

1976 Bega Valley Rally – Round of ARC

Pos	Driver	State	Navigator	State	Make/Model	Points
1	Ross Dunkerton	WA	Jeff Beaumont	Tas	Datsun 240Z	34
2	Dean Rainsford	SA	Graham West	SA	Porsche Carrera	36
3	Adrian Taylor	QLD	John Souminen	VIC	Honda Civic	55
4	David Jones	VIC	Ian Pearson	VIC	Mitsubishi Galant	68
=5	Ed Mulligan	NSW	Fred Gocentas	ACT	Holden Torana L34	71
=5	Peter Gaudron	ACT	Graeme Pigram	ACT	Datsun 1600	71

1976 Australian Rally Championship:

Rounds:

Rally of the West (WA)
 SEV Marchal (VIC)
 Bega Valley (NSW)
 Rally Renault (SA)
 North Eastern (VIC)
 Warana (QLD)

Drivers:

1: Ross Dunkerton (WA)
 2: Dean Rainsford (SA)
 3: David Jones (VIC)
 4: Danny Bignell (WA)
 5: Murray Coote (Qld)
 6: Evan Green (NSW)

Navigators:

1: Jeff Beaumont (TAS)
 2: Graham West (SA)
 3: Ian Pearson (VIC)
 4: Brian Marsden (QLD)
 5: Simon Kable (QLD)
 6: John Bryson (NSW)

1976 was a year of considerable controversy over vehicle eligibility. George Fury, driving the Datsun 710 coupe, won three of four events in which it was entered but, although the car was eligible for the Southern Cross Rally, it was not eligible for the ARC, which did not recognise FIA homologated cars!

The year was dominated by Ross Dunkerton/Jeff Beaumont in the Datsun 240Z, winning four events and finishing second in the six round championship.

This was a relatively quiet year as both Datsun and Ford prepared for their almighty battle in the Southern Cross Rally (the biggest of all for this event), and their fierceness of competition was unleashed in the 1977 ARC.



Ross Dunkerton



Datsun 260Z



Dean Rainsford's Porsche 911



Adrian Taylor's Honda Civic

1977 Bega Valley Rally – Round of ARC

Pos	Driver	State	Navigator	State	Make/Model	Points
1	Greg Carr	ACT	Fred Gocentas	ACT	Ford Escort RS2000	35
2	George Fury	Vic	Monty Suffern	Vic	Datsun 710	42
3	Darryl Rowney	NSW	Robert Wilson	NSW	Datsun 1600	43
4	Peter Gaudron	ACT	Graeme Pigram	ACT	Datsun 1600	44
5	Mark Hankinson	ACT	Graham Moule	ACT	Datsun 1600	46
6	David Balmain	NSW	Terry Hanrahan	NSW	Mitsubishi Lancer	52

1977 Australian Rally Championship:

Rounds:

North Eastern (VIC)
 Rally of the West (WA)
 Lutwyche Village (QLD)
 Bega Valley (NSW)
 Endrust Forest (SA)

Drivers:

1= Ross Dunkerton (WA)
 1= George Fury (VIC)
 3: Doug Stewart (NSW)
 4: David Morrow (NSW)
 5: Greg Carr (ACT)
 6= Clive Slater (WA)
 6= Bob Riley (NSW)

Navigators:

1= Jeff Beaumont (TAS)
 1= Monty Suffern (VIC)
 3: George Shephard (NSW)
 4: Neil Faulkner (NSW)
 5: Fred Gocentas (ACT)
 6: Brian Hope (NSW)

The ARC really came alive in 1977, with first class competition and a string of exciting events. The competition was so keen that Dunkerton/Beaumont and George Fury/Monty Suffern tied for the championship and could not be broken.



Ross Dunkerton (top) and George Fury (bottom) Dunkerton was in the Datsun 260Z and Fury in the Datsun 710.



Darryl Rowney's Datsun 1600



Dean Rainsford's SAAB

1978 Ampol Bega Valley Rally – Round of ARC

Pos	Driver	State	Navigator	State	Make/Model	Pts
1	Greg Carr	ACT	Fred Gocentas	ACT	Ford Escort RS1800	40
2	Ross Dunkerton	WA	Jeff Beaumont	Tas	Datsun 710	42
3	Colin Bond	NSW	John Dawson-Damer	NSW	Ford Escort RS2000	54
4	Geoff Portman	Vic	Ross Runnalls	Vic	Datsun 1600	60
5	Murray Coote	Qld	Brian Marsden	Qld	Datsun 120Y	61
6	Ed Mulligan	NSW	M. Rebecchi	NSW	Datsun 1600	74

1978 Australian Rally Championship:

Rounds:

Rally of the West (WA)
Lutwyche Village (QLD)
Donlee (NSW)
Bega Valley (NSW)
Endrust Forest (SA)
Marchal Rally (VIC)

Drivers:

1: Greg Carr (ACT)
2: Ross Dunkerton (WA)
(on countback with Carr)
3: Colin Bond (NSW)
4: George Fury (VIC)
5: Clive Slater (WA)
6: Geoff Portman (VIC)

Navigators:

1: John Dawson-Damer (NSW)
2: Fred Gocentas (ACT)
3: Jeff Beaumont (TAS)
4: Monty Suffern (VIC)
5: Steve Halloran (NSW)
6: Ross Runnalls (VIC)

After a season of intense rivalry Greg Carr broke through to break Dunkerton's dominance of the championship in 1975 to 1977. But it was close and the championship was not decided until the end of the very last competitive section in the last event. Unbelievably, for the second successive year there was a tie for first place, but Carr won from Dunkerton on a count back, with Carr winning three events to Dunkerton's one (with Dunkerton having several high minor placings).



Greg Carr



Ford Escort RS2000



Murray Coote's Datsun 120Y



Danny Bignell – Datsun 240Z



Bob Riley – Mitsubishi Sigma



David Jones – Mitsubishi Lancer

1979 Ampol Bega Valley Rally – Round of ARC

Pl	Driver	State	Navigator	State	Make/Model	Pts
1	Colin Bond	NSW	John Dawson-Damer	NSW	Ford Escort RS1800	91.18
2	George Fury	VIC	Monty Suffern	VIC	Datsun Stanza	97.56
3	Ross Dunkerton	WA	Jeff Beaumont	TAS	Datsun Stanza	123.35
4	Peter Gaudron	ACT	Graeme Pigram	ACT	Datsun 1600	134.50
5	Paul Nudd	NSW	Barbara Nudd	NSW	Datsun 120Y	142.10
6	Ian Swan	VIC	Phillip Rainer	VIC	Datsun 120Y	149.17

After three rounds of the ARC it seemed that the championship title would go to Datsun – either to Dunkerton or Fury. However, there were no fewer than four leaders throughout the event, and with four stages to go Fury led from Bond. On the second last stage Bond fought back, and despite hitting banks a couple of times, he regained the lead. But the expected last stage battle never eventuated as Fury's Stanza differential broke a few kilometres into the stage and he limped through to finish second.

Dunkerton lead well into the first night but his chances were blown when he rolled on an extremely slippery stage and he lost 16 minutes getting back onto the road; on the second night he fought back to be in third place and then a rear wheel flew off mid-stage and he again dropped time and had to climb back through the field, to finish third.



GMH ran the 'HDT Silver Commodore' in the BVR Wayne Bell driving, as a shakedown for the upcoming Repco Reliability Trial.



Fury thrilled spectators in his fight with Bond over the last few stages

1979 Australian Rally Championship:

Rounds:

Akaderos (VIC)
Rally of the West (WA)
Lutwyche Village (QLD)
Bega Valley (NSW)
Endrust Forest (SA)

Drivers:

1: Ross Dunkerton (WA)
2: Greg Carr (ACT)
3: Colin Bond (NSW)
4: Geoff Portman (VIC)
5: George Fury (VIC)
6: Dean Rainsford (SA)

Navigators:

1: Jeff Beaumont (TAS)
2: Fred Gocentas (ACT)
3: John Dawson-Damer (NSW)
4: Ross Runnalls (VIC)
5: Monty Suffern (VIC)
6: Jerry Browne (SA)

Ross Dunkerton was finally able to cast aside the comments from many who said his previous ARC titles had not truly made him the Australian Champion. Unquestionably, there had not been to date a more dedicated competitor in the ARC, having his base in Perth and battling against all the odds, including having to travel to the Eastern States for 80% of the events he contested each year, as well as a reluctance of Datsun Team Manager, Howard Marsden, to have him in the (then) Total Oil Datsun Rally Team (now, that's another story!!)

During the year Dunkerton finished 2nd, 3rd, 1st, 3rd, 3rd but no one could ever doubt his capacity to fight against ALL odds and finish, and by doing so, he outfought his opponents.



Ross Dunkerton



Datsun Stanza

1980 Ampol Bega Valley Rally – Round of ARC

Pl	Driver	State	Navigator	State	Make/Model	Time
1	George Fury	VIC	Monty Suffern	VIC	Datsun Stanza	6:19.43
2	Colin Bond	NSW	John Dawson-Damer	NSW	Ford Escort RS1800	6:20.20
3	Ross Dunkerton	WA	Jeff Beaumont	TAS	Datsun Stanza	6:20.56
4	Geoff Portman	Vic	Ross Runnalls	VIC	Datsun Stanza	6:31.25
5	Barry Ferguson	NSW	Steve Owers	NSW	Holden Gemini TC	7:08.52
6	Peter Nelson	NSW	Graham Moule	NSW	Datsun 1600	7:16.47

1980 Australian Rally Championship:

Rounds:

Rally of the West (WA)
Lutwych Village (Qld)
Akademos (Vic)
Bega Valley (NSW)
Donlee (SA)

Drivers:

1. George Fury (Vic)
2. Colin Bond (NSW)
3. Ross Dunkerton (WA)
4. Geoff Portman (Vic)
5. Greg Carr (ACT)
6. Barry Ferguson (NSW)

Navigators:

1. Monty Suffern (Vic)
2. John Dawson-Damer (NSW)
3. Jeff Beaumont (Tas)
4. Ross Runnalls (Vic)
5. Fred Gocontas (ACT)
6. Steve Owers (NSW)

The title going to Datsun was the fifth in six years, a record that surpassed the four titles won in the early seventies by Holden with the then all-conquering Torana XU1.

In all rounds, first outright went to Datsun five times (Fury thrice, Dunkerton once, Portman once) and Ford finished second (Bond 4 times, Carr once). Third place went to Datsun 3 times and Ford once, showing just how dominant these works team were in the ARC, as would be expected.

A telling feature of Colin Bond's ability as a rally driver (in addition to his feats as a race driver) can be demonstrated by the fact that in four years with the Ford Team he started in 16 ARC rallies and finished every one of them – with fifth being his lowest place. A great achievement.

It's a little wonder then that the privateers preferred to harness their costs and compete in rounds closest to home. But their turn was coming, as we will see as we enter the 1980s!

So, with the withdrawal of the major contenders the ARC once again reached a watershed. Time would tell if it would move forward or backward.



George Fury



Datsun Stanza



Barry Ferguson/Steve Owers – Holden Gemini

END OF 'GOLDEN AGE' ERA

1980 saw the end of the wonderful 'Golden Era', with Datsun and Ford fully withdrawing from providing 'works' cars, as well as the last running of the Southern Cross Rally.

So much of the atmosphere created about the championship in the 1976 to 1980 period was reflected by the drivers, navigators and service crews – and to that can be added, the event organisers.

Not again would there be (nor could there be) a combination of personalities ('characters') of the likes of Colin Bond, Fred Goentas, Greg Carr and John Dawson-Damer



AND Ross Dunkerton, Jeff Beaumont, George Fury and Monty Suffern in one magnificent era.



Rosco was ALWAYS up to something!!!



George Fury

And so to the next chapter, which will continue the story from 1981, and include the **Group G** saga that afflicted the sport until 1989, and, in some ways, still raises passionate discussion whenever it is raised in some circles!

However, that chapter has yet to be written!!