

PRESS PADDY HOPKIRK

FROM THE RALLY SEAT

AFTER the Christmas and New Year holidays, we started reece-ing again for the Monte. I brought in the New Year at Villars in Switzerland with my very good friend Bernard Cahier and what a great time we had. My friends will tell you I'm no name-dropper, but one of the parties we went to was given by Anita Ekberg and her husband. She is Mrs. Rick van Nutter and Rick is a well-known actor in his own right. He plays Felix Leiter, the C.I.A. man, in the latest James Bond film, *Thunderball*. They are both very nice people and it really was great fun meeting someone so famous. But as I said, I'm not a name-dropper. . . .

Reece-ing is a dull business at the best of times, especially by comparison this year after the holidays, but it has gone well this time. We went back to the Chambery-Monaco stage, the Col du Granier again, and found there had been quite a lot of snow high up. The snow-line this year is a bit higher than usual although there had been quite a lot the day before we arrived and the snow ploughs were hard at work. It was very good for late-night practising because the snow became very hard packed and we were able to use our spiked tyres.

We have been using the same car as we did our last reece in, even though we had to give up last time prematurely with broken teeth in the crown wheel. It was the same car we used on the R.A.C. Rally when we ran for a bit with a broken drive shaft coupling, which throws a great strain on the crown wheel. We had it repaired and a new gearbox fitted at Geneva.

What a great pity about all the stir-up over the Monte regulations. There is now a good deal of mud-slinging going on with each manufacturer's team accusing the other of sneaking on them to the people that make the rules. (Everyone denies everything, but someone is in there stirring it up.) We have had to revert to one fuel tank on the Minis and, with a real step forwards in un-development, use narrow wheels. The whole situation is a very sorry one when a great firm like Saab have to withdraw and people like Eric Carlsson and Pat Moss-Carlsson are left without a drive because of the slowness in getting the regulations together. None of the manufacturers had had time to gear up and I hope the organizers and the F.I.A. learn their lesson from this year and see to it that the regulations for next year are all buttoned up in plenty of time. I suppose if the new rules help private entrants it's all to the good, although I see in AUTOSPORT John Gott

doesn't think they will. I don't know whether I agree with him entirely or not.

We have had the final movement order from Stuart Turner for the rally—13 pages closely typed. He really has put his back into the organization this year and if B.M.C. aren't successful in pulling it off, it will be the fault of a car or the drivers.

One of the stages we have practised is Thoard which is quite high up and for about 8 kilometres the snow is, in deep ruts. It's like driving a tram along it. The locals say this road is never ploughed and if there is any more snow it will have to be cancelled. I hope it is because it's not very enjoyable driving on rails when you can't set the car up for a corner, or take your own line. Also if somebody spun in front of you (not unlikely with a late number like ours) it would be quite impossible to overtake. In contrast, there wasn't a speck of snow on the St. Auban. It was quite dry, which would suit a Ferrari or a Porsche if they could overcome their 18 per cent. handicap. For anybody coming to Monte to watch the rally, the first three stages of the common route after Monte Carlo are the best to see. They are run in daylight on Monday, 17th, and I would recommend the St. Auban stage. Things are much better for the photographers and film people this year because so many more of the important parts of the rally will be run in daylight. One thing that disappoints

me, however, is that arriving at 10 in the evening we shall miss one of the most dramatic sights of the rally. One that can make the whole thing worthwhile after battling against the snow and the ice and the darkness all over Europe. You come over the last mountain a few kilometres from Monte Carlo and see the morning sun and the shimmering Mediterranean ahead. What a glorious sight it is and, with the change in pattern of the rally, I'll be sorry not to see it this year.

Once again we have seen very few people practising. Henry Liddon guesses around 100 of the entry come out beforehand but I don't think there can be that many. We have seen the usual people, like Lancia, Ford and Citroën. Lancia especially are trying very hard this year and we have seen them often on both our visits. We shall have flown to Warsaw on the 12th for the start and it looks like this might be as good a place to start from as any other. One thing we are glad about is that we're not starting from Oslo, where the first car leaves some 12-14 hours ahead of us, giving them virtually an extra night on the journey. Not that it makes all that much difference as we found last year because Oslo starters have a ferry and you can sleep on that. The only thing we shall miss in Warsaw is the sunshine and pretty girls that Aaltonen and Makinen conned their way into by starting from Athens and Lisbon.

AT B.M.C.'s special tuning department just before being sent to Warsaw for the start of the Monte Carlo Rally is the Mini-Cooper S of Paddy Hopkirk/Henry Liddon.

