest with Wallis/Ward just half a second behind in 12th. Testa/Waters posted the 16th fastest time which was just 9 seconds shy of the top 10.

The last 2 stages were Mallett 1 (SS14) and Mallett 2 (SS15). Kerr/Cole stayed the course and delivered a 9th and then 7th fastest times to finish 8th overall. A fantastic effort and just a superb example of a consistent and measured drive. Testa/Waters took over the mantle posting a 12th fastest but then struck an issue that saw them post the 13th fastest time, just over 50 minutes behind the 12th placed crew. In their rookie attempt, the crew finished a very credible 11th overall. Troubles befell Williams/Ormesher with the crew setting the 15th fastest time and then an allocated time for SS15 after skipping the stage. In their first attempt, they finished up 12th overall. Wallis/Ward were given allocated times for these last 2 stages as they couldn't continue after encountering problems with the usually reliable 309. Nonetheless, the crew finished 13th overall.

David Officer summed up the event for the Victorian crews when he said "rallying can be cruel sometimes". What started out with great promise for the Victorian crews was not fulfilled at the end. Despite this, the event was absolutely fantastic and was a thoroughly enjoyable one. I urge you to come and have a crack at this one. I know I will be back, determined not leave broken hearted.

Right : Williams/  
Ormesher saving their  
tyres.



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Photo: Ryan Schembri - <http://rush.media>

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Left : Williams/ Ormesher back on solid ground

Left : Wallis/Ward speeding through the town special stage, Johnny Green. No giants to be seen though.



Left : Nom, nom, nom. Turns out that the food of choice for Audi is a Go-Pro. Rest in Pieces GP.