

## 1968 London to Sydney Marathon

Roger Clarke was the clear leader for most of the rally until the Australian section. His fast but relatively fragile Lotus Cortina did not have the enduring strength that Scotsman Cowan had in his Hillman Hunter.

At Port Augusta Clarke started to lose time due to damaged valves – as did team mate Rosemary Smith in the other Cortina. This was a signal that the end was near for Ford. However Ford decided to sacrifice the other team car and swapped heads. The Clarke team headed into the Flinders Ranges setting the fastest time ever to Quorn but by the time they had reached the Snowy Mountains more trouble plagued the car with a differential fail.

Cowan's Hunter was way ahead and chasing down the leading Citroen snapping at its heels through the twisty, narrow and pebble gravel tracks of the Alpine Country. Meanwhile Clarke does a deal with a spectator to buy the differential out of his Cortina, drives like a Bianchie in an attempt to claw his way back to 10th position but still miraculously manages to settle for 14th.

A crash near Nowra, just 200 km from the finish flag in Sydney contributed in a now famous dispute between leading drivers as to who actually won the rally. The lead car at the time was a Citroen driven by Luciano Bianchie. He was only a handful of points in front of Andrew Cowan who was breathing down his neck in the fast and dangerous narrow and twisting forests of the Snowy Mountains. Then the Citroen crashed head on into a Morris Mini Cooper coming the other way.



Citroen driven by Luciano Bianchie

Cowan arrived only mins after the crash, checked that they were OK then continued on to become the trial winner. There was controversy over who won the rally due to the times taken up by the crash. Paddy Hopkirk was not penalised for waiting with the Citroen crew and Cowan had lost the least amount of points of all cars. Hopkirk was behind Cowan on points but still considered that he would and should have won the rally.

Cowan, who died in October 2019 said before his death that 'He had won and that's all there was to it'. Cowan went on to win the 1977 L2S rally also in the same car. Interesting to note that the 18 Australian cars with the big Ford V8s and Holden Monaros thought that they should have won. After all, they knew the road well, but ... so did Andrew Cowan.



Andrew Cowan



Citroen and Mini Cooper crash\*