



Monza: Touring Car Championship, Round One



photography by Bill Forsyth

Rover 1-2...

Volvo and Holden zilch, but the war has just begun

by Barry Lake

THE SCENE was Monza, Italy; the occasion the first round of the Touring Car Championship. It looked like Australia Day, with two Aussie Holden Commodore teams ready to do battle with Europe's best, watched by an even dozen Australian motoring writers. The motor noters were taken there by Volvo who thought it might be a fitting end to a European test of the new Volvo 740 Turbo Estate Cars to call in and (hopefully) see the Volvo racers do well.

There, too, was Australia's Channel 7 with a TV camera crew and commentator Mike Raymond, as well as many European drivers familiar to Bathurst followers, like Armin Hahne, Johnny Cecotto, Tom Walkinshaw, Win Percy, Jeff Allam, Roberto Ravaglia, and Dieter Quester (remember him in 1978 and '79?)

It was soon obvious the seven main contenders were the two Nordica Volvo 240 Turbos run by the Belgian RAS team, Tom Walkinshaw Racing's three Bastos Texaco Rover Vitesses, and the two Holden Commodores of the Mobil Holden Dealer Team and Allan Grice — the latter

running with very limited sponsorship. The various examples of BMW 635CSi and 325i, Ford Sierra XR4Ti, Alfetta GTV6 and Mercedes-Benz 190E were a supporting cast only, while the Toyota Corollas and VW Golf GTis and a smattering of others were having their own class races.

Qualifying confirmed the Volvo/Rover/Holden scenario with sometime F1 driver Jean-Louis Schlesler just squeezing out the two Volvos for pole, and only five one-hundredths of a second between all three. Grice's Commodore was fourth on the two-two-two grid, the other two Rovers were on row three, and Brock — the last of "The Magnificent Seven" — was on row four with Ravaglia's BMW 635CSi.

There was no need to look further for a winner.

All of the top six qualifiers led the race at one stage. It was a race of changing fortunes, and a race of attrition. Five hundred kilometres in length and eventually won in 2 hours 58 minutes and 56.55 seconds at a speed of 169.194 km/h, it was equal to half a Bathurst classic and at least as hectic.

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Peter Brock didn't get a chance to lead. He was tail-end Charlie of "The Seven" until Olofsson had a lose in the second Volvo and dropped to the back of the group. "I was just lurking in sixth," said Brock later, confident he was in a winning position for an endurance race. But after only seven laps he was in the pits and out of the

race with a broken axle — "delaminated", split right down the centre, a first time failure of a part that has been reliable for many years. Co-driver Allan Moffat didn't even get to warm the driver's seat. "We were ahead of the Volvo that's leading now," said Grant Steer later in the race, "We could have won..." Now there were six...

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Brock didn't have the glory of leading, but Allan Grice did. Beginning lap five, having already disposed of the two Volvos, the white Commodore swept past Schlesler's Rover to take the lead. Seven times past the main stands the rugged Aussie led the race before his tyres began to go off and Cecotto's number one Volvo went to the front. Grice was still battling the trio of Rovers for second place when he made his first pit stop on lap 28 of the 87 lap race. A lap was lost looking for a fuel problem before Graeme Bailey re-entered, determined to keep the car going: "It's a long race and we could still win..." Nineteen laps later, the car didn't appear. Bailey had been caught out by an oil slick on the track and spun into the sand trap at the first chicane; out of the race. The Chickadee Chicken Man walked back to base with a look that prompted one to want to hide all sharp implements, rope and rubber hose. He was distraught.

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Johnny Cecotto, the ever-cheerful Venezuelan former motorcycle world champion and Formula One driver, looked a real winner in the number one Volvo. He took the lead from Grice on lap 12 and was comfortably — if quickly — pacing it out front, seven seconds clear of the chasing Rovers when he pitted after his 35th tour for fuel, tyres and for Sweden's reigning European Touring Car champion Thomas Lindstrom to take over. But the car wouldn't re-start! Faulty electrics had flattened the battery, the spare was also flat and it took time to find and fit a third battery. Lindstrom re-entered seven laps down on the leaders. He and Cecotto had the fastest car in the race for the rest of the distance, but



Two early pacesetters (top) the Rover of Schlesler and Grice's Commodore. Peter Brock's Mobil-HDT Commodore (above).



The Cecotto/Lindstrom Volvo leads the Brock/Moffat Commodore (left). The fifth-placed Cudini/Snobeck Mercedes-Benz (below left) and the Quester/Rensing BMW, which finished third (below right).

with no chance of victory. They picked up 10 places in 10 laps and took back a lap from the winners. They could have won ...

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Jean-Louis Schlesser's Rover Vitesse had sprinted away from the slow rolling start into a clear lead and was the early pace-setter. He lost out to Grice's Commodore — the fastest car in the race in a straight line — on lap five and then lost second to Cecotto's Volvo three laps later. But after the demise of these cars the three Rovers seasawed for the lead, with Schlesser's number seven in front when it made its scheduled pit stop on lap 43 of the 87 lap race. Armin Hahne took over with a full load of fuel and fresh tyres. By lap 53 he had been in front for seven laps. "I was 15 seconds ahead when something broke going into the first Lesmo corner and the car crashed into the tyre barrier," Hahne told me. "I was just thinking, we could win ..."

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Anders Olofsson is a mild-mannered, bespectacled family man; a Swedish insurance assessor and part-time professional racing driver. He was running third at the end of lap one at Monza but his number two Volvo 240 Turbo was oversteering badly and, after one hectic "moment" while lapping slower cars, he dropped to seventh place. This had become fourth, behind the three Rovers, by the time he pitted on lap 38 — a stop that saw his co-driver, Swedish train driver Ulf

Granberg, rejoin the race with a full tank and a set of tyres that had cured the car's tail-happiness, still in fourth spot.

By lap 50 the Volvo was third — less than five seconds behind the Allam/Joosen Rover that was to inherit the lead when Hahne crashed out of the race. Granberg was really charging and by lap 60 the Volvo was 3.25 seconds in front of Walkinshaw/Percy with the Allam/Joosen car now back in third. The Volvo was leading the race and going away. They could win ... Two laps later

Granberg coasted into the pits, the head gasket blown; the Volvo team's race was over. There would be no Volvo victory dinner tonight.

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And then there were two; two TWR Rovers. But it wasn't over yet. Jeff Allam and Eddy Joosen had led for a few laps, their car missing its front bumper bar after an early altercation. But the usually efficient TWR team had fumbled its pit stop (the Rovers were the only front runners able to do the race with only one stop) and it



The Ford Sierras were out of luck (above).



The Granberg/Olofsson Volvo was another race leader (above).

had to rush in a second time for a quick churn of fuel. That took only 4.2 seconds but the car lost a total of 28 seconds, including slowing and getting up to race speed again.

Walkinshaw's own car, driven by Win Percy at this stage, was now out in front. But the front bodywork was damaged, the car having ploughed into the back of Grice's Commodore early in the race with TW himself at the wheel when the Holden slowed suddenly with a fuel pump problem and Grice had to switch to the spare unit. The Rover's bumper was loose and frayed pieces of front spoiler were still flapping around in the breeze. They could win, but ...

"Could you come back after the race?" asked a worried Tom, leaning in the pit wall, when I approached him a few laps before the end. Anything could happen, as the other six front runners well knew ...

But there were no more dramas; Walkinshaw and Percy *did* win, 16.8 seconds clear of Allam/Joosen in the sister car. Third, two laps back, was the BMW 635CSi of Dieter Quester/Otto Rensing, running the last 20 laps on five cylinders with a broken rocker. Fourth was the BMW 325i of West Germans Marcus Oestreich/Winni Vogt. The Bee-Em had climbed through the field throughout the race after wetting its plugs before the start and giving more than half a lap start even to the last of the 44 other cars in the race. Fifth was the incredibly good-handling Mercedes-Benz 190E 2.3-16 of Frenchmen Alain Cudini/Dany Snobeck which had trailed smoke and looked a retiree from lap three — but it transpired to be only a rear axle seal leaking oil onto a brake. Two more BMW 635CSi cars followed, and then the Cecotto/Lindstrom Volvo in eighth place.

Yes, the Volvo *could* have won. So, too could have several others — if only ... They get their chance to prove the point in future TCC rounds. It should be an exciting series. □