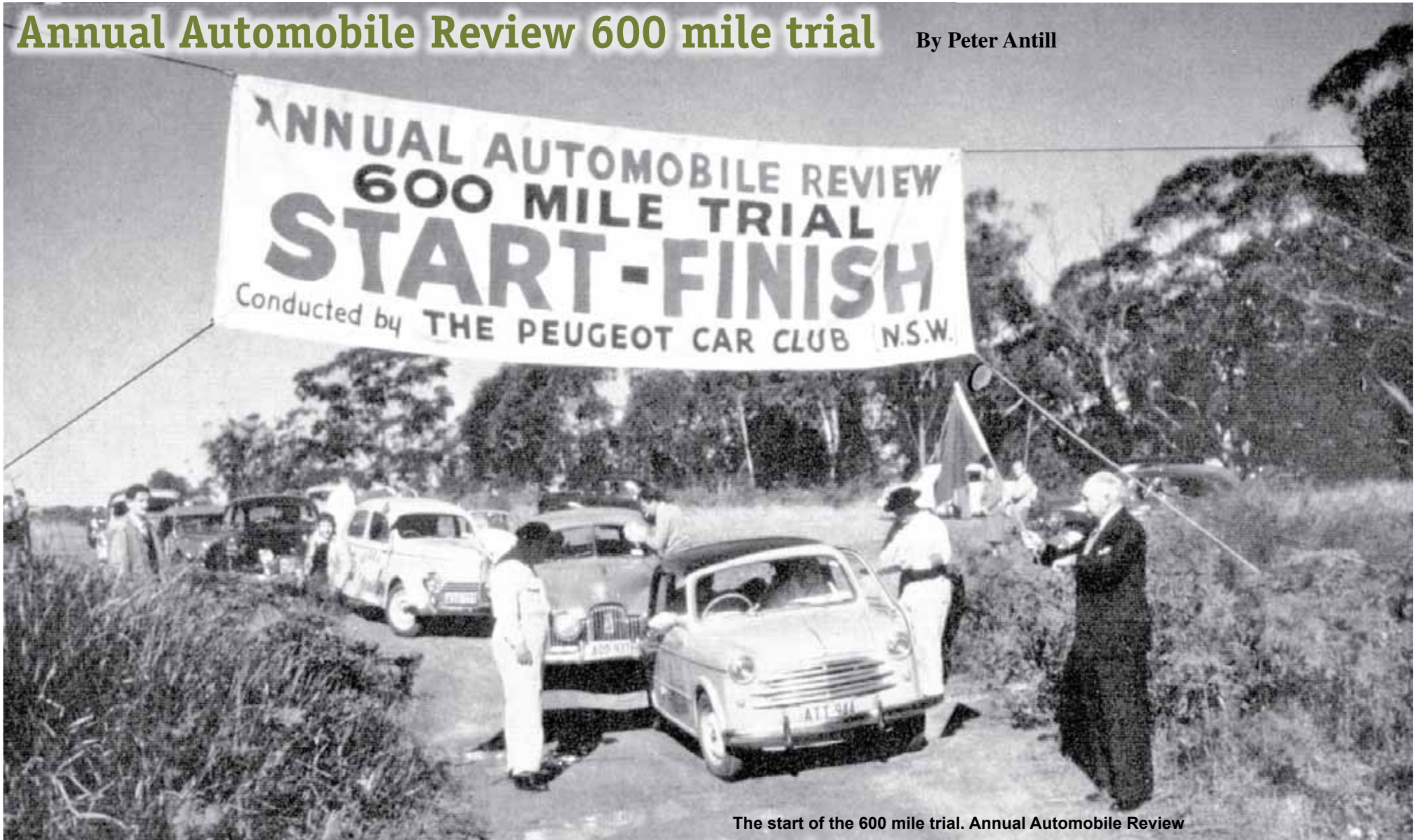


Annual Automobile Review 600 mile trial By Peter Antill



The start of the 600 mile trial. Annual Automobile Review

The first contest in Australia sponsored by the Annual Automobile Review was a reliability trial over a course of 600 miles.

The Australian reliability trials resemble the Continental rallies in some aspects, but omit the general tests at the terminating point and any sub-events in the nature of acceleration tests, brake tests or other similar contests

which would change the point scores of competitors who have completed the specified course.

In some respects they also resemble the English point-to-point steeplechases!

Cars eligible are “stock” models with some protection to sumps. The events are usually run over mediocre to bad roads at speeds calculated to cause some derangement of the mechanical efficiency of cars driven by unwary or unskilful drivers.

In addition to this hazard, many clubs keep the route secret and ultimately provide only limited route directions to the competitors.

They route the trial through areas where only the barest details appear on the standard road maps, and detailed survey maps have to be used on which to trace the correct line of the course.

From this requirement the riding partner of the driver is very rightly called navigator, as it is his job by means of these detailed maps, speedometer distances, sweep hand clocks and some sort of a speed computer to keep the driver on the correct road and travelling sufficiently fast to complete the section within the time specified by the club.

As many of the speed averages set approach the impossible, it is the driver’s job to extract the highest average speed from his car which will enable him to complete the circuit with his car still running and in first-class order.

Before the event, cars are inspected for mechanical efficiency, and for structural and superficial (body) damage.

Any existing defects are carefully noted, so on completion of the event when a similar inspection is made on the cars from which the winner may be selected, i.e. those carrying the least penalty points for time late, etc., damage sustained during the run becomes evident and penalty points are awarded in accordance with a specified scale.

The event under review was submitted to the State C.A.M.S. (F.I.A.) rather late for a really good date to be allocated and it was given a weekend in between two other similar contests.

The Australian winter is a comparatively mild affair, and because of its higher rainfall, absence of dusty roads and longer “dark” hours, is preferred by trials organisers to the summer with its greater heat, dust and a shorter night. In spite of this date allocation, 22 entries were received with almost every entrant a proven driver.

On the night before the trial, all starters were assembled at 6 o’clock and cars examined and marked by the scrutineers, and at 1 pm the following day, No. 1 car was despatched from a park adjacent to Sydney.

It was followed at two-minute intervals by the remainder of the field in the numerical sequence of the starting draw.

Initial roads were easy to follow as sign boards were plentiful and speeds low for the quality of the road surface, but after passing through Windsor, difficulties began to beset the competitors and careless navigators began to draw their cars into trouble.

From Windsor, the road led northward into the mountainous ranges, which form part of the Great Dividing Range and are as yet but sparsely populated. Despite the maze of roads through dense farmland, the “field” was running in its correct sequence and maintaining the 37 mph average set.

A route checkpoint caused one or two erratic navigators some worry and a large portion of the field was missing at control 2.

With the average speed lifted to 42 mph and the road surface deteriorating, competitors were led to the 1,500-ft. descent of a narrow winding pass, the road composed of gravel but with many larger rocks strewn on its surface from occasional minor earth falls.

This shortish section took the trial into a steeply walled ravine, with only one small bridge spanning the deep river.

By design, route directions were vague and local sign boards even more vague, so that after descending the pass and meeting a crossroad, the remaining competitors were soon racing frantically up and down this new and dusty road which runs for many miles in both directions on the southern side of a stream -- all but one car having run first into a farmyard dead-end to the west and then too far to the east, all missing a small bridge concealed by bushes.

Drivers’ tempers frayed, and cars were forced to the very limit of safety as one or another navigator would discover his error and direct his car back through perhaps half the field then running in the opposite direction.

At control 3, only one car checked in on time, and the majority, myself included, were up to 20 minutes late.

One competitor went too far east, picked up the lure of a road in the right direction and soon ran into control from the wrong direction to “buy” a penalty of 1,000 points!

With evening came heavy ground mist, the cunning trial director having selected roads which followed the course of streams, so 50 miles were traversed trying to average 30 mph over loose earth and gravel roads whose surfaces contained many pot holes and frequent outcropping rocks.

Again the speed proved high enough for all, and too high for any who made navigational errors and who were trying to recoup time lost.

Swinging westward and climbing from the coastal plain onto the highlands up a three-mile hill, we were then faced with the task of making up time on very mediocre roads.

So we raced, navigator braced in his corner, head down checking speedo distance to road junction or village, directing his driver with such comment as “turn right in a mile” or “enter the town and take the road to ULAN on leaving ...”

A reverse cambered gravel corner nearly caught our speeding Simca, and I was lucky to balance the car at 40 mph with one rear wheel “drooping” on the unfenced road edge, unable to correct the slide or unable to use more wheel or brake.

The accelerator alone remained to help and the manoeuvre was successful. We ran on with my apology to my navigator for ham-handedness.

Control 6, the second last before the half way mark at Dunnedoo, turned up after two short errors in road choice, and the official in charge directed us “through that open gate there, on your left”.

After very few miles we were in heavily wooded flat country, the road crossing many shallow streams running strongly from recent local rains.

Twice our engine stalled as water covered the exhaust pipe outlet, and twice my unlucky partner, Russ Curtis, leaped out to help push the car.

I edged it to the far bank of the “creek” by use of the starter motor power, then along the new road -- or where it will be one day soon; now it is a swath cut through the forest and the surface only a pudding of soft sandy mud left in the wake of the advance bulldozers as they formed the low embankment which will ultimately carry the road surface.

Gone were the tracks made by the local cars; there was only the new earth embankment to follow as one sat tense, juggling the wheel in second gear through the soft places, correcting this dive, trying to check that wallow with the accelerator foot feeling just enough power onto the back wheels to keep up controllable speed and avoid disastrous bogging.

Speed will keep the car up on the soft surface, but may also throw it out of a slippery rut into a nearby tree or log.

The “new” road is not on the map and it strikes a cross road at a different place perhaps from the one indicated on our map, but in any event we failed to locate the continuation across country of the road we were travelling, and we, too, entered the next control from the wrong direction and earned the 1,000 points penalty.

This, coupled with a seal broken on the case of our “official” time piece, caused our withdrawal at the supper control set up at the town Dunnedoo.

(In many Australian events, competitors are required to carry their own “official time”, a watch sealed into a transparent container. An error of 1 minute between this watch and the club’s official timepiece at the end of the trial will earn 5 penalty points per minute fast or slow; a broken seal, 1,000 points.)

From Dunnedoo, the course swung southward and westward and so led to a once-famous village, Sofala, for it was at this spot that gold was first produced in quantities in Australia and the diggings once had 30,000 people.

Today nearly all traces of the rush have gone. Small “mullock” heaps dot a hillside, silent marks of abandoned shafts and, in favoured areas, whole slopes were completely dug up and “washed” to harvest this yellow metal.

Two things remain: the river running through a steep sided ravine, and the old road which crosses and re-crosses the stream as it wends its way for eight or 10 miles from end to end of the gold-bearing area.

So to Sofala and the Turon River the “Review” trial went. No gold here for careless drivers; the road is rough and stony and the river fords have to be crossed with accuracy as the fords are nearly all rough stone causeways made when the river was filled up to leave only a foot or so of water running over the stones. Sufficient for an ox team to cross, but what of the sports cars?

The navigator of car No. 8 told me: “We had difficulty in tracing the road to Sofala, and in keeping going when we got there. In one place we jammed our trusty MG on a round stone with its front wheels off the ground!

“Why did we hit so hard? Our brakes were ‘shot’ from the combination of too many fast downhill sections on very narrow roads and too much water in the river!

“Tyre trouble caused us anxiety as we split the wall of a tyre on a quartz rock -- sharp as razors they are. Lost? Oh, yes. After Dunnedoo, the route directions said ‘proceed 9.6 miles to a branch road and then 8.8 miles, then enter a gate on your right’. The trouble was that our speedometer carried a distance error, accentuated by the loose gravel road and we found three gates all within (a) our speedo reading, (b) our corrected speedo distance, and (c) one right beside (b), so we had to try them all!

“Many of the minor roads we crossed are not shown even on the survey maps, and as we were directed to follow roads of this type for 50 per cent

of the course, we had to rely on `bushcraft' a great deal, but unfortunately neither of us in car 8 were good bushmen.” (The skilled Australian bushman has great directional sense and can travel many, many miles direct from point to point.)

Again, as the Peugeot Club president said: “We had to make it tough. We had to make you pay attention to your maps and the directions given.

“When control 2 was closed at the end of the allowed time, only seven competitors had passed through it.

“At control 5 one more was missing, while only five runners checked into supper. These five finished the run, but the finish was three hours later than we expected, and that after an 18-hour course!”

I think these five finished because they began running as a team! We heard that on one occasion three were stuck in the same stream at the same time.

Yes, we were lucky to find the poultry farm ... The one you had to go through in the night.

We heard that one competitor became more interested in a large fat turkey and tried to run it into a covey with his car, but no sooner did he alight from his car than a shot gun went off! Oddly enough, he lost no points for time late at the next control.

Winner of the event was Ken Tubman, in car No. 10, having lost 845 points, and the second place went to Messrs. Piggot and Lowe with a loss of 985 points and third to R. Smith, having lost 1,480 points.

ANNUAL AUTOMOBILE REVIEW 600-MILE TRIAL

1.	R. Smith-K. Wilcox,	FIAT	1,089cc	3rd
2.	W. R. Smith-C. Higgins			
3.	R- Green-J. Sharkie,	PEUGEOT	1,290cc	
4.	N. Giffin-J. Giffin,	PEUGEOT	1,290cc	
5.	R. Newman-J. M. Webber	MG TF	1,500cc	
6.	A. A. Box-M. Brill	HOLDEN	2,174cc	
7.	C. Kennedy-W. Turner	PEUGEOT	1,290cc	
8.	J. Craigie-G. Henshaw	MG TD	1,346cc	
9.	P. Lowe-B. Davis	PEUGEOT	1,290cc	
10.	K. Tubman-K. Pleasant	PEUGEOT	1,290cc	1st
11.	M. Piggot & J. Lowe-J. Caspers	VOLKSWAGEN	1,192cc	2nd
12.	L. Sly-A. Rost	VOLKSWAGEN	1,192cc	
13.	R. Roberts-L. Smith	PEUGEOT	1,400cc	
14.	W. Bramley-A. Scott	CONSUL	1,501cc	
15.	P. Antill-B. Curtis	SIMCA	1,200cc	
18.	A. Bagnall-T. Butler	HOLDEN	2,174cc	
17.	L. R. Brickwood-S. Morgan	PEUGEOT	1,290cc	
18.	M. Wardrop-D. Macdonald	AUSTIN A70	2,199cc	
19.	C. Fulton & N. Stewart-T. Cowdroy	AUSTIN A70	2,199cc	
20.	R. Petty-E. Petty	PEUGEOT	1,290cc	
21.	J. Stiebel-B. Graham	PEUGEOT	1,290cc	
22.	S. Donney	PEUGEOT	1,290cc	

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