

The 1979 REPCO Adventure

One Sunday evening in July 1979 a long time friend rang me to ask if I could get a couple of weeks off work. Ted Jones and I had formed a lasting friendship when we both lived in Toowoomba and shared an enthusiasm for motor sport. This included competing at hillclimbs, race meetings, local club trials and gymkhanas in South East Queensland during the late fifties. In response I replied that it might be possible and would make enquiries at work, on Monday. When I enquired the purpose of the leave he said, "Would you like to come for a drive around Australia as an acting unpaid member of a back-up team for a car in the REPCO Rally?" Obviously the answer had to be "yes".

The competing car turned out to be the Citroen CX2400 to be crewed by Andrew Cowan, Jim Reddiex and navigated by Jeff Beaumont. It was a well balanced and experienced combination.

Originally there was to have been a team entry of three cars sponsored by Brysons, the Citroen distributors, but they and another sponsor had dropped out. While other sponsorship became available it was far from sufficient for such a large scale effort. This limited the entry to one car and one service vehicle with a team of three mechanics. To provide further much needed assistance Jim Reddiex approached Ted, who was also in the motor trade, to see if he would work as a member of a second service crew and perhaps recruit a friend to form a two man team in a vehicle Jim had available. Neither Ted nor I were motor mechanics but were not totally lacking in experience in the workings of motor cars. Our main duties would be as drivers, wheel changers and carters of spare wheels and tyres to some but not all service points. Because of the schedules for the rally cars it was not physically possible for one service team to get to all service points ahead of the competitors. In some cases our rally car arrived at a service point which neither service vehicle had been able to reach in time. On the Monday following Ted's phone I approached my boss, the District Telecom Manager Gold Coast, with a request for two weeks leave. He was not very receptive as he was due to go on leave about the same time and our leave periods would overlap. He said to me, "It will have to be a pretty good reason." When I explained that I had been offered a once in a lifetime chance to co-drive a service vehicle for a competitor in the Repco Rally he replied, "That's a good enough reason." Before final arrangements were made I arranged with Ted to meet Jim Reddiex. I had wanted to do this because, while I was reasonably fit and active, I was approaching 57 years of age and did not wish to saddle the team with someone who might not be able to keep up the pace. There was no problem so far as Jim was concerned.

And so it was that the Cowan/Reddiex Citroen was to have two service teams despite many reports to the contrary. Officially there may have been only one. Certainly the few photographs I found time to take confirm that the two service vehicles had only one door sticker each designating them as service vehicles. In the book "An Old Dog For a Hard Road" by Bill Tuckey and Thomas B. Floyd a picture caption states, "Tired, but smiling, the lone service crew for Cowan's Citroen (Jim Reddiex's brother on right) wait for Andy and Jim to pay their respects at Wittenoom." The other gentleman in the photo is my mate

Ted Jones. Later in the book it says of the Cowan car "his sole service car was waiting in Fort Headland." Motor Sport magazine was a little closer to the mark in its report in the October 1979 issue. Speaking of one of the winning Holden cars on its arrival at Geraldton it said, "They remained 40 min ahead of Cowan and Reddiex who grafted into fourth spot with the grim knowledge that they had no back-up truck since before Mt Gambier. Two men in an old Citroen London-to-Sydney car was the full complement." The truck had been in trouble before Mt Gambier with a broken axle but a replacement organised by the Ford dealer was soon fitted by the three mechanics in the truck. They caught up at one of the service points later in the night.

The Brisbane newspapers had it right. The "Sunday Sun" of August 5 said "Maxim Motors Citroen will be accompanied by only two back-up vehicles , basically toting tyres and minor spares. If anything goes wrong - say to gearbox or engine - they'll be out of the event."

In a way this was to prove prophetic. The other report headlined "Citroen Trial Team confident" said "Local Citroen dealer Jim Reddiex has high hopes for his Citroen CX2400 GTI in next month's Repco Reliability Trial." It goes on to say "The Citroen's service team will include five Brisbane men." The five were Bob (Jim Reddiex's brother), Alex Lowe, Trevor Ruddick, Ted Jones and myself (Ken Ebeling).

Ted and I flew to Melbourne on the Friday prior to the start scheduled for Sunday, August 5th, 1979. The city lived up to its reputation. It rained for most of Friday but was reasonably fine on Saturday. By 4 pm in the afternoon it was getting rather chilly for Queenslanders. "By 7 pm we were happy to be inside somewhere to keep warm" was how I described it in a letter to my son Mar. our accommodation in Melbourne was in the owner's unit above a garage where the rally car and the back up vehicles were undergoing final preparation. It was, I understood, a family business owned by the Dutton family in the suburb of Burnley. Most of the family were away for the week end and the back-up crew members slept in sleeping bags on the lounge room floor. It wasn't to be the last time we used our sleeping bags and we wouldn't always have a carpet underneath, a roof overhead and central heating.

We first saw the car we were to use as a back-up vehicle shortly after our arrival at the garage on Friday. It was a Citroen CX2400 which had previously been a competing car in a London to Sydney rally. It still had some of the original advertising signs on it and as a result we were directed into the competitors' compound at Adelaide and had a job getting out again with the other competitors trying to get in. The car had a huge auxiliary petrol tank mounted in part of the back seat space with a lot of pipes and a tap which was to become a spare for the rally car some time later. Best of all though was the five speed gear box and a set of twin choke Webber carburettors. It performed accordingly. The car had already been in use by Andrew Cowan as a practice car over some sections of the route many competitors thought the rally would use. Lots of people had been asking lots of questions of friends, motor dealers and trial drivers in past events. The main points on the route had been made public but there is lot of territory between even the smaller towns and no one could really be sure of the details.

Ted and I spent a lot of time becoming familiar with the Citroen, including some practice at changing wheels, and packing, unpacking and repacking the things we needed and the spares we had to carry for the rally car. A few drives made it apparent that whenever the car was driven with the windows down the ear filled with petrol fumes. Despite a lot of investigation and attention to probable causes we never fixed the problem. In the end it was more than cold enough to keep the windows up during the period I was in the car. There was virtually no interior trim and at a stop somewhere I obtained a number of fruit cartons which were flattened out and used to insulate knees and feet from the cold metal of the car body.

There was a briefing for all participants at the showgrounds on the Saturday night. The competing cars were lined up on the trotting track and gave everyone the opportunity to walk among the brightly polished rally cars with their logos and advertising signs prominently displayed. For the briefing we sat in one of the grandstands and froze. In anticipation I had put on long socks underneath my trousers, a warm shirt, a pullover and wore my overalls as well. Despite this I was so cold that my bones ached and I was soon looking forward to crawling into my sleeping bag in the heated lounge room.

It wasn't as soon as I had wished as, when we got back to the garage, we had to sit with the rally crew while Jeff Beaumont went over the instructions for the service crews. Jeff gave us a list of the service points where the car or the truck and sometimes both, were to meet the rally car. For the car these were Tooborac, Ballarat, Greenwald, Mt Gambier, Bordertown, Pinaroo, Renmark, the finish of the special stage at Kuitpa Forest and on to Adelaide. The first rally car was due to leave the showgrounds at 12 noon on Sunday August 5 and arrive in Adelaide by 4 pm the next day. The Citroen, being Car No 2 was to leave one minute later. Jeff wanted the service car to follow the rally car, when it left the showgrounds, all the way to Tooborac. I am not sure why but it may have been in case the truck was held up in the Sunday traffic. Ted was driving when we left Melbourne, which was probably just as well. He took a few liberties with traffic lights, which I might not have done, to enable us to sit behind the rally Citroen. It was only a transport stage for the rally but traffic was heavy and it was not always possible to get into the same lane as the rally car.

The Tooborac Showgrounds was probably more crowded than it had ever been or ever will be as the rally crews prepared for their onslaught on the first special stage of 48.34 km to be covered in 34 minutes. Mention was made in the instructions of rough roads, tree stumps in the grass alongside and the need to exercise due caution. Despite the belief that no one would complete the section within the time set, two cars were early and one arrived dead on time. Portman (Datsun Stanza) was 32 seconds early, Carr (Ford Cortina) 25 seconds early and Brock (Holden Commodore) dead on time. The Citroen, with Cowan driving, was 28 seconds late but in no way disgraced. As it turned out the Citroen was always to be up with the front runners until forced out by major damage in a section beyond Darwin.

Over ten years later memories of the first night have become a bit of a blur. I do know that Ted drove most of the night while I navigated. In fact I don't remember sleeping at

all until the following night in Adelaide. It wasn't because of Ted's driving but the flow of adrenalin. Somewhere along the way, on a gravel road bordered by stunted trees, there were countless mice scurrying across the road in the glare of the headlights. We waited for the Citroen at one point and were able to direct it to reach a control from the correct direction after there had been some error in distance or route instruction. This was one of the locations where we again saw the truck. The truck also arrived while we were waiting at Greenwald at the end of a special stage. Later events indicate that it must have left before us. A copy of the route instructions for service vehicles which I still possess has a note in my writing on this section of the route. It says "Follow (the rally car) into Mt Gambier", I do not recall having done this. At any rate it would have been impossible as on the way to Mt Gambier, in rain and fog, we passed the truck stopped by the wayside. We nearly kept going but fortunately backed up to see what was wrong. The Ford light truck with three men on board and a host of wheels, tyres, spare parts and other service needs was badly overloaded and had broken an axle. One of the mechanics, Trevor, I seem to recall, was jammed into the car with us and we continued on into Mt Gambier. Fortunately there were Ford representatives on hand to assist the Ford cars in the rally and Trevor was able to arrange for an axle and transport back to the stricken truck. As stated earlier they caught up some time later. Whether the pump up shock absorbers were added to the suspension before or after Adelaide I no longer recall.

At Mt Gambier the Citroen was the first car in its class to arrive and Andrew Cowan was presented with a trophy by the mayor. Just why they picked on the class with the Citroen in it is unclear. The fact that Andrew was a well known rally driver overseas may have meant better publicity for the mayor, the rally and the town. The Citroen had lost only 2 minutes 28 seconds and was running fourth behind Carr (Cortina) and Portman (Datsun), both with clean sheets. Brock (Holden) was third having lost a minute.

Both service crews were due to go to Bordertown and on to Renmark. The route for the service vehicles was no cause for concern but the competitors were not so lucky. Their lot was to be little used tracks, mud, sand and a pitch black night. We made good time on the run into Renmark and arrived well before the rally car was due. We were to have a frustrating wait as their arrival time came and the minutes ticked on. When they finally arrived they were recorded as having lost 22 minutes between Mt Gambier and Renmark. They had been bogged three times and luckily towed out of trouble twice. This dropped them to sixteenth place with 24 minutes 28 seconds lost. The leading three were Portman, Carr and Brock, the latter being only a minute down. The rally cars were lining up to use a coin operated high pressure wash hose to clean the mud away particularly from under the mudguards. We took a turn and used up nearly all the 20 cent pieces I had with me for use in Public Telephones. The garage had long before used up its supply. While one of the Porsches was being washed I inadvertently walked in front of the cameraman filming the operation and was told off very smartly. As was usual at most of the scheduled meal stops the locals had provided ample facilities for food and drink.

From Renmark the service crews were directed to the service point at Murray Bridge. We paused to say hello to the crew of the truck where a group of service vehicles were waiting just before Murray Bridge but did not realise that the next set of instructions

began at that point. As a result we crossed the Murray at Murray Bridge, where there was far more river bed than river, before realising we had gone wrong. One of the trial cars had followed us and as we saw no others he must also have been off course. We retraced our course and waited at the "T" junction where we had gone astray along with a small number of other service crews who were also unsure of the situation. After some rechecking Ted convinced me where we had gone wrong and soon the instructions fell into place and we found ourselves back on track. We left the bitumen surface and because of the time we had lost Ted kept things moving. He was obviously enjoying himself, and we arrived at the start of the Kuinto special stage long before the rally cars. We were of two minds but decided we had better stick to the designated service vehicle route and pressed on. We finally got to the finish line of the special stage, but only with the help of directions from a local couple who were heading out to see the fun. We had turned left at the wrong "Y" junction. They also provided us with a cup of tea, biscuits and a chat while we waited.

Brock (Holden) made fastest time of 4 minutes 30 seconds easily beating the set time of 7 minutes for the 11.4 km special stage through the forest. He was followed by Menta (Holden) and Portman (Datsun) both having dropped 2 minutes 39 seconds.

The run into Adelaide was hampered by the Monday afternoon traffic and those who were late were happy to hear later that any points lost for lateness in the section would not be counted. On arrival at the finish we headed for the service vehicle entry but we were very firmly directed to the competitors' entrance. Having driven in we were firmly directed to leave. The confusion was no doubt caused by the advertising still on the car from the London to Sydney rally and the fact that there was a service crew sticker on one side only.

The service crews were booked into a motel near the centre of Adelaide and after a bath we presented ourselves at the dining room. The waiter sat us down and shortly came back to tell us that as it was after 7 pm the chef had ceased duty and we could not be served. We found a restaurant nearby where we enjoyed an excellent meal and a glass of wine. After a much needed sleep, even though a little short in time, we were up about 3.30am. It was already Tuesday August 7, 1971 and there was still a long way to go. It was permitted to take the rally cars out of the impound an hour before the scheduled departure time. The first car was due out at 5am. At this stage the Citroen was still running sixteenth with 28 minutes 03 seconds lost. There had been some changes among the leaders. Portman (Datsun) was still leading with two minutes 53 seconds lost. Brock was second, down a further 52 seconds, followed by Ferguson (Holden) also with 3 minutes 45 seconds lost.

In the morning, despite the instructions given the previous night, we had trouble finding the garage where the rally car was to be serviced. For some reason some of us had to sit in the back of the truck to get there as the service Citroen was elsewhere. It may have been that Bob Reddix had been at the same motel as the rally crew or perhaps it was needed to ferry them somewhere that night or get to the impound area to pick up the rally car. There did not seem to be a great deal to be done apart from routine maintenance and

the taking on board of some spares sent from Melbourne. The latter included extra wheel nuts of the type used for the alloy wheels on the rally car. It had been the intention, for some forgotten reason, to fit alloy wheels as used on the rally car to the service car. This never eventuated as the bag of nuts was left on the floor of the garage. Tyres or wheels which had been punctured or damaged had been repaired or replaced overnight and were reallocated among the rally car and service vehicle. The rally car was ready to roll without too much drama so far. The service vehicles and their crews were also ready to head for the first interception point.

A notation on the front sheet of the Adelaide to Perth service crew instruction lists the service points for Ted and me to visit. They were, I think, in Jeff Beaumont's writing. They were certainly not written by me. The list contained a number of previously unheard of and unusual places. It read Yunta, Mingary, Parachilna, Kingoonya, Nullaboor and then says all the rest to Perth. A note, written by me, against Parachilna says "us only" and another says "truck + Broken Hill". I can only assume that this meant the truck would go to all points on our list, except Parachilna, and would also go to Broken Hill which was a two hour service and refuel stop. We certainly didn't get to Broken Hill and were alone at Parachilna apart from a small number of locals and the crews of other service vehicles and rally cars which were coming and going. The publican there apparently intended to stay open all night for what must have been his busiest night in years.

Our first service point at Yunta brought about a reshuffle of the service personnel. As neither Ted nor I were fully trained mechanics, and certainly short on general knowledge of Citroens, it was decided to put a mechanic in the service Citroen. The crews became Bob Reddiex and myself in the Citroen with Ted going to the truck with Trevor and Alex. Bob and I, being the older two, may have been considered to be a little more compatible. It was a lovely sunny day at Yunta and the trial cars coming from the direction of Manunda heralded their coming with a cloud of dust atop a distant ridge. The first car had been due at 10.40 am and by the time the Citroen arrived we had transferred the necessary gear and were waiting to see what had to be done. I can only recall them taking on petrol.

Did we go to Mingary? You can ask but I can't really be sure. Just a fragment of a picture in my mind says we left in that direction but the dusty road and open country could have been one of a hundred other places. Having placed some photographs in the right sequence it gives an indication that we did go there. If it was Mingary there wasn't much to it. There was still a railway water tank but all the houses were gone and a number of derelict brick chimneys suggested there had once been an hotel. While we waited a long train headed by a diesel locomotive headed towards Peterborough and I spent time boiling a billy for tea and fossicking in the railway yard. I found a sleeper nail in an old railway sleeper, a two cent coin and indications that one of the railwaymen had owned an early model Holden. I'm not going to go into details of what a sleeper nail is for other than to say the figures on the head are for the year it was driven into the wood. The rally car came and went with only a quick pause to scrounge a chicken leg and a cup of hot tea without leaving the car. Our next service rendezvous was at Parachilna where the first car

was due at midnight. This meant we would retrace our steps on Hwy. 32 before leaving the highway for Peterborough. From there we went through Hawker and on to Parachilna. The instructions say, in capital letters "navigation is hazardous from Peterborough".

It would have been after 3pm when we left what logic now says was Mingary. By the time we got to the reputedly scenic Wilpena Pound area it was after dark and what we saw was mainly road and kangaroos and an occasional service vehicle rushing past. We were well ahead of the rally cars and Bob settled down for a sleep after we had fuelled the car and had a drink and a bite to eat. I couldn't sleep and got talking to a chap in an old Holden utility who was thinking of going into the ranges to watch the rally cars come through. Then he found he had a flat tyre and a spare which he knew to be useless. I gave him a hand but whether we fixed a puncture or merely a leaking valve matters little. We had a pump in the Citroen but had never used it. When we tried to pump up his tyre we found the hose connection to the valve to be perished and could only get air into his tyre by using bits of rag over the valve stem. He had neither spare tyre nor a pump in an area where both were surely essential. When our rally car arrived we gave them a couple of new spares to replace those that had been destroyed or punctured and they were soon on their way. We repacked our gear and headed south for Port Augusta. We paused there to refuel the car and ourselves and stretch our legs. While there the pump attendant warned "Watch out for kangaroos if your'e going to Kingoonya". A police car pulled up and gave us the same advice and then the driver of a long distance coach which had just arrived from the west offered the same warning. Either we were both asleep for most of the way or the kangaroos had been frightened off by the increased traffic. We saw very few. It was about lam Wednesday morning when we arrived at Kingoonya. We parked beside the truck, on the lee side, spread our tarpaulin and crawled into our sleeping bags without disturbing the crew of the truck. It was a freezing night and I was thankful for the silvery coated space blanket Ted had lent to me earlier. Bob and I slept beyond daylight but the growing activity woke us soon after. We found that the number of service vehicles waiting had increased overnight with the first rally car due at 9.40 am. Someone had found a small log and was trying to get a fire started but was hampered by a lack of kindling. Ted, at my suggestion, had bought a half axe which we were carrying in the service car. It was soon put to good use and the small fire soon attracted a group of half frozen people looking for some warmth. When the fire had died down Alex got out a frying pan and cooked bacon and eggs for the five of us. It got the day off to a good start. It was the only day when I found time to take a photograph of the rally being serviced and a very ordinary one of both our service vehicles together. There was again not a lot of work required on the rally Citroen apart from routine maintenance and swapping of wheels and tyres for any damaged ones. As soon as the work was done we left for Nullaboor.

The service vehicle route instructions say "Travel via KOKATHA (45km), LAKE EVERARD (81km), HILTABA (53km) to WIRRULLA (76km). Then take the Eyre Highway to CEDUNA (93km) and NULLABOOR (290 km)." I have never travelled such a desolate road but obviously the ones the rally cars traversed were far, far worse. We drove through stunted scrub, across open plain and salt flats, skirted salt lakes and drove through long stretches of loose sand. The good thing was the suspension of the

Citroen. The first time Bob drove it with me he showed that potholes and bumps, which I would have slowed considerably for, could be taken at speed without a care in the world. At one spot we passed by a large open shed with a vast galvanised roof. This appeared to be designed to catch the limited rainfall and collect it in the nest of tanks sheltered from the sun's rays by the vast roof. On one sandy corner I ran out of road, fortunately in a clear area, where I was able to reverse back onto the track and to get going again. Bob didn't say anything but he did give me a bit of a look. Not long after getting to the Eyre Highway we stopped for petrol and Bob asked "How far is it to Nullabor and how long do we have to get there?" I cannot recall the actual time and distance but the latter was a little under 390 km and we had about two and a half hours before the first car was due at 4.20pm. Bob suggested that he take over for the first stint of driving. I must admit he really drove. On the open sections, which accounted for most of the distance, he cruised at around 160km/h. After about an hour and a half we changed over so he could rest in preparation for the servicing to come. I kept going at about 120 to 130 km/h and while there have been times when I have driven faster I have never driven so fast for so long. We got to Nullabor just after 4.20pm on Wednesday afternoon only to find that none of the rally cars had arrived. We had ample time to reserve a place for the service vehicles with a space in between for the rally car. Bob walked up to the control, about half a kilometre away, where the road coming from the north joined the Eyre Highway. This was the road bringing the rally from Immarna via Maralinga and Fisher a 260 km journey. Immarna and Fisher are on the East West railway line. At the control Bob was told that the rally was being held at Immarna for three hours to wait for a train carrying fuel for the rally cars. It was running late. This meant our hurried trip had virtually been for nothing. It was a glorious drive just the same and we had both enjoyed it. Meanwhile at Immarna a number of the leading crews had told the organisers that they would wait no longer as they did not need fuel. In most cases they also had service vehicles waiting at Maralinga. It was in this section that problems began for some of the fancied competitors. The delay gave us time, after the truck arrived, to set up for a quick service and to have a meal. Someone, I think it was Trevor, managed to get us into the dining room before it was to be opened and we enjoyed eating at a table and being served a meal for the first time since Adelaide. It was good to be out of the wind as well. The wind was blowing so strongly that an elderly gentleman serving petrol was nearly blown off his feet and you had to lean into the wind when you were walking about.

When the Citroen arrived with Andrew driving Bob was busy mopping up petrol from the floor. There had been a problem with the changeover tap for the auxiliary petrol tank and there was petrol everywhere. Fortunately the service Citroen had the same arrangement and a swap fixed the problem for the rally car. Another workable set up was arrived at for the service car. In addition to minor servicing needs there was the usual exchange of good space wheels and tyres for those which had taken a beating. Night had fallen before we left.

We tore on across the Nullabor Plain of which we saw little apart from what could be seen in the narrow swathe which we cut through the darkness of the night with the headlights and the two large driving lights. Our next interception point was to be where the rally rejoined the Eyre Highway beyond Mundrabilla. The rally had left the highway

at Eucla, for a 127km stage to the north. At Eucla the road descends several hundred metres from an upper to a lower plateau which continues on into the distance. The service route instructions said "The trial cars will return to a point approx. 3km past the Mundrabilla Motel." When we reached the motel there were a number of service vehicles waiting there. Why, I couldn't understand. We continued for a few kilometres to the next road coming from the north where a few more vehicles were waiting. One of them was a Marlboro Holden service van. We could hear them talking on their two way radio from time to time even though they were on the opposite side of the road. While Bob slept in the driving seat I went over the instruction and the map by the light of the map reading light. It was an excellent light on a long flexible stalk mounted on the windscreen pillar and created no problem for the driver when it was in use. After some time the Marlboro van left. By then I was convinced that the instruction was way out so far as distance was concerned. I woke Bob, convinced him, and we drove back to the motel and convinced some of those there. We set off, travelling as quickly as possible in the circumstances, in the hope of making the interception point in time. We didn't make it but we confirmed that the instruction had been wrong. The interception point turned out to be an awfully long 3km past the Mundrabilla Motel. By now I had found I could sleep soundly while Bob drove, and wake up refreshed ready to begin driving again. When possible I drove the last leg to each service point to let Bob rest ready for servicing the rally car. Even now I find that I can often get to sleep by imagining I can hear the drone of the engine of the Citroen as we hurried on through the night. Even if I don't go to sleep it brings back pleasant memories.

We arrived at Cocklebiddy, 461 km from Nullaboor, where we met up with the truck. We had missed the rally car again. Trevor, Alex and Ted were waiting for a couple of not very co-operative workers to fit a new tube to one of the truck tyres. It was quite late at night and the workers, I am sure, had already changed and fixed many tyre problems. The money which changed hands was well above the standard rate. We had a quick drink, left them to load up and sped off in the hope of getting to Coolgardie in time to meet Andrew, Jim and Jeff on the morning of Thursday August 9th. The first car was due at 3.25am without allowance for the holding time at Immarna. My notes tell me that the truck was originally supposed to go to Goolgardie. The truck probably couldn't have made it in time as the instructions gave the rally cars six hours for the trip from Cocklebiddy to Coolgardie including a transport stage and a refuel and meal break at Kalgoorlie. The service vehicles had a further 43 km to travel in the same six hours if they left Cocklebiddy together. The service crew instruction refers to it as a six and three quarter hour trip. I don't know how long we took but we were there in plenty of time.

We refuelled on the outskirts of Coolgardie and moved to a spot on the wide street where the rally car could readily see us. It was daylight when they arrived but there was little to do. Quite often the service crew had no idea of the problems encountered by the rally car or the repairs the crew had to make. We always knew how many tyres or wheels they had damaged. It was not long before we were both on our way to meet again at Narrogin. This time we were better off than the rally car as they had a nominal 10 hour trip over worse roads while we had 122km less to travel.

Some time after leaving Coolgardie I reached behind me for the service instructions to check on the route we had to follow. I couldn't locate them despite a fairly thorough but panic stricken search while on the move. We pressed on just the same as the last time we could recall looking at them they were on the roof of the Citroen while we talked to Jeff about the route. Some time later we stopped to look for some windscreen cleaner and found the missing instructions underneath the spare wheels and tyres. Later in the morning we had our first and only minor mechanical problem. Going down hill into a small town the car didn't slow as much as expected when I eased off. On the other side of the town I stopped the car and as I did so Bob woke up. The detached throttle return spring was quickly replaced.

We had just sat down after ordering some tea and sandwiches in a small cafe when another Citroen drove up. It was being driven by the proprietor of the LAUREX company the major sponsor of the rally Citroen. He had been sticking to the main roads and meeting up with the rally at major control points. He had his school age son with him who by now was missing school. His son didn't seem to mind. It had been totally unplanned at the start but the current intention was to go as far as Perth.

On our arrival at Narrogin we set up for a service at one of the refuel points but moved on to the other when the truck arrived. It was closer to the start and finish of the 26km special stage which ran along the track beside the railway line and returned down the other side. It proved very little so far as the rally was concerned but gave the locals a few hours of entertainment. Portman (Datsun Stanza) was fastest, taking only 12 minutes 34 seconds for the 26km. Dunkerton (Volvo 244) was next then Bell (Holden Commodore).

The service crews had another change around before leaving Narrogin. I joined the truck crew into Perth but am not sure whether it was with Ted and Alex or Ted and Trevor. It was intended to be only temporary but future events were to change things. Both service vehicles went to the garage of the Citroen agents where the car was to be serviced next morning. Arrangements were made to have tyres changed and some of the special alloy wheels trued up and rim dents removed and tyres refitted before morning. We were driven to the motel by Trevor in an Alfa Romeo loaned by the garage which apparently was also the Alfa Romeo dealership. It was after dark when we arrived at the motel. We had a lovely room with a balcony overlooking the Swan River but some of us had to sleep on the floor in our sleeping bags. I was one of them.

Our arrival and departure times from the first overnight stopovers reminded me of a chat with Job Reddiex before the rally. He mentioned to me that he had been at Ayers Rock on three occasions, I think it was, but had never really seen it because each time it was during a rally and at night. I have the same feeling about Perth and Adelaide.

At Perth the Citroen was running seventh in the rally with 2 hours 23 minutes 18 seconds lost. The leading car was the Cortina of Bond with 53 minutes 26 seconds lost followed by the Ferguson and Brock Commodores, the Carr Cortina, the Fury Cortina and the Johnson Volvo. Only 26 competitors had visited all controls.

The first car was scheduled to leave Perth at 4 am on Friday, August 10th. This meant getting cars out of the impound area shortly after 3 am depending on the scheduled departure time of each car. After being taken from the impound to the garage the Citroen was put on a hoist while the mechanics worked on the car. Ted and I were given the job of fitting a reinforcing plate over a crack in one of the front wheel arches. At that stage the hoist was up about 400 mm and had to be raised further. Everyone was told but a few moments later I had reason to step down and completely forgot. As a result my step down foot finding nothing beneath it, swung under the hoist and I landed flat on my back. Luckily I had somehow managed to keep my head up, at least partially. It caused quite a stir. I had a couple of Disprins and was able to keep working. I felt no ill effects and was unmarked except for a lump on my head. It meant, however, that it was unwise for me to go back in the service car with Bob. If I became unwell he would have needed to do all the driving and might not be fully refreshed when servicing was needed. There was also the added risk of him falling asleep at the wheel. Ted rejoined the Citroen with Bob and I went to the truck.

Leaving Perth we misread the instructions and had to retrace our steps for a short distance. The time loss didn't really matter as we did not have to go to the special stage at Wanneroo Raceway. The Citroen had to do so and then go to an interception point near Cervantes which is on or very near the west coast. At one point on the way to Geraldton, the first service point for the truck, we pulled up at a roadside shop with a couple of petrol pumps and were joined by Ted and Bob. Whether or not they had already been to Cervantes I don't know but I don't recall them being at Geraldton. Jeff's list of service points on my copy of the instructions does not mention Geraldton for the service car. We arrived well before the rally car after a pleasant tour up the Brand Highway which is referred to in the instructions but is not marked as such on the BP map.

The Citroen had a good run to Geraldton and had picked up three places and was now running fourth. Ferguson led followed by Brock, both in Commodores, then Johnson (Volvo). The Ford Cortina challenge was beginning to fade.

While the rally car was heading for the Hutt River Province of Prince Leonard and Yuna and the 359 km competitive stage to Big Bell the service car and truck took a more direct route. The Citroen was headed for Cue, a note on the instruction says "if time" and the truck to Big Bell. I can only assume that it was Big Bell where we waited to service the rally car. I really can't remember whether it was Big Bell or Cue. The service route was to Cue and on to Big Bell and then back to Cue to head further North. I can remember quite clearly what went on as there had been an intention to replace some front suspension components. The only facility that was available was an inspection pit at an old place which looked like it had once been a blacksmith shop. There was a great heap of bits and pieces of machinery out the back and the floor was of dirt or covered with a deep layer of it. I can't be sure. While we waited Alex purchased some bread, butter, jam, tinned meat and pickles for our lunch. The job of making the sandwiches and boiling the billy to make tea was mine. When the rally car arrived I had to make another batch. Either the suspension changes were not needed or the facilities were inadequate as the work was not done. It may even have been due to lack of time.

Our next service meeting with the rally car was to be at the Capricorn Roadhouse and once again my memory is hazy. I can recall a late night servicing behind a store and service station where we had the use of a hoist at what I believe was Capricorn. There is also a note on the service instruction in my writing which says "Front End at Capricorn 17km south of Newman." This was probably the work originally intended for Big Bell.

The service car was due to meet Andrew and Jim at a point about 100 km south of Capricorn where the rally would rejoin the Great Northern Highway after a 414 km competition stage west of the highway. From there the service car had to make a very hurried trip to Wittenoom. Ted and Bob made it there in time by dint of some very hard driving. Had I been with Bob it is unlikely we would have made it in time. Ted was then and still is, I believe, a faster driver than I. I'll make the excuse that it is because he is more than ten years younger than I. In hindsight my fall from the hoist in Perth may have been a blessing in disguise. A photo of the service Citroen with Ted and Bob waiting at Wittenoom made it into the book by Tuckey and Floyd as referred to earlier. A report on the rally says that the Bell/Ferguson Commodore was first to arrive at Wittenoom followed eleven minutes later by the Philip/Brock Commodore with the Cowan/Reddix Citroen a further nine minutes behind. The third Holden Commodore of Aaltonen/Mehta arrived ten minutes later.

The truck took the easy way up the highway to the service point at the Walkabout Hotel at Port Hedland. We didn't stay there but headed for a service station to set up to service the rally car. Apparently this had been arranged earlier by Jim through a friend of his and we had the use of two service bays and all the facilities. It may have been at South Headland and was an Ampol station. We repacked the truck while we waited and sorted out some gear, mostly personal stuff, to be sent back to Brisbane by Jim's friend. It was creating a problem as being the lightest had always to be on top and was invariably in the way when something heavy was needed. I even found time for a shave and a shower and Perth seemed a million miles away. The route for the rally cars from Perth was shown as 2342 km and the service vehicle would have done less than that so a million may be an exaggeration. It was now Saturday August 11.

We had waited a long time before we received a message, brought in by another competitor, that the Citroen was immobilised with suspension damage about 130 km from Port Hedland. Bob and Alex, or Trevor, drove out against the rally traffic in the service car, to make temporary repairs to allow the rally Citroen to limp in to the control. Then it was time for repair and maintenance. Frantic work by the mechanics with tools and the welder repaired the car for a fresh onslaught on the rally course. There was also a crack to be welded in the body above the passenger front door. Despite these problems Andrew and Jim, ably navigated by Jeff, had lost only another 2 hours 2 minutes 23 seconds and were in fourth position at Port Hedland. The Holden Commodores of Brock, Ferguson and Mehta now occupied the three leading positions.

We paused at Sandfire, a Mobil service station where the service car was due to meet the rally car some time after 1.33 pm. We had some lunch after a long wait in a queue as the

place was never intended to play host to such a large group of hungry drivers and mechanics. A rough note on the instructions says we left there at 6pm. Obviously we did not see Andrew and Jim there. Both service vehicles and the rally car were supposed to meet at Kununurra but the chances of the truck doing so was pretty remote. We had 1317 km to cover and the rally car, which had long since left, was due there in 13 hours. At least 300 km of our route were of gravel surface and at 5.30am, it was now Sunday, August 12, we were at Halls creek with 356 km still to go. The first rally car was due at Kununurra at 2.32am but it was well into daylight when we arrived. What time the Citroen had passed through I don't know. One report says that Cowan was 47 minutes late due to being held up by two slower cars which had cut and run. They should have been held at the previous control until the true competitors had left. The report says Andrew and Jim has suffered further suspension damage in this section but we heard nothing of this when we finally caught up with them. When we got to Kununurra Bob and Ted were still there. They had changed a front tyre on the service car which was worn down to the second steel belt in some places. The alignment had been out for a long time before the damage being done was discovered but an adjustment by Bob, without the aid of a machine, had it in far better shape when we arrived. Ted and I had realized much earlier that a small amount of effort, disguised by the power steering, was required to keep the car going straight. What we hadn't realised was the tyre wear it was causing. It was also possible that some suspension damage could have occurred along the way. It was in this section that the tragedy of the event occurred. The driver of Car 91, a Peugeot 504, miscued at a creek crossing in a cloud of dust and blinding sun and drove into a creek bank. The driver at the time escaped but the other two in the crew were killed. An attempt by the organizers to keep the deaths quiet until the relatives were notified failed when the story was put to air by the ABC. The problem apparently arose from a report from a competitor direct to the ABC. Journalists had agreed to hold the story until the appropriate time. An item in a London paper some days later spoke of the death of two crew members of a French car in the rally. This caused my daughter, working in London, to ring home almost in tears in case I had been involved. For reasons which will become clear later I had already arrived home and actually answered the phone and quickly put her mind at ease.

The section from Kununurra to Katherine (509 km) and Darwin (a further 331 km) was only a transport stage with a time allowance of eight hours for the 840 km journey. The first car was due at Darwin at 2.25pm. The service instructions quoted 834 km for service vehicles and a travel time of 8 hours 30 minutes. From Kununurra we followed the Victoria Highway to Katherine where we met up again with the Citroen driven by the proprietor of the LAUREX company, the rally car's major sponsor. Despite his original expressed intention to follow the rally only as far as Perth he was still going. It was just as well as the rally car had at some stage lost one of the rear tail light assemblies and had borrowed the one from the sponsor's car. That afternoon we visited a long time friend of Jim Reddix and were shown photographs of the friend's Citroen, a DS I think, which had been written off in a smash.

As I type I have by me a letter I wrote to my wife. It was written in Katherine the morning following our arrival and posted in Pine Creek. In it I stated "it was decided that

Alex, Trevor and I in the truck should stay at Katherine while the Citroen with Ted and Bob went to Darwin and serviced the car and brought some extra wheels here." We had no complaints on that score as it meant the chance of a shower, a clean comfortable bed, meals in the dining room of the hotel and a chance to wash some clothes. For supper I had soup of the day followed by barramundi and apple pie with ice-cream. The letter, written on the stationery of the Crossways Hotel in Katherine, goes on to say "I am waiting in the motel room for a ring to say they have left Pine Creek and what if anything we have to do here." I presume that by "they" I meant the rally car as the trial route was to bring the rally back to Katherine before heading south to Mataranka and turning east for Queensland.

The first rally car was due to leave Darwin at 6 am on Monday, August 12th. The scheduled departure time had been changed from the original 4 am, to give the crews two hours extra rest time. When leaving Darwin the Cowan/Reddiex/Beaumont Citroen was still running fourth with 4 hours 26 minutes 48 seconds lost. The Commodores of Brock, Ferguson and Mehta were running 1, 2 and 3. The rally route took the cars along the Arnhem Highway to the start of a 201 km trial stage before heading back towards the Stuart Highway to a control just north of Pine Creek. This was near a level crossing of the derelict railway which once went from Darwin to Larrimah. The service Citroen was to meet the rally car there after a leisurely run down the Stuart Highway.

The message we had been waiting for at the motel in Katherine finally arrived but it did not say head for the next interception point on the way to Boorooloola as expected. Instead we were told to head for the Pine Creek control as the rally car had not arrived and was running very late. At the control we met up with the other service crew. Before long a message came through, via a competitor I believe, that our entry was in dire trouble near Goodparla. As the rally car was closer to the Darwin end of the trial section the service car went back to Darwin to try to reach them from there. It would have been an almost impossible task to reach the damaged car by driving against the rally traffic. Because of expected major problems Alex and Bob went in the service car and Trevor, Ted and I drove back to Pine Creek in the truck to wait for further instructions.

At Pine Creek we had a rest in the shade of some trees near the hotel and had a counter lunch. We were unable to contact the rest of the team in Darwin as pre-arranged and returned to the control in case a message had come through. As there were none we returned to Katherine to wait for a phone call and to have another meal of barramundi and a good rest. When the phone call came it said we should return to Brisbane. Even if Alex and Bob were able to repair, the rally car it would have been pointless to continue as they would have been outside the time limit for late arrival.

Apparently one of the drive shafts of the rally car had popped out, on the bump or rebound after hitting something, and while thrashing about had holed the gearbox. The tragedy of this was that the factory were not unaware of the problem and modified drive shafts were available. They had been sent to Brisbane and had arrived before the team members left there. Unfortunately there was a wharf strike at the time and the shafts had to be left sitting on the wharf. Such are the fortunes of rallying.

We three, Trevor, Ted and I, left Katherine on the morning of Tuesday, August 14th after another good night's sleep. We headed south along the Stuart Highway and had lunch at a roadhouse near Newcastle Waters before reaching the turn off to Camooweal where we joined the Barkly Highway. From Camooweal we rang Mt Isa and booked into a motel which saw us arrive quite late at night. We left the motel quite early in the morning and visited the control to find out how the rally was going. There were still some officials there despite the rally cars being due the previous morning and the late ones in the afternoon. They couldn't tell us much. It was after all Wednesday August 15th and the rally cars were already due at Townsville. While the others were talking at the control I took a picture of the mine workings. After a quick return to the motel to pick up the watch I'd left behind we headed for Cloncurry and Winton. We took turns at driving on a road with some of the worst corrugations I have ever driven on. We had lunch and refuelled at Winton which seemed to be in the throes of a carnival of some sort. There were two much modified Morris Minis running about, one of extremely short wheelbase and the other which had two front ends and could be driven from either. It made parallel parking a breeze when steered from both ends. We headed for Longreach and just before dusk approaching Ilfracombe I started a fresh stint at the wheel. At Barcardine in the darkening night we turned southwards for Blackall and my first encounter of the trip with a kangaroo. The kangaroo was killed and we had to replace one of the huge driving lights. Not long after I nearly fell asleep and handed over to one of the other drivers. We had a late night snack and refuelled at Blackall. We drove through the night taking turns at driving or sleeping. Through Charleville, Roma and Miles we hurried on and arrived at Dalby for a very early breakfast on Thursday, August 17th. The first of the rally cars would have been somewhere south of Sarina and heading for Brisbane but ours was not one of them. When we arrived in Brisbane I was dropped off at my mother-in-law's home in New Farm. When my mother-in-law opened the door to a tired, grey faced disreputable character in dirty overalls she wasn't too sure at first who it was. After a shower and a shave and a phone call to my wife to tell her I was in Brisbane, I went to bed and slept for almost ten hours. I had intended to go out to the control to see the rally arrive at the Brookside shopping centre but did not wake in time. I didn't even hear my wife and the two boys when they arrived later in the afternoon. After supper I was quite content to sit in the front passenger seat and watch an occasional rally car pass by. The rest of the rally I followed from the newspaper and television reports and later read about it in *Wheels* and *Modern Motor*.

The outright winners were at Melbourne on Sunday, August 19th were, of course, the extremely well prepared and organized Marlboro Holden Dealer Team Commodores.

First: Car 05 Drivers: Peter Brock and Matthew Philip; Navigator: Noel Richards
Second: Car 17 Drivers: Barry Ferguson and Wayne Bell Navigator: Dave Boddy
Third: Car 3 Drivers: Shektar Mehta and Rauno Aaltonen Navigator: Barry Lake

I wish the rally Citroen had been there and that I too could have been there to see it, but it was not to be. As for the part I played, I can only say that I enjoyed it and thanks to Jim Reddiex who allowed me to join the service team and to Ted Jones who brought up my name as a possible recruit.

Some weeks later, all the members of the service crews, and their wives, were invited to the home of Jim Reddiex for a barbecue in a gesture of appreciation for their efforts. It was a night of recollections which, along with the trip around half of Australia, will remain with me for all time.