

## ANSWER THE QUESTION

When was the last time you had the opportunity to get Ari Vatanen's autograph? When was the last time you saw Ari Vatanen the flesh? Have you ever actually seen Ari anywhere other than on a rally video. You would have to be lucky.

Peter and Steve Fraser decided to go to Canberra to watch the 1st Round of the Australian Rally Championships held some weeks ago, end of February early March. Their last visit to Canberra was ten years ago. Included in the party were Steve's sons, Jack and Toby the intention being to blood them into motor sport particularly rallying as we know it. Ages 10 and 7, both ARGH prospects. It was an easy drive down, staying at a Best Western motel and eating at Goulburn's famous Paragon cafe going and coming.

The rally started near Parliament House at Actor Park with a roll up of FIFTY NINE cars! Something to cause one's heart to pump a little harder. The field catered for 2 categories the ARC championship and the NSW State championship and what a wide spread of different vehicles. Hondas, Citroen, Peugeot, Renault. BDA Escorts, ever faithful Datsun 1600s, Neil Bates's Celica, a M3 BMW and a Porsche 911. A field that would bring to mind of a start of an AHRG event from Freeman's Water Holes!

The roads used were of course those used so many times over the years, good gravel and plenty of it. The boys watched a particular section called Pedders Power Stage which was a 3km blast on tight turns which had attracted quite a few spectators. It was between car arrivals to test their talent over the section that Peter turned his attention to admiring the local scenery. He noticed a tall fair haired slim built man standing not that far away. He nudged his brother Steve and said, "Who does that bloke remind you of? A bit thinner, but there's a resemblance don't you reckon?" Steve turned and took a good look at the man in question. He said, "Do you know he's more than a look alike. It's Ari Vatanen. Anyhow, let's go and check." I said, "How?" Steve said, "Let's go and ask. So this is what we did."



He had started to walk away, up the hill and there were more people than we two who had recognized him but they kept moving aside as he approached probably not wishing to intrude. But we did. With a friendly Newcastle smile we got close and asked if he would allow us to take a photo. He smiled and said "Yes of course" in his heavy Finnish accent. He was still quite reserved in his attitude. The boys thanked him for the time taken, then Steve decided to ask Ari how his son was handling the rally scene, the pressure he was under being Ari's son. It opened the floodgates and Ari could not have been more openly friendly

toward them after that, and mentioned the late Henri Toivenen who was killed with his navigator some years ago. It was the highlight of the trip for them and the photo they have secured is a beauty. We hope to reproduce it in the club's publication.

That great Australian rally personality and national champion and larrikin Ross Dunkerton was also standing close by and after viewing some of the current vehicles contesting the Australian Title sliding

past labeled it, Boring. It appears that Ari was flown out by the organizers to add a touch of class to the event.

They couldn't have made a better choice. After all, he is acknowledged as one of the greatest Rally Drivers ever to sit behind the wheel.

As told to PoP.

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### **Who is this Ari Vatanen guy, anyway?**

Born in Finland in 27 April 1952

Ari Vatanen's first professional rally was in 1970 and first WRC rally was the 1974 Thousand Lakes Rally

His first international rally was in 1975 in Jamaica

After that he became World Champion in 1981

He won the Paris-Daker Rally four times

Set a record time at Pikes Peak in 1988 in a Peugeot 405 Check it out on YouTube at:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=295SCGR-1ZA>

Ari had many more wins in his career, competing in 101 international events

After he retired from rallying he entered Politics in 1999 and was elected to the European Parliament

Since 2013 Ari Vatanen has been the President of the Estonian Autosport Union

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