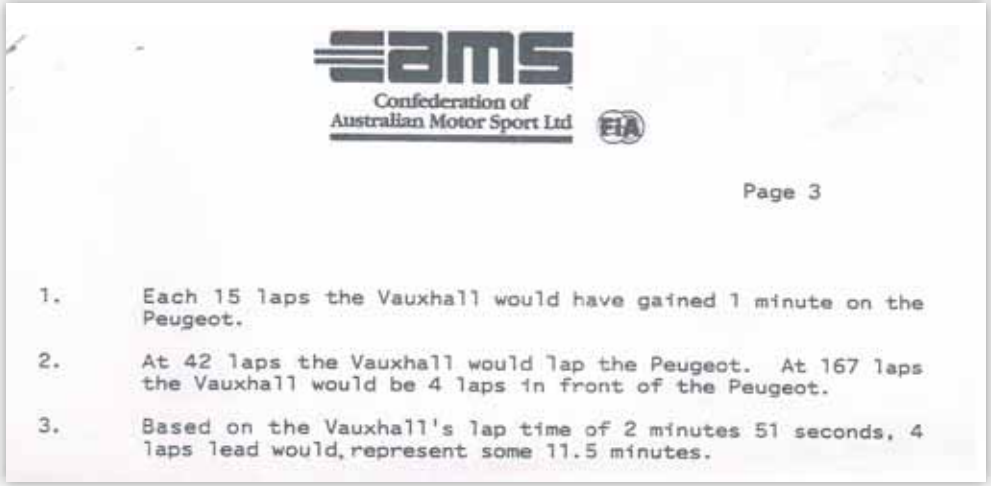
The debate over the first Armstrong 500

By Paul Watson



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Page 3

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2. At 42 laps the Vauxhall would lap the Peugeot. At 167 laps the Vauxhall would be 4 laps in front of the Peugeot.

3. Based on the Vauxhall's lap time of 2 minutes 51 seconds, 4 laps lead would, represent some 11.5 minutes.

The crucial paragraphs of the Hoinville report.

There has been a great deal of discussion over the past 50 years about which car really won the first Armstrong 500, raced at Phillip Island in 1960. In fact, the race was run in classes and there was no provision for an outright winner, but that hasn't stopped the discussion.

Many people (including Wikipedia) will tell you that the John Roxburgh-Frank Coad Vauxhall Cresta and the Geoff Russell-David Anderson-Tony Luxton 403 both finished the race on lap 167, even though the Peugeot was in Class C and was flagged away some 10 seconds after the Vauxhall and other big cars in Class D and 20 seconds after the lone Customline in Class E.

If this was true, it would have been a remarkable result for the 403, with its 1468cc engine, compared with the Cresta's six cylinders and 2262cc donk.

In 1992 the noted race and rally driver/navigator Graham Hoinville, who was working for CAMS at the time, was asked to put this discussion to bed. So he did a forensic investigation of the lap times and came to the conclusion that the Vauxhall finished lap 167 just seconds after the 403 began lap 164.

The start of the 1961 Armstrong 500 at Phillip Island. This picture shows how the various classes were staggered, with 10 seconds between each class.

This was still a good result for the Peugeot, as it completed more laps than all the remaining cars in the race, including the Murray Carter Ford Customline V8 (154), the John French-Norm Beechey-Jim McKeown Vanguard (160) and the Bob Jane-Lou Molina-W. Jane Falcon (158).

What follows is taken verbatim from Graham Hoinville's report, which is in the form of a letter to David Greenhalgh of Killara, NSW, dated 30 March 1993.

"Firstly, let me say that I certainly recall the earlier occasion when I provided you with copies of the official results of the 1960 event and further that I did see the article you subsequently included in your column in the December 1990 issue of 'Racing Car News'. I believe it was that article that resulted in Frank Coad making a further approach to CAMS concerning the results of the first event, and in turn I was requested … to undertake my own investigation based on the results that I possessed.

"My following comments are made in the light of that investigation which I actually carried out in early 1992.

"My investigations were directed exclusively at the position of the two cars involved in the question, namely the Coad Vauxhall and the Russell Peugeot. The official results as published, namely 167 laps in 8 hours, 20 minutes and 45 seconds for the Vauxhall and 164 laps in 8 hours 23 minutes and 21 seconds for the Peugeot appear to be beyond question in terms of race time. My understanding is that these times were based simply on the time of the day when the first cars were flagged away, subtracted from the respective times of day when the two cars were flagged over the finishing line. There

appears to be no dispute in terms of these total race times. It is, of course, inevitably a possibility that the number of laps completed by the two cars may be open to query.

"The supplementary schedule of individual lap times certainly bears the 'disclaimer' that the information contained therein may not be used for the purpose of challenging the official results, nevertheless represents a reasonably acceptable schedule of the lap times of the two cars in question. The implication of this 'disclaimer' together with a number of other stories which circulated regarding official lap scores being 'blown out of the control tower window' are in the manner of folklore and really cannot be taken into account in investigating this matter.

"One of the anomalies present in the individual lap times is that if you add up the total lap times of the two cars concerned, the total does not correlate with the official race times for the two cars. I suggest the explanation for this is that the individual lap times were rounded off to the nearest second, yes the nearest whole second, and when taking into account that the number of laps was in excess of 164 a cumulative error occurred in the addition of the rounded-off figures. This discrepancy in both cases is in the order of 25 seconds, which really is not a significant amount of time in the total scene.

"What I did do in my investigation was to carry out a reconstruction of the race as far as the two cars were concerned, using the individual lap times as a basis. This reconstruction is a very lengthy and wordy piece of work and I believe it is fairly pointless to go into it in detail in this letter. There is a much more direct and easily understandable path to arriving at a definitive resolution of the debate.

"As I indicated earlier, there can be little doubt that the schedule of detailed lap times gives and excellent guide to the individual lap time capabilities of the two cars. If one takes a sample of the first 30 flying laps of the two cars … the average lap time for the Vauxhall is 2 minutes 51 seconds and in the case of the Peugeot, 2 minutes 55 seconds. Reiterating, the Vauxhall lapped at 4 seconds less than the Peugeot; taking samples in other portions of the race revealed a similar comparative lap time difference. The consequences of this lap time difference of four seconds is as follows:

1. Each 15 laps the Vauxhall would have gained 1 minute on the Peugeot.

2. At 42 laps the Vauxhall would lap the Peugeot. At 167 laps the Vauxhall would be 4 laps in front of the Peugeot.

3. Based on the Vauxhall's lap time of 2 minutes 51 seconds, 4 laps' lead would represent some 11.5 minutes.

"Turning now to the question of pit stops, the individual lap times show that the Vauxhall was totally regular and precise. The Vauxhall had pit stops at lap 42, lap 84, lap 126 and finished at 167 laps. On each of the three pit stop lap times, if one subtracts in each case the typical flying lap time of the Vauxhall at 2 minutes and 51 seconds, there is a total additional time arising from the three pit stops of 11.5 minutes.

"It is quite coincidental that the time lost due to these three pit stops, 11.5 minutes, is almost exactly the lead time I have attributed to the Vauxhall as a result of it faster lap time capability.

"A most significant deduction at this point in my argument is that the only way the Peugeot could have been in a position to challenge the Vauxhall at 167 laps, would have been for the Peugeot to have run the entire race without any pit stops. This of course, would be nonsense.

"Reverting to the case of the pit stops of the Peugeot, these were not so regular although they did result in less additional time for the car. Pit stops occurred at 57 1aps, 100 laps and 126 laps, the additional time resulting from these stops, totalling 10.25 minutes. In addition, the Peugeot on lap 121 suffered an inexplicable extension of lap time of some 1 minute. This particular lap bears the endorsement of 'S' but no explanation is given. Whether it was a brief pit stop or a spin remains a matter for conjecture. The end result however, is that the total additional time applicable to the Peugeot is 11.25 minutes.

"The conclusion reached in this area, is that of the 11.5 minutes advantage the Vauxhall wou1d have built up due to its faster lap time capability only some 15 seconds of this would have been recovered by the Peugeot as a result of its better performance in terms of total time lost due to pit stops. Thus, the conclusion derived from the above calculations is that the Vauxhall was not quite 4 laps in front of the Peugeot. In other words at the end of the race, the Vauxhall was closing in on the Peugeot in preparation to lap it for the fourth time.

"By comparison, my reconstruction of the race mentioned earlier produced the result that the Peugeot completed its 163rd lap 501 minutes and 34 seconds after the start of the race, whilst the Vauxhall completed its 167th lap (namely the total distance) in 501 minutes and 42 seconds. This showed

that the Vauxhall was some eight seconds behind the Peugeot and was about to lap the Peugeot for the fourth time.

"A further comparison is provided by the official total race times. As I said earlier … the Vauxhall took 8 hours, 20 minutes and 45 seconds to complete the 167 laps whilst the Peugeot recorded its 164 laps in 8 hours, 23 minutes and 21 seconds. The difference between these two race times is 2 minutes and 36 seconds and given the average lap time capability at 2 minutes and 55 seconds, the position of the Peugeot on the road when the Vauxhall received the chequered flag was 19 seconds in front of it.

"Summarising, therefore, I have detailed three different scenarios. The first is based on the consequences of the average lap time capabilities of the two cars, deducting the effect of their recorded pit stops. The second scenario consists of a reconstruction of the race derived from the individual lap times, and the third scenario is provided by the official total race times. All three produced, within a relatively small time frame, the same scenario – the Vauxhall approaching the Peugeot to lap it for the fourth time at the end of the race.

"I acknowledge the oft-quoted story of Geoff Russell that 'he had the Vauxhall in sight at the finish' but my inevitable conclusion is that the sighting of the Vauxhall by Geoff Russell was via his rear vision mirror. In other words, as the Vauxhall received the chequered flag, it was probably visible to Geoff Russell in his rear vision mirror as he commenced his final (164th) lap. Thus, I believe that based on the foregoing, there can be no shadow of doubt that the Vauxhall was clearly the winner of the race and furthermore, it was almost 4 laps ahead of the Peugeot.

"Given the unarguable lap time superiority of the Vauxhall of some 4 seconds per lap and given that the additional time taken by both cars in their respective pit stops was relatively comparable, it is inevitable that the Vauxhall was close to being four laps in front of the Peugeot at race end.

"In a somewhat lengthy way I have summarised the outcome of the investigation I conducted a little over a year ago, and the result of this is that CAMS has reaffirmed its position that the Vauxhall Cresta of Frank Coad and John Roxburgh was the first car to finish the initial Armstrong 500 held in 1960. The winning margin in the race was a little less than 4 laps."

Graham Hoinville's report also includes the times for every lap by each of the two cars. For reasons of space, times here are given in minutes and seconds in 10-lap groups (except at the end of the race). The figures in brackets are the cumulative times.

	PEUGEOT – Car 34		**VAUXHALL** – Car 37	
After	*Time*	*Accumulative time*	*Time*	*Accumulative time*
LAP 10	30.02		28.57	
LAP 20	28.59	(59.01	28.28	(57.25)
LAP 30	29.04	(88.05)	28.23	(85.48)
LAP 40	29.13	(117.18)	28.25	(114.13)
LAP 50	29.36	(146.54)	31.53	(146.06)
LAP 60	32.99	(179.43)	28.49	(174.55)
LAP 70	30.00	(209.43)	28.53	(203.48)
LAP 80	30.04	(239.47)	29.22	(233.10)
LAP 90	29.55	(269.42)	35.29	(268.39)
LAP 100	34.33	(304.15)	29.42	(298.21)
LAP 110	31.21	(335.36)	29.09	(327.30)
LAP 120	31.13	(366.49)	29.31	(357.01)
LAP 130	33.12	(400.01)	34.28	(391.29)
LAP 140	30.48	(430.49)	29.34	(421.03)
LAP 150	30.53	(461.42)	29.54	(450.57
LAP 160	30.49	(492.31)	29.47	(480.44)
LAP 164	12.04	(504.35)	12.03	(492.47)
LAP 167	–	–	20.58	(501.42)