

A very wet 2022 Mitta Mountain Rally won by Jamie and Brad Luff from NSW

This year, the sixth running of the Mitta Mountain Rally incorporating the Mitta Masters, jointly organised by the North Eastern Car Club and Albury Wodonga and District Car Club, was also a round of the Victorian Club Rally Series and the East Coast Classic Rally Series as well as the Till Hino Victorian Rally Championship.

The traditional format was retained, including the amazing service park on the golf course, modern Rally Base with excellent local catering and blind mountain stages wrapped up with presentation that night in the fantastic Mitta Pub. The route included one new stage, three modified stages and one used previously.

58 entries started, 27 VRC only, seven entered VRC and Masters, three Masters only, six Masters and VCRS and 13 VCRs only. While not a round of the NSW Championship this year, the event attracted eight entries from NSW and one from SA.

The Mitta Masters for classic cars and crews had a healthier entry this year, with the more traditional narrow winding mountain roads, long stages and no pace noting offering some appeal to competitors from former times. The Mitta Masters continued its unique awards based on driver age, with awards for the most successful drivers in their 50's, 60's and over 70's, as it is felt that particularly on longer events with longer stages, crew ability, attitude and stamina are more important than the vehicle. Co-drivers were not to miss out as they were to receive "Carers Awards" that reflect how well they have looked after their elderly chauffeurs.

Saturday dawned fine and mild without the traditional Mitta valley fog, until half the field had negotiated the opening Granite Peak stage, then the skies opened up depositing 46mm of rain on Mitta Mitta for the day, making conditions for the remaining stages treacherous and challenging for competitors and officials alike.

Competitors were informed at the briefing that "There are long intervals in the roadbook with no instructions but lots of corners. It is matter of judgement what bends deserve a caution. The guide has been: corners are cautioned that are not as they appear on approach or out of general character or might be an issue at high speed. We have probably erred on the side of too little than too many cautions, as it is frustrating for more experienced crews to slow for something that was not a problem. If there are no cautions it does not mean that the roads can be maximum attacked. These roads warrant respect and a little reserve, particularly by less experienced crews. They were built by loggers not engineers. They are unpredictable, constantly changing in direction, width, radius, shade, camber, and surface. The consequences are severe with big drop offs. They are demanding roads, but ultimately very rewarding."

The ballot of the first three seeded positions saw Neale lead off, followed by Quinn then Reeves.

Crews headed east from Mitta to the opening stage – 16.4km Granite Peak, where advice for competitors was: "On the drive out from Mitta, there are glimpses of the Dartmouth Dam wall. Unfortunately Goulburn Murray Water would not allow us to run a planned stage zigzagging across the dam wall and above the spillway, so instead this is a new forest stage that overlooks the lake. It climbs gradually for 8 km in a good warm up before joining onto

the last downhill 9 km of the traditional Razorback stage, the final stage in 2021, requiring more precise braking judgement down to a spectator point before Snowy Creek." Luff/Luff from Yass NSW set the pace by three seconds to Reeves/Catford. Sytema/Dewhurst were fastest Masters on this and all following stages, while King/McClure-Wallace made the most before the roads got really wet in their Corolla, being quickest VCRS. Wallis/Davies did not get to start SS1 with electrical problems. Moynihan/Brophy, looking to repeat their Masters success of last year, Raymond/Williams and Friend/Canning went out with various mechanical maladies, while Garrad/Wright retired with vision issues and Holloway/Hilton were the first to be beaten by the slippery conditions and leave the road.

In what has become a unique feature of this event, due to the lack of 2WD access into the middle of any stage, the only spectating options were at the finish of special stages 1 and 3. Spectators could walk in from the end of two of the stages to a safe elevated viewing point.

Stage 2 – 31.8 km, The Hollow, followed a remote refuel and had the following advice for competitors: "The previously used 55 km Bogong Stage has been divided into two stages. This 32 km will be hard work for the driver and a scenic tour for the co-driver in between some vital calls. The stage climbs for 18km up into the snow gums to 1377m at The Hollow at the foot of the Granite Flat Spur approach to the Mt Bogong summit, along a road full of sharp stones requiring careful tyre management. The next 14 km link drops into and out of Camp Creek up to the foot of the Eskdale Spur approach to Bogong. Keep an eye out for hikers! This rugged link opens out for the run to the finish at Trappers Gap." Luff/Luff were again quickest by almost a minute to Quinn/Eadie. Porter/Robinson were a staggering 1 minute 40 seconds faster than Wald/Elliott in VCRS. Reeves/Catford, Griffin/Critchlow and Valentine/Valentine succumbed to mechanical issues, while Moore/Hutchins, Stapleton/Ellis and Burn/Milburn all slipped off the road.

Stage 3 – 15.4 km Trappers followed shortly after stage 2. Advice for competitors was: "A stony 8 km section of Trappers Gap Road has been converted to liaison out of the previously used 55 km Bogong stage, leaving this mainly downhill run back to Mitta. Familiarise yourselves beforehand with the arrangement of the chicane at the end of a 1 km straight to practice on before another after a further 1.4 km on, in sight of the spectator point, where a narrow grid is followed immediately by a turn left and short straight to the finish line." Luff/Luff set the pace again by 14 seconds to fellow New South Welshmen Neale/Fegl. Porter/Robinson were again fastest in VCRS from Tobin/Crowe and Leoncini/Leoncini starting to up their pace. Three crews received penalties for striking the haybale chicanes before the spectator point, which admittedly had a scary slippery grassy approach. Retirements on this stage with engine problems were Stewart/Zinsstag and Snooks/Foreshew. The other Snooks, Steuart, survived the long straight at the end of the stage to then go off through a fence on the following liaison when a steering link broke.

Heat 1 went to Luff/luff, from Quinn/Eadie and Sytema/Dewhurst.

The rain kept coming at the start of Heat 2.

Stage 4 – 18.5 km Bullhead, where advice was: "This is the reverse of Bullhead stages used in 2017, 2018 and 2019, and part of the Bullhead Gap stage used in 2021. It starts on a shire lane, then into the forest climbing up through a couple of tight hairpins to a turn off at

Bullhead Gap, then climbs up, along and down the Bullhead Range into the next valley along a road that has been graded recently.” Luff/Luff continued their domination from Sytema/Dewhurst, starting to enjoy the conditions. In VCRS Leoncini/Leoncini were getting serious taking 45 seconds off Wald/Elliott.

The rain kept falling, but the 21.0 km Stage 5 Mt Benambra was maybe the least water affected stage, with advice for competitors: “This is the only stage this year that was used last year. It begins with a nice gradual climb up the ridge. The second part of the stage, we think is the most exciting piece of forest road in Victoria - a wide, rapid, rollercoaster of dips, climbs, turns and drops off huge blind crests. In 2016 the stage continued up over Mt Benambra, then dropped a massive 1200m in 13 km. It is a bit rugged, so now that part is liaison, so you can enjoy the views of Dartmouth township, which seems a long way below the narrow mountain road.” There were no retirements on this stage as the men had been sorted from the boys by now. Sytema/Dewhurst were on fire over the rollercoaster in the RS1800, knocking off Luff/Luff by 25 seconds, who were a minute in front of the next. Leoncini/Leoncini followed up with another stage win in VCRS by three seconds over Porter/Robinson.

Stage 6 was cancelled as the 46mm of rain had taken its toll, making roads incredibly slippery.

Heat 2 saw Sytema/Dewhurst take the chocolates narrowly from Luff/Luff, who held on for outright victory.

VCRS outright honours went to Porter/Robinson by just over two minutes from the late charging Leoncinis.

The Masters was dominated by Sytema/Dewhurst in their Ford Escort RS1800 from Schey/Schey in their earlier Escort RS1600, with the VCRS winners Porter/Robinson in third place.

The rain finally went away to allow the champagne presentation and spray at parc ferme on the edge of the oval below rally base against the clearing backdrop of Mt Welcome.

Presentations were preceded by some footage of the day’s action on the big screen courtesy of Blendline including some impressive aerial shots from the drone. The traditional Mitta vases were presented by Gordon Douglas from Border Oils and Batteries and event patron Philip Rodgers who was interviewed by MC Alan Baker on his slightly different rally career managing a number of high profile drivers and teams across the globe.

The event coordinator Ross Runnalls acknowledged a huge team that included: Brian Royal - Road Secretary, Gary Gourlay - Event Secretary, Deb Richards - Entries Secretary Tod Reed – Road Director, Chris Aggenbach - officials coordination, Steve Roman - equipment, Steve Davies - checker, Warren Brown – Radio network, Trevor Woods and family – scorers, John Downs – CRO, stage commanders – Ray Wingrave, Steve Roman, Newville Bell, Tom Kaitler, Rob Wilson, Mark Richards, David Schmidt, Max Carmody, Ron harper and Ged Blum, Wade Ryan/Tim Clark 0 car, Kevin Battocchio 999 car, Mick and Julie Carey sweep, Ben Quick and Luke Webster recovery crews, all the time controls, road closures, SOS, Refuel and spectator point officials and MIV crews Ian Enders, Jim Reeves and Matt Webster.

The event continues to be a worthy part of the VRC and VCRS providing variety and its own unique character which the organising clubs are committed to continuing next year and in following years.

Award Winners

Mitta Mountain Rally

VRC Outright

1 st	Jamie Luff / Brad Luff	Subaru Impreza WRX
2 nd	Luke Sytema / Tracey Dewhurst	Ford Escort RS1800
3 rd	Nathan Quinn / Alex Eadie	Mazda RX2

VRC 2WD

1 st	Luke Sytema / Tracey Dewhurst	Ford Escort RS1800
2 nd	Nathan Quinn / Alex Eadie	Mazda RX2
3 rd	Peter Schey / Chris Schey	Ford Escort RS1600

VRC Classes

1 st Novice	Tom West / Stephen Dunbar	Hyundai Excel
1 st Excel Vic	Tom West / Stephen Dunbar	Hyundai Excel
1 st CLB	Nathan Quinn / Alex Eadie	Mazda RX2
1 st CRC	Luke Sytema / Tracey Dewhurst	Ford Escort RS1800
1 st PN 2 under 1600	Lochlan Reed / Brittany Draper	Ford Fiesta
1 st PN 4 over 2000	Andrew McNay / Sebastian Vella	Holden Commodore
1 st PN 5 modern 4wd	Jamie Luff / Brad Luff	Subaru Impreza WRX
1 st PN 6 older 4wd	Adrian Stratford/Kain Manning	Subaru Impreza

Mitta Masters

1st O/R	Philip Rodgers Cup	Luke Sytema / Tracey Dewhurst	Ford Escort RS1800
1 st M50		Peter Schey / Chris Schey	Ford Escort RS1600
1 st M60		Michael Ward / Pete Hellwig	Toyota Corolla

East Coast Classic Rally Series

1 st 2WD	Luke Sytema / Tracey Dewhurst	Ford Escort RS1800
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Mitta Mountain Rally

VCRS Outright

1 st	Steve Porter / Tony Robinson	Mazda RX7
2 nd	James Leoncini / Mark Leoncini	Toyota Corolla AE71
3 rd	Joel Wald / Cathy Elliott	Datsun Stanza

VCRS 2WD

1 st	Steve Porter / Tony Robinson	Mazda RX7
2 nd	James Leoncini / Mark Leoncini	Toyota Corolla AE71

VCRS Classes

1 st Novice	Jayden Hocking / Lincoln Hocking	Ford Falcon
1 st Class C 1600-2000cc 2WD	James Leoncini / Mark Leoncini	Toyota Corolla AE71
1 st class D Over 2000cc 2WD	Steve Porter / Tony Robinson	Mazda RX7
1 st class E 4wd	Chris Tobin / Melissa Crowe	Subaru Impreza

The action in pictures:



Luff/Luff charging to victory before the rains came



Second placegetters Quinn/Eadie slip sliding their way through Bullhead Gap



Third outright placegetters and convincing Mitta Masters winners, Sytema/Dewhurst exiting Trappers Gap Rd on stage 3



The lovely Escort Rs1600 of Schey/Schey on their way to second 2WD



Porter/Robinson powering to VCRS victory and second Mitta Masters through the rain



The late charging Leoncinis heading for second VCRS



A wide entry from third VCRS Wald/Elliott



First PN2 Reed/Draper lining up the exit

(Thanks to Wishart Media, Roy Meuronen and Bruce Keys for the above photos)