



# Elouise & The 1970 AMPOL TRIAL

In 1970, PCCV member Brian Amey bought Elouise, a nine-year-old 403 for \$150 and entered the 16,000km Ampol Trial with co-driver Gordon Frohling. The car was prepared with help from club members. Against all odds, and with little service assistance, the car did remarkably well, making some factory entries look silly. What follows is Brian's account of the event, published in Torque.



1970 AMPOL TRIAL – rest and service breaks (From Torque, June 1970)

Place	Location	Rest Break	Service	Time In	Date
Pt. Augusta	Showground	15 hrs.	—	8.30 pm	21/6/70
Alice Springs	Traeger Park	10 hrs.	10 hrs.	11.18 am Out 7.30 am	23/6/70 24/6/70
Mt. Isa	Kalkadoon Park	10 hrs.	—	12.10 am	25/6/70
Cooktown	Racecourse	16 hrs.	—	9.35 am	26/6/70
Townsville	Sportsground	9 hrs.	3 hrs.	7.54 am	27/6/70
Brisbane	Myer, Cherside	11 hrs.	—	8.11 pm	28/6/70
Wagga	Showground	10 hrs.	—	7.51 am	30/6/70
Adelaide	Parade Ground	9 hrs.	4 hrs.	11.31 am	1/7/70
Melbourne	Olympic Park	8 hrs.	2 hrs.	10.45 pm	2/7/70
Albury	Showground	9 hrs.	—	4.12 pm	3/7/10
Bathurst Sydney	Showground	Finish	—	1.15 am 11.00 am	5/7/70



Elouise in the 1970 Ampol Trial.

## The Ampol Trial

By Brian Amey

**Car 8, Class B:** Peugeot 403B, 1961

**Purchase Price:** \$150. Speedo reading 75,000 miles (120,000km) at purchase.

**Crew:** Brian Amey, Gordon Frohling.

**Prepared by:** BA & GF with much help from several PCCV members.

**Finishing Place:** 27th outright, out of 179 trial starters — 108 finishers.

**Class Place:** 2nd class B (1100-1500cc)

**Points Loss:** 371

**Class B Winner:** VW 1500 Beetle, 209 points.

**Outright Winners:** Citroen and Datsun SSS — Equal 60 points loss.

Equal 1st outright was Jean-Claude and Lucette Ogier



### Trouble Experienced on the

**Trip:** Two flat tyres, noisy water pump, sagging front spring, holed radiator (in service break) holed petrol tank and sheared front spring mounting bolt.

**Course in Brief:** 10,000 miles — Melbourne, Bourke, Port Augusta, Alice Springs, Tenant Creek, Cooktown, Cairns, Rockhampton, Brisbane, Narrabri, Wagga, Swan Hill, Bordertown, Adelaide, Mt. Gambier, Halls Gap, Maryborough, Ballarat, Melbourne, Matlock, Albury, Omeo, Bruthen, Buchan, Cooma, Canberra, Bathurst, Sydney.

(From Torque, July 1970)

### A Few Impressions:

1. Dust.
2. More dust — after 30-50 cars had preceded us along dusty roads in calm conditions, the dust cloud was frightful. A Falcon ripped out its side on a grid post in the dust and a Renault shunted a Morris, also in the dust — illustrations of the danger. Of course, a leaky old 403 let in plenty of dust giving us considerable discomfort.



3. Long Distances. Two stages were 1400 miles long, That is a long time to stay fully operational when you have been going a week or two already.
4. The feeling of participating in something fairly important – big names all around, publicity welcomes (including pretty girls presenting pineapples) and the willing help given by garages and helpers at service points.
5. Utter incredulity at the director's ability to find a whole day's motoring on secondary (or tertiary fourth-rate) gravel roads without using more than 20 or 30 miles of bitumen. He really made us work, although most sections were achieved by some of the faster competitors. All in all, Gordon did an excellent job in piloting the 403 round without mishap and without losing too many points. The car is still running beautifully and is just nicely run in, as 49 m.p.g. in the Economy Run would suggest, (Offers considered — it will be for sale).

(From Torque, August 1970)

A frantic last minute working bee, till around 4 am, preceded the rather gloomy start in Melbourne on Saturday, June 26th at 9 am.

The first set of route instructions were a shock, it said:

Section 1, Melbourne to Port Augusta. Time: 29 hours, 53 mins., plus 3 hrs. meal and refuel breaks!

So off we went, just touring really, picking up the odd check point, usually at refuelling points. Only when night had fallen and we set out on the 100 miles north from Cobar to Bourke did the route become interesting. I was trying to sleep and every so often I'd wake up to an unusual car movement and jerk upright to see only a windscreen full of illuminated dust, which Gordon later told me was full of dips, horses, cows, kangaroos, cars and grids! Yet I did sleep, even through the time when Gordon had pulled out to pass someone and found three horses between us and the car we were passing.

From Bourke to Wilcannia was miles and miles more of dusty dark travel on basically good wide road, but with narrow cattle grids looming up at frequent intervals.

At Port Augusta we had no trouble sleeping in the car except that after going to bed at about 6 p.m., I woke at 8, thought we'd missed the start, looked around saw cars and wasn't convinced that the rally hadn't been held up until

I woke Gordon and he told me I'd only been asleep 2 hours, not 14!

Next morning saw us setting off cheerfully into the dusty Flinders Ranges, into the rising sun. 4 points lost, then 10 more, then we tried to go from Copley to Arkaroola from the N.W., along a rocky creek bed for the last 10 or 15 miles. The ruggedness of this track (48 m.p.h. average set!) was quite astonishing and Gordon, not yet at ease with an overloaded, tail bobbing, unprotected 403, took things quite slowly and securely to drop 20 points. Hodgson, in a Falcon, dropped 1 point because he stopped to say hello to the Ford team manager who dropped in along the route by plane. More dusty miles and we went via Marree (where I had to tell Gordon who was driving that we had a flat tyre) to Oodnadatta. Along this stretch (300 miles) many railway crossings gave cause for right angle bends in the road, which were made according to railway practice with gradually increasing curvature. This gave rise to many interesting wheel tracks, including ours. Here also we saw the Datsun, eventual winner, looking very sorry for itself having just been turned back on its wheels. Gordon had already started saying, "They're all bent up! Only one car has to go every 50 miles and none will finish."



Brian driving Elouise in the Dulux Rally in the early 70's.





From Oodnadatta, I drove westward across the fascinating “gibber” country. No vegetation, just 4 inch diameter pebbles. We roared through the night across the almost flat plains, at cruising (cum flat out) speed of 80 plus, along the bulldozer blade width track, 110 watts of Cibie driving lights, plus the 90 watts of Marchals, showing the way, when bingo! — the exhaust fell off. This required the first of many efforts at wire tying, etc, to hold the pipe (broken at the manifold) in place. On we went, 80 m.p.h., slight left curve, uh oh another one, sure enough sharp right, steep creek crossing and back to 80 across the plains, An occasional crossing without the slight left, occasionally had all those lights pointing straight at the ground on the opposite side while the brakes worked hurriedly. This fascinating drive, averaging about 60, led us on to the main Alice Springs road and back into the dust.

Further on, 70 miles went under the wheels in just one hour. Not bad for rough gravel road and a top speed of about 84 m.p.h.

Alice Springs and we went to the Renault service point, removed the broken exhaust pipe and tried to drive to impound quietly! The scrutineers said the exhaust was a ‘bit noisy’ and we’d have to have it fixed before starting the trial. Quite an understatement. The 10 hours refuel and service period was very profitably spent on exhaust refitting, lubricating and a few other items.

The trial got off to a bright cold start, to the accompaniment of a Scottish band and Captain Cook sent off the first few cars! Quite a number of cars didn’t make it to the trial start, but only one of these was in the “Experts” class. Through the township and then we had 700 miles to cover in 14-and-a-quarter hours. One Citroen did it in 7-and-a-quarter hours! (96 m.p.h. average)! We took our time and only had about three hours to wait before starting the first horror stretch. Off we went full tilt, a little trouble finding two dusty wheel tracks on a dusty plain under a cloud of dust and we had gained two places. Then the deep sandy creek bed, plap. Nav. out and bodily heaves the 403 to the other side, but the bank stops us. Then we spy some “poor” lads (later to become rich) with a Landrover and rope. A minute or two and we’re out. “Thanks fellas!” “Where the hell’s that track?”

Dashing through the anthills, along the ruts, through gates, through ditches and creekbeds and what’s that noise? Sounds like 50 fans chewing up their friendly radiators, A quick inspection confirms the noise but no visible problem. Dash on again and we are suddenly launched over a mild hump to meet the opposite side of a deep dip with a dramatic head-on crunch. We limp into control (swiftly still) trying not to let the 403 sound too collapsed and worriedly try and figure out whether we are in condition to go on, or only to creep into a repair station.

We found we had 6th best points loss to Mt. Isa. We go on.

*(From Torque, September 1970)*

I had a drive and found a nice smooth rock dip which had just the right shape to entice our sagged front end down to neatly knock off one front spring mounting bolt and bend another. Have to be careful. The noise was by now becoming familiar, and the water pump appeared to be the culprit. We found a 403 in Cloncurry and, wonder of wonders, a spare water pump kit. Heartened, we set off on the long drag to Hughenden, but decided that the front spring felt too much like falling off, so we had another bolt put in at Julia Creek. Mobile again, but alas, the delays and the dust held us back to lose 34 pts. at Hughenden on a transport section. From there to Cooktown involved more dust and another horror section near Atherton, very steep and very rough.

After a rest break at Cooktown, we went via Cairns (9 pts, again on a transport section) and another tough section to Townsville. This section, up the eastern edge of the Atherton Tableland to the Paluma Dam was so rough that we saw a Mazda perched over the edge of a straight bit of uphill road. He had simply bounced off the road! Here too we became very aware of a Colt — zow, and there went his taillights — zip, and there went his headlights back again — zoom,



**Elouise lives:** to see the old girl in her faded glory, go to YouTube and search for Peugeot 403 Elouise.





Brian Amey in November 2012. Photo: Paul Watson

taillights again, then he returned from a wrong road ahead of us and still did the section 9 minutes quicker!

Townsville was beautiful, I must spend some time there in less of a hurry. A rest break, some very useful service and we were on our way to Brisbane. The general pattern was that the transport sections were getting harder and the horror stretches easier. Few bits here stood out, but we did have to mend a holed fuel-tank (body filler).

In Brisbane a warm welcome from Peugeot types and a good night's rest in the Tower Mill motel. Gordon's motel affiliations were much appreciated at the stopovers.

We then set off southwest, climbed what Kilfoyle described as "definitely a five litre hill" and saw the girls' Renault (nice crew!) being wrung out after immersion in a ford, without a starter motor at that. Not long afterwards we saw Watson's 16TS parked forlornly by the road, apparently head gasket trouble. Again the cry from Gordon, "He only needs to lose one every 50 miles, and they're every 20 miles, nobody will finish." Much tight driving later we left Narrabri for Wagga on a lo—ng transport section.

Rested, we headed for the infamous San Isadore "jump", a muddy rough stock route section 1.3 miles long to be

done in 2 mins. and lined with photographers all anxious to photograph the poor drivers desperately trying to will their mounts across a horribly wide deep channel, which had unfortunately never been bridged. That was where we bent our roo bar and mudguard, the only visible signs of the whole 10,000 miles.

Just north-east of Bordertown is a blank space which we now know is filled with sand. A section which looked quite feasible, became very tough when the main road was only heaps of loose sand and all side tracks were choked with bogged cars. We shot down a sidetrack only to find a Monaro resting quietly on its belly. When backing out, we sank similarly. We got out of the car to look, after placing the gear in neutral and turning the engine off, and then had to put the brake on to stop the wheels from turning. When you lose grip in sand it's really lost.

A little jacking, shovelling and scrub under the wheels and air out of the tyres and we were away again. While bogged we saw the incredible sight of a Datsun flying full tilt at the loose sand on the main road, in the hope of getting through it by momentum and he pulled up quite involuntarily from about 70 to zero in about 25 yards! We lost 19 points — quite respectable as it turned out.

From ordeal by sand to ordeal by mud. Gordon set off down the muddy little track at a terrific bat. We approached a corner at a good 60 and I suggested that this was a bit fast for mud, and he said, "Oh, I thought it was gravel!" The Monaro we passed didn't think so and was wondering why we tooted as we slid wildly up to him, along the muddy grooves, trying desperately not to pass him unless he was out of the way! Just out of the competitive section the speedo cable broke. Thank goodness Adelaide is easy to find. There, a further service break enabled that, the front spring (lacking temper from the start) and the radiator, which had suddenly sprung a large fan-induced leak while driving to service, to be replaced.

Adelaide to Melbourne was fairly normal trialling and ended with a tremendous reception of well known faces. Servicing on the car was very enthusiastically carried out here next morning one could

almost say we'd completed preparation for the trial.

A simple but rather too quick (for 403) run to Albury via snowy Matlock and Woods Point made a short day's run before the final day marathon.

A 3 a.m. start set us off to Omeo via the Omeo Highway, through the snow and past one deserted Cortina, one wrecked Capri and one overturned Holden. (One every 50 miles, etc. etc.) after Bruthen and the Snowy valley, we reached the high country near Cooma and found there a V.W. just returned to its feet and a Torana which had tumbled across some boulders. Obviously, fatigue was taking its toll. Tea at Cooma and we ventured forth into the fog, snow and mud, down a precipitous S.E.C. road past mountain huts and on to Canberra. Then more tough going, but now it was rough, winding gravel roads, just more, and more and more of them. It was a long night. The effect of going to sleep, dreaming of a sweeping right hander and abruptly waking to the feeling of turning sharply LEFT is absolutely shattering. I was even going to sleep during competitive sections while sitting bolt upright waiting for a mileage.

The competitive sections ended at Bathurst, in the early daylight hours and from there the competitors had to try and drive to Sydney without going to sleep. Not all made it without mishap. By the time we arrived at Bathurst we had travelled 28 hours of highly competitive motoring, dropping some points on most sections. By the time we got to bed, we had been up for about 42 hours!

The results showed that 108 finished out of 179 (trial) starters, with our 9-year-old \$150 403B coming 2nd in class and 27th outright. The car is in excellent running condition still, achieving 51 mpg. in the mainly uphill economy run held recently, will pull uphill in top gear at 12 m.p.h. and rev. out to at least 55 m.p.h. in second gear. Brake linings are still well and truly present and the 75,000 mile old suspension is still quite trialable.

Altogether, although considerable criticism has gone the way of the Ampol Trial (some of it quite justifiable) Gordon and I have now an experience which neither of us would have liked to miss.

Lastly, I would like to thank all those who did so much to help us and even to enable us to get away in the trial at all. In the last couple of weeks there were always one or two helpers, and in the last days the numbers swelled to six or eight. I am really glad to have been able to carry a Peugeot Car Club sign around the Ampol Trial.