



TONY FALL shoves his Austin 1800 through creek crossing in London-Sydney marathon. What did it all prove, asks Stirling?

# The longest drive

OVER the last two months, we've all seen and read quite a lot about the London to Sydney Marathon. Organised by the London "Daily Express" in conjunction with the Sydney "Daily Telegraph", to provide valuable publicity, the event ended up by doing a good deal more. Not only did a large number of works teams enter into the spirit of the thing by putting the whole weight of their experience and organisation behind it as if it were a major international rally, but even the general non-motoring public took an unusual interest in the cars and drivers concerned and their progress around the world.

But is this all? Now that the Marathon is over, will it fade away into the history books as just another sporting event, slightly more unusual and more successful than average, but otherwise indistinguishable from thousands of others? Or will it have more lasting benefits, either to motor sport or the motoring public at large?

It would be nice to think of the London-to-Sydney run as being the first in a series of revivals of the kind of great races which characterised the heroic early days of motoring, but at the moment everything seems against it. There is apparently every intention of holding another London-to-Sydney Marathon at the end of 1972, but the sheer effort and expense of putting on a show like this (not to mention taking part in it) must rule out the chances of many competing events.

The works rally teams especially have a very crowded calendar of rallies demanding their attention, and cannot spare drivers or cars for long-



distance runs like this very often. For another, it's difficult to think of another route which would combine the varied conditions of this year's Marathon with its exotic route, and it's equally difficult to imagine another newspaper footing the bill for a similar event unless it could be made really different from the one which the "Express" and "Telegraph" got all the credit for.

Quite apart from the problems of running what amounts to a long-distance road race on public roads in the more motorised parts of the world, Lucien Bianchi's heart-breaking collision with a non-competing car while in the lead on the very last lap, show how acute the dangers are at times.

## More benefits

But there are other ways in which an event like this can produce worthwhile additional benefits for the great mass of us who use motor cars to drive to work, or to take the family

out for a holiday or even to go down the road to the shops. Running cars over the kind of appalling road conditions encountered on this run presents unusual problems. Even those makers who do a lot of varied long-distance testing before introducing a new model have problems because the full glare of world publicity is focused on any mishap or breakdown. The incentives to make the cars stand up to the battering without breaking is strong indeed. Some works teams spent a reasonable-size fortune in sending cars and drivers to make a full-scale reconnaissance of the route before the race started — forewarned is most certainly forearmed in this business.

In some case the rehearsal runs produced some surprises. Many people who had no real knowledge of the country involved thought that the first half of the run — London to Bombay — would do the real job of weeding out the less professional entries, especially towards the end of the stretch. Then the Australian part of the run would be a pleasant, if demanding, high-speed run rather like the high-speed tests at the end of a rally.

But drivers who knew the Australian outback had different ideas. They said the wilds of Central Asia held no terrors like the Australian desert with its sudden floods, hidden potholes filled with fine dust waiting to shatter suspension and steering and thousands upon thousands of miles of trackless bush. Some of them wondered if anyone would get through at all!

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# BEECHEY

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However, the Monaro has not been lowered at either end.

This is largely because of the wheels and tyres — American 7in. rimmed mags fitted with Firestone ultra-low-profile tyres ("a new compound called 134. They've only just been released in England, according to Brian Muir").

The end result is a car which, while lacking the Mustang's cornering finesse, loses little as a result of sheer power.

Says Beechey: "I'm positive the car is much faster than any of the Mustangs in Australia. And what's just as good, it's a damned sight cheaper."

This was one of Beechey's calculations in purchasing the car in the face of his newly-acquired Camaro.

"I figured it would be miles better for my motor racing if I could get a Holden to do what a Camaro or Chevy does. Look at it this way. The main running gear is the same and, being made locally, it is cheap. With the Camaro I have to get everything air-freighted out from America, which costs a fortune."

The Camaro will be entered in events in Singapore, Japan or South Africa if it can be arranged, and give Beechey his first taste of racing outside of Australia and New Zealand. If the entries cannot be arranged, the car will be sold locally. Says Norm:

"I'm planning on a one car racing organisation."

And as the opposition has no plans to stand still, it's just as well. There's a new Mustang in America which will undoubtedly attract opposition interest in NSW. Meanwhile, Victorian Bob Jane is working on aerodynamics. He has fitted a full-width aluminium under-bumper spoiler to the Mustang and has matched it with one on the tail. He hopes the system will give him an extra second a lap on the faster circuits.

But Beechey has undeniably got the power-to-weight ratio. A recent dynamometer test taken immediately after the car's hat-trick run in Tasmania showed 428 bhp.

With a freshen-up and a little more time, the Coburg car and truck salesman expects at least 440 bhp.

Now with the Australian touring car championship to be decided on a points basis, reliability seems the questionable barrier between him and his second national title. He is highly optimistic about his chances.

The Dandenong boys must be highly hopeful also. With the success of Beechey's Monaro, there is almost certain to be a rash of similar machines appearing on our racing circuits — the first time for many years that locally-manufactured sedans have had a show.

"But Norm," I said. "Why didn't you go Ford when they officially pay the bills?"

"I don't know whether they'd have me," he replied. "They've already got 'Pete' Geoghegan and he's doing a grand job for them."

"And I'm more personally interested in my cars being successful than any sponsorship. Besides, I'm a Datsun dealer."

# MOSS

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Looked at from this gloomy point of view, the run was not only a success, it was a surprise from start to finish. To see my old friend and colleague Innes Ireland leading the field into Bombay with his two co-drivers as temporary leader of the private entrants was enough of a shock. For I'm sure Innes won't mind when I say I never thought of him as the world's greatest navigator—one of the reasons I asked him to drive with me in the Marathon de la Route was because I knew he could not get lost driving round and round the Nurburgring!

Certainly this kind of run is vastly removed from the experience of even a top driver — not only is the surface so bad that it cannot be compared with even the worst racing circuit, but the problems of driving along unknown roads for very long periods of time present a completely different set of requirements from those he has to face driving in a grand prix or even a long-distance endurance race.

This may be why the private entrants did so surprisingly well. Not only did more people reach Bombay than was expected by even the most

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optimistic forecasters before the start, so that it really was a case of first come, first served for berths on the Chusan ready for the cruise to Australia, but even the Australian desert failed to live up to its build-up. Of course it was bad, but as the wholesale destroyer of cars predicted by old Aussie hands, it was a bit of a flop. Not that conditions were not difficult — but compared with the efforts put into preparing cars which would take a battlefield in their stride, it was something of an anti-climax.

Will the makers learn anything from their experience in this Marathon — will we have tougher cars as a result? Personally, I'm very doubtful. I cannot help thinking that most of them will look on the run as an interesting exercise, but one that was too specialised to affect materially the design of their production cars.

Now I'm familiar with the old arguments in favor of designing mass-produced cars to suit the average man in average conditions, but I'm still dubious about their truth. I appreciate that you can't design every car so that it would accommodate a 2ft. midget and a 10ft. giant without adding greatly to the cost — but I'm 5ft. 7½ in. tall, and all too many cars I test give me the impression that any 6-footers trying to drive them must feel distinctly uncomfortable.

And this concept of "average conditions" may well be equally inaccurate. After all, there were several really genuine private entrants in that run who got through with very nearly standard cars — so, although rough,

the roads couldn't have been impossible. And how can we be sure that each one of us, through some unforeseen emergency, might have to cope with conditions like that in a standard production car, when it might be absolutely vital that it doesn't let us down?

But whatever the eventual benefits to car buyers, the Marathon has had one other very important side-effect. Everyone's had a lot of fun and a lot of interest, competitors and spectators alike. A lot of people who followed the results closely have never been involved with motor sport before — if they can be driven as a result to find out what grand prix racing and international rallying have to offer, then it can do the sport nothing but good — for they could well be the enthusiasts of tomorrow.

## ELEGANCE

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special award. And he was placed second to the Bolwell in the popular vote. What else for a better-than-new TR which owes him \$7000 and looks like every cent of it?

Sonnwald, a trainee aircraft engineer, built up the 1961 model car from three TRs. In doing so he modified and lightened the chassis considerably, and spent \$2500 dropping in a 2580 cc. 128 bhp engine, which, fitted with its twin 45 DCOE dual-choke Weber carburettors, has taken

its owner to over 130 mph "in mid-night testing".

Examples of detail are the car's specially built-up 72-spoke, chromed triple-laced wire wheels, which feature Aston Martin DB4 hubs imported at a cost of \$16 apiece.

Sonnwald did all his own restoration — "all except the seat stitching," he apologises.

No so sporting, but equally immaculate, was the 1938 Nash Ambassador Six saloon of Frank Dallimore.

This car, which has done a genuine 50,000 miles since new, swept away with the Pre-1940 Touring Car award, and finished third in the popular vote.

The car has a fairy-tale history. It was owned by a little old lady who passed it on to her daughter. Dallimore, a Classic and Historic Automobile Club of Australia member, bought it in February 1967.

It was in such good order, that bodywise it needed only a touch-up repaint on the mudguards and wheels to bring it back to as-new condition.

It has a 234 cubic inch six-cylinder, dual ignition motor, and according to its owner, it drives "just like a modern car".

Which was the way I left the Concours — in a modern car. . . .

While all the entrants were having heart failure as the dust and gravel attacked their handiwork on the entrance road.

And while an immaculate MG TC stopped dead with a mystified driver and some obscure ailment.

Sometimes it's nice just to drive an ordinary, dirty family car. . . .



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