



Santinho Mendes ended a fine year by winning the Algarve Rally.

# Mendes's fine year

Wilson dominates early stages but retires — Datsun win for Mendes — French Peugeot 104ZS drivers star — Report & Photography: PETER FOUBISTER.

With both the European and the Portuguese National Rally Championships already decided, early prospects for the Rallye Urbibel Algarve appeared a little dim. The days immediately before the start quickly dispelled any likelihood of a tame event, as national teams were desperate for victory, and clearly concerned about the arrival of Malcolm Wilson, with his Escort RS in Rothmans colours.

Indeed, Wilson dominated the event, taking the lead on the first stage and building an impressive advantage over the first two days of the event. It marked the return of the 'old' Wilson, who used to thrill spectators up and down this country. His foreign programme has not been too successful this year — mechanical failure often putting him on the sidelines — but this time he was enjoying the challenge immensely.

When a broken half shaft eventually put him out after the final stage of the second section, he was not too disheartened. He had proved that, with Terry Harryman, he is quite capable of putting in a professional performance on hard pace note rallies.

His retirement signalled the start of a bitter battle between Portuguese drivers Carlos Torres (Escort RS) and Santinho Mendes (Datsun Violet). Torres led, but retired on the penultimate loop, handing Mendes victory to complete a fine year for his Salora sponsored team.

The Rallye Urbibel Algarve has for some years maintained a fine reputation for offering a hard demanding event, coupled with a friendly atmosphere, likened to that of the Scottish Rally in this country some years ago. The organisers, the Racal Clube in the Algarve, have ambitious plans, and were disappointed not to receive promotion to European co-efficient 3 status this year. Their determination to climb the co-efficient ladder has not wavered, however.

Certainly this year's offering continued the high standard, with an event which followed fairly closely the traditional format of three sections, each divided into two laps of a circuit, with the famous 'rest halts' dotted along the Algarve coast at the major resorts. Some new tests were included, but the proportion of asphalt stages stays low and the rally remains a very tough test of machine, with some really rough 'earth' tests.

There were two British entries, Malcolm Wilson/Terry Harryman in Wilson's Lucien Bianchi Escort, displaying Rothmans colours, and the similar car of Darryl Weidner, partnered on this occasion by Malcolm's father Ken. Clear Lite Roof Lights are the sponsors.

Wilson and Harryman took a full week to prepare for the event. The only other foreign interest centred around past winner Werner Schweizer — now campaigning an Opel Ascona as opposed to his old Kadett — and Blazej Krupa, who brought his Renault 5 Alpine from

Poland in search of European championship points.

And, of course, there was the Peugeot 104 ZS contingent from France contesting the Esso-Peugeot Cup, a one-make series similar to our own Talbot Sunbeam ti Challenge, run in conjunction with the National rally championship. René Defour had already sewn up the series, but that did not stop 25 cars starting.

## RALLY

Rumours abounded before the start of the event about the preparations made by some of the Portuguese drivers. Mendes had apparently spent weeks practising, and was desperate to win the event, to complete the year which has given him the Portuguese National title. He was worried about the dust problems, however, and looking forward to trying Japanese Dunlops instead of his usual Mabor rubber.

Whatever aspirations and hopes the National men had, however, there was absolutely no touching Wilson from the start. He had no advantage by running at number one as a sea breeze kept the dust moving, but there was nothing the locals could do even if they started at 2min intervals.

The only man to offer any resistance was Torres, but as the rally headed into the mountains for the first time, Wilson put on the pressure in exactly the way he used to love to do in British national rallies in the late seventies.

The long Amexial stage, which climbs

high up the mountains, was perhaps the best indication of the performance. The Rothmans car was 24secs clear of Torres, but also a couple of seconds quicker than the time set last year by Hannu Mikkola in the Audi Quattro on its 'debut'.

When the cars reached the first half at Monte Gordo, Torres was in second place delayed by a puncture, followed by Mendes and Santos. Krupa's early kilometres were not particularly happy, with a puncture delaying him. He was looking for a finish, and knew only too well what a hard, physically demanding event lay ahead.

Already it had taken its toll: Carlos Peres rolled out, Francisco Romaozinho retired his Citroën Visa with transmission troubles, and Inverno Amaral had transmission problems in his Fundador supported G2 Escort which would soon end a fine drive. Even the leader, Wilson, reported some problems: "This event is looking more and more like the Acropolis Rally. It is so hard on the car. We broke a link on the rear axle on the last stage of the section." It was the first warning. His team-mate Weidner did not even reach the first stage, as the Hoyle-prepared motor blew a head gasket on the way to the first test.

The second lap through the night did not alter the positions at the top, although Wilson had a near escape on the final test when the rear axle casing actually broke into two pieces. He completed the test and reached the service point to change the unit and arrive at the first overnight halt with a 2m 41s lead.

Torres was still second, with Mendes moving to within 4secs after switching to Dunlops, and eliminating an early differential problem. Krupa was still well outside the top ten, and now chased by the top Peugeot 104ZS heroes, with Jean Bouzat and René Doufour leading the hunt.

The pattern continued exactly on the first lap of tests on Friday with Wilson extending his lead — particularly over the tarmac stages — Torres and Mendes engaging in a battle for Portuguese honour, and the two Diabolique cars of Santos and Silva setting some quick times.

Behind them, Werner Schweizer (the 1979 winner) was seventh in the Opel Ascona — which uses 170bhp motor — and Krupa's Renault 5 was moving up, chased by the fleet of Peugeots. All of these men would soon benefit as the leaders hit troubles during the next 24 hours.

Still Wilson was setting quickest times, drawing out his lead to nearly 6mins on the penultimate test of the second section. Others in his wake looked much closer to the edge of their abilities... and those frightening drops which feature in some of the special stages.

But Wilson and Harryman were to suffer. At the start of the final tarmac stage of the loop, the car broke a half shaft on the line, and, after the co-driver manhandled the vehicle up the worst slope on the stage, the Escort emerged to the service point.

Unfortunately, the shaft had broken in such a way that swift replacement was impossible, and time would not allow a second axle change. Torres took the control ramp first at the end of the second lap, but the seconds were running out for Wilson, who was still ahead on stage times (the lead was now 1m 35s). The field followed Torres through, with Mendes 25secs behind his countryman, but some huge time gaps were forming. Santos was over 7mins back, his team-mate another 6mins, with Schweizer fifth, and the Renault and the Peugeots getting into the top ten.

For Wilson, the

been, because lying at the end of the stage were two new half shafts waiting to be fitted as a precautionary measure because of the rough surfaces.

Mendes was in trouble before the re-start, because of an engine problem. On the run out to the first stage the mechanics fixed it and a chronic differential problem was rectified — although it had cost time. With fire in his belly Mendes attacked the road section with gusto to arrive at the start of Marmeleite the first stage of the final section, a seventh car on the road, and with 14min road penalties. Attack was the only course of action left, until the Datsun happened on Torres's stricken Escort in the 52km Monchique stage, its rear axle broken.

Over the test, Mendes took over 1½mins from the next man Krupa, with G1 Opel Kadett driver Gomes Pereira third and the little Peugeots of Yves Bruel and Jean Bouzat also well up the list.

The Escort of Santos broke a half shaft over 10kms from the end of the test. Next car to arrive on the scene was team-mate Mario Silva, who then pushed — nose to tail — his team leader to the finish. The move dropped both a lot of time, and Schweizer's Opel was soon into their dust cloud. "We caught up quickly," he commented, "but when I tried to get through the dust, we hit a log. I stopped waited for the dust to clear, and then had to follow to the finish."

Mendes completed the test over 5mins quicker than his nearest rivals, Santos and Silva. Santos retired at the service point, with the same problem as Wilson.

Silva moved to second, but continuing clutch problems had dropped the Escort to 13mins behind Mendes before the start of the stage. That team work cost him any chance of snatching an unexpected win.

"That's rallying," commented Krupa, "you have to decide how you want to drive on an event, and stick to it." He would pick up sufficient points to put him up to fifth in the European Championship and ensure 'A' status for 1982.

Silva's clutch problems continued in Aljezur, the stage following Monchique and Mendes arrived at the final rest halt of the event with a surprise 6mins lead ahead of Silva's Daibolique Escort.

Schweizer took third, Krupa fourth (after being in the late teens on the first day) and Pereira the G1 award in fifth.

The Peugeots? the champion, Defour, was another to suffer on Monchique, when his front suspension failed, but Bouzat took an amazing sixth place overall, with a car developing little more than 70bhp. Bruel chased him home, 1min behind, and of the 36 survivors which completed the tough Algarve event, 14 were Esso-Peugeots.

## URBIBEL ALGARVE RALLY (P)

Nov 4-8

1. Santinho Mendes/Filipe Lopez (Datsun 160J), 7h 12m 41s;
2. Mario Silva/Jorge Cirne (Ford Escort RS), 7h 18m 05s;
3. Werner Schweizer/Bernd Oostman (Opel Ascona), 7h 30m 30s;
4. Blazej Krupa/Piotr Mystkowski (Renault 5 Alpine), 7h 35m 09s;
5. Gomes Pereira/Quina Falcao (Opel Kadett GTE), 7h 40m 06s;
6. Jean Bouzat/Jean Souyille (Peugeot 104 ZS), 7h 51m 38s;
7. Yves Bruel/Jean Jean (Peugeot 104 ZS), 7h 52m 39s;
8. Antonio Segurado/Pedro Sena (Ford Escort RS), 7h 55m 17s;
9. Raul Peixoto/Luis Sena (Ford Escort RS), 8h 00m 31s;
10. Michael Andre Poyaud/Daniel Andre Payand (Peugeot 104 ZS), 8h 7m 57s.