

Klaus Rüssling wins Polish Rally

DRIVING a 2.7 Porsche Carrera Austrian pair Klaus Rüssling and Wolfgang Weiss led from start to finish in the 34th Polish Rally, a round of the European Rally Championship. Second place went to Poles Krupa and Landsberg in a Renault R 12 Gordini. Local favourite Sobieslaw Zasada partnered by his wife Ewa had an unfortunate debut at the wheel of an Alpine-Renault, colliding with an errant marshal's car on a special stage and retiring.

In 1973 the Polish Rally was the only Eastern European event in the World Rally Championship, but the rally met strong criticism afterwards because of dangerously high average speeds, needlessly rough roads and serious organizational shortcomings. The Rally Prom Association advised the FIA to withdraw the event from the series and this year the Polish was back to its previous status as a round of the European Rally Championship and the Peace and Friendship Cup, to pursue the East European Rally Championship. The organisers had taken heed of last year's criticisms and suggestions and this arrangement together with fuel shortage problems and legislation introduced in Poland last year restricting to 60 kph the average speeds on road sections of all rallies on open roads, resulted in the 1974 Polish Rally appearing in a completely new and probably more sensible shape.

The route was shortened to 1475 kms, the shortest Polish Rally since 1959 and consisted of a single loop in south-eastern Poland, thus omitting the traditional south-western leg with its rough stages in Lower Silesia. The route, which had to be driven without a half way stop, was divided into 50 road sections with the average speeds not exceeding 60 kph, a truly relaxing figure compared with all those 90s and 100s so common in previous years, and the competition was based exclusively on special stages. There were 27 of these timed to a second and two hill-climb stages timed to 1/100 of a second. The total competitive distance was 241 kms, narrow, bumpy, tarmac roads being the most common and loose surfaces only occasional. In the opinion of all drivers, the rally was considerably easier than in previous years and favoured the more powerful cars.

The event attracted 107 entries from 19 countries, but internationally prominent names were rather scarce on the list. The current European championship leader, Walter Rohrl, chose the Vitava Rally only a week before the Polish, won it for the second year in succession and did not come to Poland. Seeded No 1 was Sobieslaw Zasada partnered by his wife Ewa who always co-drives for him on the Polish Rally. Instead of his usual Porsche the Pole appeared at the wheel of no less than a works sponsored Alpine Renault 1600S, a car he had not driven before. He had spent some time in France negotiating with the Dieppe firm and it seems that this may not have been just a one-off drive. Zasada's most serious opposition came from Austria: Klaus Rüssling and Wolfgang Weiss brought a 2.7 litre Porsche Carrera.

East European manufacturers were represented by four works teams. Polski Fiat entered three Gp 2 125 Ps fitted with the newly homologated 1600 cc engines derived from the 132 model, developing about 135 bhp, for Maciej Stawowiak/Jan Czyzyk, brothers Ryszard and Jerzy Zyszkowski and Marek Varisella/Stanislaw Brzozowski. The Gp 1 Polski Fiat of the lone female crew in the rally, Janina Jedynak and Maria Zyskowska, was also works-backed. From the Soviet Union came a team of Gp 2 GAZ-24 Volgas, big, heavy saloons powered by 2445 cc four-cylinder engines tuned up to 110 bhp instead of the original 90. These cars had their international debut last year in Hungary and the Polish Rally only their second appearance outside Russia. Five examples, looking rather standard with apparent modifications restricted to wide rims, sporting seats and steering wheels, and massive roll cages, were driven by

Valeri Vereshchak/Vechislav Oumnov, Renis Reshetnix/Andris Evingervich, Oyar Mayors/Jaris Jansons. Vladislav Guryev/Vladimir Ushakov and Nikolay Elizarov/Vladimir Voronov. The Moskvich team was absent this year.

Wartburg sent three cars a Gp 2 version for Horst Niebergall/Bernd Malsch and two Gp 1 cars for Egon Culmbacher/Werner Ernst and Roland Weitz/Bernd Frommann. Another East German manufacturer, Trabant, arrived with four diminutive 601s for Helmut Piehler/Klaus Riedi, Franz Galle/Jochen Müller, Hans Ullmann/Werner Lange and Eberhard Asmus/Christian Meischner. Several leading East European drivers had works prepared Renaults; there was a single Alpine driven by Bulgarians. Radoslav Petkov/Gancho Ganchev and five R 12 Gordinis in hands of current East European Rally Champion Jordan Topodolski/Vladimir Ilyev, Ilya Tchoubrikov/Atanas Taskov, Marin Velev Karamfil Elenkov (all from Bulgaria) and Hungarians Attila Ferjancz/Jenő Zsembery and Poles Blazej Krupa/Jerzy Landsberg.

The rally attracted a small group of privateers from the West - from Sweden came Curt Malmgren/Hans Andersson on a Saab V4, Ewert Westström/Bo Carlsson in Toyota Celica GT, whilst among numerous Danish crews there Aage Skov/Ole Pallesen, Jörgen Bindner/Poul Andreasen and Carl and Ellen Syberg in Asconas, Per Holm/Per Glad in an Escort RS 2000 and Christensen Henning/Vladimir Sidorenko in a Toyota Celica. West Germany was represented by Horst Hohlheimer/Rudolf Huber in a Fiat 128 Sport Coupe, Dieter Kirchhof/Peter Junge and two German-Polish crews Horst Rausch/Jerzy Sypniewski and Ewald Pauli/Jacek Jurzak in BMW 2002 Tiis. From Spain came Julio Gargallo/Ignacio Lewin at the wheel of an Alfa Romeo 2000 GTV, a similar car being driven by Italian-Polish team Lelio Lattari/Marek Szramowski.



THE big, heavy GAZ-24 Volgas from the Russian factory were hopelessly underpowered. This was their second sortie outside the USSR and there could well be changes before the next.

allowed in villages. The first competitive stage, a hill-climb from Targanice to Kocierz on narrow, slippery tarmac, was won by Rüssling by a mere tenth of a second from Krupa in a Renault. Further places went to Rausch, Ferjancz, Tchoubrikov and Zasada. Some drivers, including Holm and Lattari spun on the wet road and lost valuable seconds. In Westström's Toyota the gearbox began to give trouble and this brought about his retirement two stages later. The works Volgas showed rather a disappointing performance, the cars being definitely too heavy and hopelessly underpowered.

After the first five stages were completely dominated by Rüssling's Carrera the situation in front seemed to look clear. The Austrian driver led the rally safely from Zasada, who was getting accustomed to his new car, and although he was losing most stages to Rüssling, he placed himself regularly in the first five. Behind those two cars was a group of about ten drivers involved in a very close dice for leading places, which included Ferjancz, Tchoubrikov

suffered general, but fortunately not serious, bruises, but the Alpine was a write-off. From that moment Rüssling had only to nurse his Porsche home, but he believed in the reliability of his car and kept on the pressure, winning almost all the special stages.

The retirement rate was not high, an absolutely new feature of the Polish Rally. The surprisingly well performing Spanish crew overdid things on 10th special stage and crashed their Alfa Romeo, damaging the front too seriously to continue. Ferjancz lost two minutes on the road, whilst his compatriot Balatoni was forced to change spark plugs in his Skoda on the special stage because of poor quality of petrol, and this cost 8 minutes. The second hill-climb stage, Berest, some 400 kms from the finish went again to the all-conquering Rüssling, from Tchoubrikov, Petkov, Komornicki and Ferjancz.

During the final stages of the rally no major changes occurred in the leading group. Works Volgas and Wartburgs definitely did not shine, both makes being underpowered.

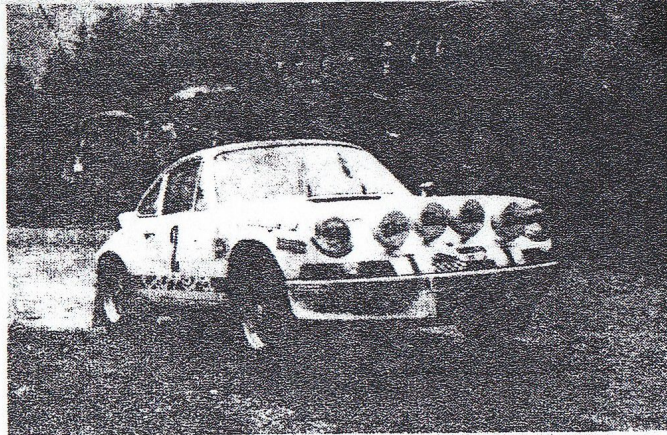
The event had its usual splendid sporting atmosphere, but the organisers permitted many of their old mistakes to be repeated; scrutineering started too early, the results service was very poor, and worst of all the event ended in complete chaos when the computerised results system went wrong, delaying everything by all of 24 hours.

J.A.L.

PROVISIONAL RESULTS

1. K. Rüssling/W. Weiss (Porsche Carrera RS) 8044; 2. B. Krupa/J. Landsberg (Renault 12 Gordini) 8973; 3. I. Tchoubrikov/A. Taskov (Renault 12 Gordini) 9549; 4. Lattari/Szramowski (Alfa Romeo 2000 GTV); 5. Komornicki/Rozanski (Fiat 125P).

98 starters, 70 finishers



LIKE the Finns, Poles will stand out in all weathers to watch a rally. This is Rüssling on the Polish Rally's first hill-climb, on his way to a succession of fastest times.

The rest of the field was composed of East European privateers driving Polski Fiats, Skodas, Wartburgs and Trabants, the most prominent being Poles Komornicki/Rożanski and Bien/Nicieja in Polski Fiats. The British participation was unfortunately restricted to Peter O'Brien of Castrol making his customary trip to Poland with tins of oil and thousands of highly-prized stickers.

As usual the event was based at Kraków, where the city's biggest football stadium served as the scrutineering area, parc fermé and starting place. Scrutineering was again scheduled for the early morning of the Friday of the start, starting at 7 am, and went quite smoothly without major dramas. Perhaps the biggest sensation was the decision of Egon Culmbacher, an FIA seeded driver, to relinquish his start of number six in favour of number 98. This was undoubtedly to put him nearer his team-mates and make service schedules easier.

Thousands of spectators arrived at the stadium to watch the start of the rally, preceded by a parade of veterans. At 16.01 the first of 98 cars, Zasada's Alpine, left the starting ramp. Soon after, in the small town of Skawina, police set up a radar trap and no less than ten penalty coupons were cut off for speeding. There is presently a general 80 kph speed limit on all roads in Poland, only 50 kph being

and Krupa in Renaults, Stawowiak and Komornicki in Polski Fiats, Lattari and Gargallo in Alfias and Malmgren in his Saab. Soon after the second special stage the works Volga of Mayors and Jansesn went off the road and retired. Polski Fiats lost one works car too; Varisella retired after four special stages with engine failure. Another early retirement was that of Rausch in a BMW after figuring frequently in the first ten in the opening special stages.

The rally then went eastwards towards the Polish-Soviet border, with Rüssling leading by a healthy margin from Zasada. As the event progressed Zasada started to improve and when it looked like an exciting Polish-Austrian duel would develop, the Pole was pushed off the rally by a stupid accident caused by the irresponsible behaviour of marshals on the 12th special stage near Sanok in the Bieszczady region. Ignoring the scheduled times of competitors they sent a car with some documents from the finish to the start (!) of the stage. The result was inevitable; running first on the road, Zasada met the marshal's car head-on in the middle of the stage when he was doing about 130 kph. Only the great experience and fast reactions of the Polish driver prevented a more tragic finale. Zasada managed to throw his car sideways and the impact smashed the left rear side of Alpine instead of the fragile front. Zasada escaped unharmed, his wife