

Jumping Jacks



Rallycross in Australia

Rallycross had a meteoric rise in popularity, but crash landed almost as quickly as the cars.

Rallycross began in England in 1967, and within two years was being experimented with in Australia. The popularity of the sport was due mainly to its spectator value and tailor-made-for-television appeal. It combined the best elements of rallying, with the spectacle of door-to-door motor racing.

The success of Rallycross in Australia also owed much to the Mini clubs of Victoria, New South Wales and South Australia, which put so much effort into running the events and providing most of the officials – essential for any motorsport – as well as fielding many competitors.

A significant appeal of Rallycross was its grass-roots affordability, that allowed fresh newcomers with a bit of clever thinking, to take on the established rally and racing stars on fairly equal terms.

There is no doubt that television played a crucial role in the growth, attracting sponsors and competitors, and the loss of TV coverage was a major factor in the sudden demise of the sport.

In the early days, Rallycross in the UK attracted Works entries from BMC, Ford and others. The battle saw the development of the first 4WD competitors (Ford Capri and Mini) and their subsequent banning from the sport.

Yet, when Rallycross began to falter in the UK in the early 1980s, it got a reprieve from the rally fraternity – the same place it got its initial kick-start – when the banned Group B rally cars found a new home. The likes of the MG Metro 6R4 brought new life to the sport.

Today, Rallycross is still well patronised in the UK, but is particularly big in parts of Europe, especially Scandinavia, where the top-line drivers are almost household names.

Unfortunately, in Australia it is yet another chapter in the motorsport story that has been consigned to history. Or, has it?

To read the whole feature on Rallycross, get your copy of the magazine from your newsagent, or subscribe today.