

ALPINE - RENAULT, WORLD RALLY CHAMPION: 1973, THE STORY OF A FANTASTIC SEASON

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INTRODUCTION

Alpine !...

In this name, there is already rallying! It was no coincidence that Jean Rédélé chose it for his brand. He was always aware that rallying could be a source of happiness for those involved and that the rallying image could be positive to the public.

GENESIS OF A CHAMPION BRAND

As we know, it all began in the early 1950s with the 4 CV 1063, then, from 1955 onwards with the Alpines of Paris' Rue Forest, and rapidly of Dieppe's Avenue Pasteur. After the A106 coach and the A108 berlinette, came the A110 in 1962. These three models marked rally history as they allowed amateur drivers to win - despite their small engine capacity - against powerful sports cars. Their names were Jean Vinatier, Jacques Feret, Jean-Pierre Hanrioud and even a certain Jacques Cheinisse. At that time, there was no question of competing in championships other than the French Rally Championship or district championships. Things changed with the arrival of the A110 1300 S in the latter part of the 1960s. Jean Vinatier was to prove that the Alpine was able to endure the harshest conditions on the rally roads while Gérard Larrousse was to score the first exploit hailed by the mainstream press at the 1968 Monte-Carlo Rally, which he should have won if a band of sensation-seeking fools hadn't dumped snow on a blind corner. Jean-Claude Andruet (1968 and 1970) and Jean Vinatier (1969) won three consecutive French Rally Championship titles for Alpine. And to prove - if necessary - that these titles were to be respected, Andruet added the 1970 European Rally Championship title aboard an A110 1600 S. In 1971, there was still no world rally championship, but a series known as the "International Rally Championship" served as such. Jean Rédélé and Jacques Cheinisse were sure that it was possible for Alpine to fight for this first international title.

To do so, they hired a brilliant 33-year-old Swedish driver, Ove Anderson. He won four of the five rallies in which he competed: the Monte-Carlo Rally, the San Remo Rally (Italy), the Alps Rally (Austria) and the Acropolis Rally (Greece). That season, Jean-Luc Thérier was second in the Monte-Carlo Rally, Bernard Darniche won the Alps Cup, and Jean Vinatier won his Coupe d'Or. In the end, Alpine triumphed ahead of Saab, Porsche and Lancia in what can be considered a Pre-World Championship. Not to break the chain of success, Jean-Pierre Nicolas won the French Rally Championship in 1971 and Bernard Darniche in 1972.

These successes made Alpine a household name and a feared competitor, including those who entered with factory cars.

Like Asterix against the Romans (Lancia, Fiat etc...), Alpine thus faced up to the challenge by entering the first World Rally Championship in 1973. There were thirteen rounds on the calendar, but despite financial support from Elf and technical help from French brands Michelin, Marchal, Cibié and Devil, Alpine's competition budget (which

represented 7% of its turnover!) was not enough to compete in all the rounds. The first consequence of Renault taking a minority share in Alpine was the reorganisation of the racing department, now managed by Jacques Cheinisse alone. A fine strategist and thrifty man - by nature and obligation - he selected the events where he thought the French brand was most competitive. It would be the Monte-Carlo Rally, Sweden, Portugal, Morocco, Acropolis, Austrian Alps, San Remo, Rally of England and the Tour of Corsica, i.e. nine rounds (Editor's note: the Safari, Poland, Finland and USA were not selected). As for the drivers, he called upon his "three musketeers", Jean-Luc Thérier, Bernard Darniche and Jean-Pierre Nicolas, with occasional support from Jean-Claude Andruet, Ove Anderson and Jean-François Piot as here, during the opening round, the legendary Monte-Carlo Rally.

CASINO ROYALE IN MONTE CARLO

The 42nd Monte-Carlo Rally ran from 19 to 26 January. There were 270 cars at the start, only 51 would finish... Opposite the Alpine A110 1800, developing nearly 170 hp and weighing around 700 kilos, were four Lancia Fulvia HF 1600s with 160 hp and 880 kilos (one of which was driven by Sandro Monari), four Fiat Abarth Spider 1800s (including one entrusted to Bjorn Waldegaard), two Datsun 240 Zs (one of which was for Rauno Aaltonen) and, most importantly, two Ford Escorts 2-litre, 16-valve, with 220 hp driven by Hannu Mikkola and Tommy Makinen. For the record, two Renault 12 Gordinis sporting the colours of Radio Monte Carlo were entered for Jean Ragnotti and Patrick Tambay.

Bernard Darniche, joined by co-driver Alain Mahé, was his usual ball of nerves, especially as he was carrying the #1, a position he hated as it forced him to open the road and possibly face unforeseen circumstances as was the case before the Corbin pass, which was covered in snow only a few hours before the competitors' came through. All the Alpines lost time. Things went better during the shared course and its nine Special Stages (SS) for a total of 275 kilometres. At the end of them, Andruet (and Biche) were first ahead of Anderson (and Jean Todt at the dawn of his brilliant career) at 1m44s and Nicolas (and Vial) at 3m06s. While 140 amateur competitors were complaining about the snow on the Burzet plateau, preventing the officials from continuing to allow them to start the stage, Andruet set the best time, which did not calm him down from a penalty by the rally officials he contested. The rally continued under a cloud of confusion. The two white A110s sponsored by "La Défense Mondiale" struggled. At the front of the order, Anderson was a solid second place behind Andruet and ahead of Nicolas. In the famous Turini, Andruet suffered a puncture. Biche motivated him, "keep pushing!" she ordered him before a nervous return to Monaco. The next day, the final special stages were a second run over the Turini, Couillole and Col de la Madone de Gorbio. Anderson, supported by Todt, drove brilliantly, but Andruet slammed a legendary time to win the rally.

In the opening round of the world championship, Alpine scored big points, with Andruet winning ahead of Anderson at 26 seconds, Nicolas third at 1m35s, Th  rier fourth at 3m 58s, Piot sixth at 3m59s. Darniche was tenth at 15m 04s. Alpine swept the top three in the GT category with Jacques Henry, Alex Vineis and Marianne Hoepfner. A triumph celebrated as it should be (and even more!) by the Alpine team of mechanics. Renault naturally capitalised on this triumph. The Alpine brand was honoured, while the Renault mechanics were glorified. Cheinisse proved that he deserved the trust that he had been shown. The legends were on their way.

THE WHITE WEDDING

Three weeks later, Sweden was the next stop on the calendar, from 15 to 18 February. The course was 1,800 kilometres long, with 32 stages in two loops around Karlstaad. To resist the astonishing Saab V4s of Stig Blomqvist and Per Eklund, and reinvigorated by the performances of Ragnotti and Tambay on the Monte-Carlo, Jacques Cheinisse had the idea of entering two front-wheel drive cars: the R12 Gordinis. He entrusted them to the crews of Jean-Pierre Nicolas and Michel Vial as well as Bernard Darniche and Alain Mah  . Moreover, he rightly thought that the ban on studded tyres gave the berlinettes a chance. Invited to Jean-Luc and Jacqueline Th  rier's wedding, he slipped him a plane ticket to Sweden as a "wedding present"... On the official programme, a certain Calle Waertmarcel was Th  rier's teammate, which made the entire French community laugh, including the specialised press who journeyed to cover the event. Ove Anderson, the wild-card, was now in a Lancia, as Harry "Sputnik" Kallstrom while the Swedish giant Bjorn Waldegaard was entrusted with a super sharp iconoclastic VW 1300 Beetle.

The snow was abundant. Blomqvist crushed the competition, winning the first eight stages. Anderson demanded too much of his Lancia and went off the road. In an ill-tempered mood, Darniche did the same in his R12 Gordini, while the car driven by Jean-Pierre Nicolas - which did not have a limited-slip differential - could not keep up with the pace set by the Scandinavian acrobats. At the front, Blomqvist, who had been dominant until then, had to deal with a faulty fuel pump, which cost him the rally lead. Jean-Luc Th  rier remained in contention. On the evening of the first leg, the two Saabs were ahead of Th  rier's berlinette and Kallstrom's Lancia, who was vary of the Frenchman's performance. In the second loop, he amazed all the observers by winning the test on the frozen Travbana racecourse. Unfortunately, he went off the road shortly after and crashed into a snow bank while Kallstrom looked on mockingly. The steering rack of the berlinette broke under the impact. It was replaced by a simple   12 bolt. With the blessing of Jacques Cheinisse, the "fox" was back again, starting with Kallstrom. Then it was the turn of the moustachioed Viking to plant himself in the snow, and Jean-Luc couldn't help but give him a deceptively friendly V-sign as he passed him at full speed. He was still third. At the pointy end of the order, Blomqvist (26) regained the lead ahead of teammate Per Eklund. The two Saabs posted 29 best

times from 32 stages (!), and Stig Blomqvist eventually took his third consecutive Rally Sweden victory. Jean-Luc Thérier was on the podium.

He overcame the handicap of driving a rear-wheel drive car with simple Michelin M+S tyres in a bid to get some grip. With the agreement of the hilarious "Papa" Jacques Cheinisse, the organisers offered him a superb pair of elk horns, a souvenir of a truly unique honeymoon. After two rounds, Alpine led the World Rally Championship with 32 points ahead of Saab (20 points), Lancia (13), Fiat (12) and Ford (10 points)

TAKE ANOTHER PLANE

Portugal hosted round three. The TAP - named after the national aviation company - ran from 13 to 18 March. Four legs, totalling 2,821 kilometres with 32 stages, had an entry list made of 79 crews. Alpine entered its three drivers, supported by Antonio Berges, a talented local driver in a privateer berlinette. Some famous "privateers" lent their talents to a few factory teams, such as Ove Anderson in a Toyota Celica, Harry Kallstrom in a VW 1302 S, and Bjorn Waldegaard in a Fiat Spider. Citroën entered two DS 23s for Austrian Richard Bochnicek and local driver Francisco Romaozinho. As with the Monte-Carlo Rally, the rally began with a long journey drive from the four corners of Europe to Coimbra, Portugal's premier university town. As soon as they arrived, the crews headed for Viseu to compete in the first stage. It was short (8 kilometres) but crucial as it set the starting order. In this tactic war, Darniche won ahead of Nicolas, Warmbold and Thérier. For once, "Nanar" was all smiles because his number 1 starting position allowed him to avoid the clouds of dust raised by the cars. The following stages went well, including the one with the Boa Viagem jump immortalized countless times by amateur and professional photographers.

The three Alpines crushed the competition, of which only emerged the 16-valve BMW 2002 of Achim Warmbold, navigated by Jean Todt. At the end of the second leg, Darniche led ahead of Thérier at 8 seconds, Warmbold at 28 and Nicolas at 40. There were eleven special stages, ten of which were run on gravel, to get from Sintra to Lisbon. They are all won by Bernard Darniche, driving at its finest.

During the third leg, he consolidated his lead ahead of Thérier, Warmbold, Pinto and Jean-Pierre Nicolas, delayed by a faulty fuel pump. Behind him, Waldegaard tried to catch up to the leading group but crashed into a deep ravine, fortunately without any serious consequences other than shame and fear of heights. On SS24, Senhora de Graca, Darniche suffered a puncture and damaged the self-locking differential, which eventually broke. Simultaneously Warmbold also retired. Thérier took over in front of Nicolas while the astonishing Antonio Borges finished sixth in his privateer 1600 S berlinette. The final podium was monopolised by French cars, two Alpine 1800s with Thérier and Nicolas, ahead of the DS 23 of Romaozinho. Only nineteen - out of the

79 starters - made it to the finish. In the championship, Alpine had 52 points ahead of Fiat on 22 points and Saab on 20 points.

The East African Safari Rally ran from 19 to 23 April in Kenya without the Alpine team. "Too close to the Portugal, too tough, too specific, too expensive," said Jacques Cheinisse. Two Datsuns (Mehta and Kallstrom) won ahead of the 160hp Peugeot 504 saloon entrusted to Ove Anderson (and Todt), who raced in his fourth rally of the season for a fourth different constructor.

NEW LIVERY AND ANOTHER VICTORY IN MOROCCO

Round five of the world championship was also in Africa, but much further north, in Morocco with 4,093 kilometres spread over five days and four legs, comprising eleven stages (for 1,210 km, 160 on tarmac and 1,050 on gravel!). This event took place in a tense political climate as Hassan II had recently "Moroccanised" the last agricultural estates belonging to French people. There were 71 crews at the start, including the trio of Alpine drivers. Thériér asked to race a 1600 S (160 hp) while Darniche and Nicolas drove the 170 hp 1800. All three cars were new, with steel casings under the engine and armour plating attached to the chassis. The cars were painted in the French national colours for the first time, with the Renault logo by Victor Vasarely.

The competition was primarily French, with two DSs, two GSs, and six Peugeot 504s. Renault Morocco entered two official R12 Gordinis for Jean-François Piot and "le Tahitien" (who is not Tahitian!) while Datsun lined up a 240 Z for Safari winner Shekhar Mehta.

The first stage was rocky over its 95 kilometres. Darniche finished it in 1h6m. He was quickest again on the Zegota pass and the two tarmac stages to lead after the first day.

The second stage was a veritable car breaker with stages of 175 and 205 kilometres. Darniche won the first one and Thériér the second, which comforted him a little for the delay caused by a broken fuse in the first one. Parisian Jean-François Piot achieved a double feat by finishing 4th, then 2nd on these stages. During the regroup in Marrakech at the end of the second leg, Bernard Darniche was in first place ahead of an exceptional Jean-François Piot (at 16m09s) and Jean-Pierre Nicolas at 17m14s while Jean-Luc Thériér was 13th at 1h14m. Only 37 competitors remained in the rally. During the loop around Marrakech, the unlucky Piot broke a suspension wishbone but was still the hero of this rally led by Darniche in front of Nicolas at 24m20s and the three Citroën DSs. A final 236-kilometre stage (!) followed by a rough liaison road again caused havoc among the privateers. Both the cars and the drivers were exhausted.

Only 13 crews made it to the finish. Darniche won ahead of the three Citroën DSs, which made a nice grouping with Neyret, Bochnicek and Ponnelle. The A110 of Nicolas, the Fiat of Waldegaard and the A110 of Thérier followed. Seventy-one cars at the start, only 13 at the finish, but there were three berlinettes at the start, and three at the finish to leave the most experienced observers speechless. When you know the hell of the Moroccan tracks, you can only be amazed by the crews' performance, the quality of the preparation of the cars and their remarkable robustness. Managed by Gilbert Harivel, the mechanics team was warmly congratulated.

In the provisional classification, Alpine extended its lead with 72 points ahead of Fiat (31), Citroën (27), Datsun (22), Saab (20), Lancia (13), Ford and Peugeot (12).

ALPINE, THE MYTH

The next round was ten days later, in Greece, where a military junta had taken power, deposing King Constantine II.

Repainted in Alpine blue, the three A110 1800s with plastic fairings to save about 20 kilos per car compared to those assembled for Morocco were entrusted to the usual trio. There was also a privately entered A110 1600 in the hands of the excellent Greek driver "Sirocco" and co-driver Andriopoulos. Opposite the Normandy cars, there were two factory BMWs for Warmbold and Waldegaard, three Fiat Spiders, one of which was for Aaltonen, a Toyota (Anderson), four 130 hp VW Coxes and a DS 23 (Bochnicek). There were ninety-seven cars at the start for 2,809 kilometres (including 1,200 on gravel), five legs and 45 SS for 420 kilometres on gravel.

To prevent any overheating on the rear wheels, the bearings were now maintained in metal cages. Not very confident in the resistance of the auto blockers, Jacques Cheinisse asked to mount them only on the berlinettes of Darniche and Thérier, who teamed up for this rally with Christian Delferrier, an excellent Belgian co-driver.

Bernard Darniche suffered from a severe sciatica the day before the start. After courageously taking the start the next day to be the 50th international driver, a compulsory quota for the rally to count for the world championship, he retired. Thérier immediately took the lead ahead of Nicolas. The "fox" dominated the rally while his teammate Jean-Pierre Nicolas struggled with a clutch problem, and "Sirocco" jammed the gearbox in his berlinette.

In the second leg, the rally was even more challenging. The sun burned the bodywork and dried the throats of the competitors. Thérier continued his sirtaki in the lead, while Nicolas was deceived by the fake news disseminated by Aaltonen and his British co-driver Robin Turvey. The driver thought he was safe in second place ahead of the

Finnish driver, but he was eventually beaten by 20 seconds and was disappointed and furious with the wily Scandinavian. In the mid-season classification, Alpine was obviously consolidating its position as leader. Nevertheless, Jacques Cheinisse, who had not planned to run Alpine in Poland as he considered it too rough, changed his mind. Noting that no factory team - apart from Fiat - was entered, he suggested to Jean-Luc Th  rier that he go and dance the polka in Poland. The newlywed, already deprived of a honeymoon, accepted and missed the birth of his son Nicolas... Exceptionally, his co-driver was Alain Mah  . Fiat entered two cars, one for the Italian Alcide Paganelli but – surprise! - the other for the German Achim Warmbold, still co-driven by Frenchman Jean Todt.

There are two legs of more than 1,500 kilometres and 52 stages. The rally organisation was poor, the roads extremely rough, and the tests incredibly dangerous. Even the Moskvitchs, Trabants, Wartburgs and Skodas of the Eastern drivers gave up on the side of the road like tanks of a routed army. At the end of the first day, only 14 cars remained from the 62 at the start. The two Fiats were ahead of the Alpine. Th  rier was visibly unhappy to be there. He had just completed 32 hours of driving and knew he had just three hours to recover. "They are completely crazy", Jacques Cheinisse grumbled at the organisers. Sometime later, the A110 suffered front axle damage in a rut a bit deeper than the others. The car was wounded, and Th  rier, a tired hero. The mechanics from Dieppe repaired the car silently but quickly, and the "Fox" was back on the stages. He nibbled away at the gap to the Fiat. Paganelli accelerated and broke his engine whilst the cunning Jean Todt calmed Warmbold's enthusiasm. "Let it happen! The route is still long..."

Th  rier and Mah   got lost in SS50 because of an inaccurate roadbook. Despite this, they won the following five stages but were disqualified by the organiser. Only three cars finished this hellish rally. More ostentatious than ever, Warmbold and his Fiat won ahead of a DDR's Wartburg and a local driver. "Poland, land of misery", concluded a laconic Jean-Luc Th  rier.

The 1000 Lakes Rally was round eight of calendar. It is well-known that, like the Swedish Rally, it is the domain of Scandinavian drivers who know all the subtleties and shortcuts. Jacques Cheinisse thought it unnecessary to cross swords (or plastic) with the Vikings and the Trolls, leaving the way clear for the locals and their strange machines. Timo Makinen won in a Ford Escort ahead of Volvo's Markku Alen and Porsche's Leo Kinnunen. Amongst the Scandinavians in the top fifteen positions, only the German Warmbold, his BMW and co-driver Jean Todt finished 8th. The "Grand Jacques" was right once again... In the provisional classification, Alpine still led with 92 points ahead of Fiat, 69 points.

ALPINE AT THE AUSTRIAN ALPS RALLY

After a dozen days of recce, the two Alpine drivers Darniche and Nicolas were at the start of the Austrian Alps Rally to contest 29 stages totalling 400 kilometres on a 2,300-kilometre tarmac itinerary. Opposite them, two 215 hp BMW 2002s for Bjorn Waldegaard and Achim Warmbold, who returned to the German team, two 165 hp Saabs entrusted to the duettists of the Swedish rally and three 165 hp Fiat Abarth Spiders for Paganelli, Pinto and Lindberg. The service plan designed by ex-driver Marcel Callewaert included 56 service points with ten mechanics in two SB2 trucks and four Renault 16 TSs.

After the first leg and its 1,009 kilometres, Warmbold in his BMW was in command ahead of the two agile Saabs and the berlinette of Jean-Pierre Nicolas. Further back, Bernard Darniche was in a grumpy mood. Jacques Cheinisse pretended not to notice. In the 608-kilometre-long second leg, the German continued his domination, but one Saab had some problems that allowed Nicolas to move up to third place and Darniche fifth. Strongly solicited, the BMW experienced some suspension troubles and, to reach its service, took a road outside the roadbook which resulted in it passing in front of a checkpoint in the opposite direction as a Saab observer looked on and reported the matter to the controllers. The penalty for such an irregularity, disqualification from the rally, was contemplated, particularly as the Warmbold-Todt team had used a "conceded shortcut " by the organiser. Furious, Jacques Cheinisse borrowed a journalist's car and blocked the exit of this shortcut. Imbroglio, exclusions, complaints... Meanwhile, Bernard Darniche recovered some bite and racked up best times to beat the Saab of Per Eklund by one second while Jean-Pierre Nicolas finished fourth.

In the provisional classification, Alpine ran its points tally to 112 ahead of Fiat, totally out of the picture here (77 points) and Saab (45 points scored in just three rallies).

SAN REMO AND THE RAC

For the 11th San Remo Rally running from 10 to 13 October, Jacques Cheinisse entered three A110 1800s against a field of 100 competitors, including five Fiat Spider 124 Abarths, three Lancia Fulvias and two BMWs. The route was 1,786 kilometres long, divided into two legs with 37 stages. Bernard Darniche still had back pain, but he was determined to strike from the start, which he unfortunately did, smashing his berlinette into a wall and retired after only a few kilometres! Jean-Luc Th  rier avenged the Normandy-based team by winning the stage despite gastric pains, and Jean-Pierre Nicolas blamed himself for "being too careful". At the end of the opening day, Th  rier was in the lead ahead of Nicolas (30s), ten Italian cars and the isolated BMW of Bjorn Waldegaard. Jacques Cheinisse had to settle the goals of his two drivers to

avoid a potentially-destructive rivalry, thus, to Th  rier the French Championship and Nicolas a first victory in the world championship.

Th  rier regained his form and attacked, but Nicolas was not to be outdone. Sadly, the Marseille native crashed and lost valuable time to his Alpine teammate. The positions were now frozen until a clutch problem caused him to lose second place at the finish to Verini in a Fiat. Alpine consolidated its domination of the World Championship with 132 points, 40 more than its challenger Fiat. Jacques Cheinisse could therefore skip the aptly named American round, "Press on Regardless Rally".

On 6 October 1973, the Yom Kippur War triggered the effects of the fossil fuel war, which is still going on 50 years later. The RAC Rally - Royal Automobile Club Rally - offered 198 crews the pleasure of driving on "secret" (?) roads and tracks well-known to the British contenders. Ford entered three 220 hp Escorts, Datsun three 240 Zs, Saab three 96 V4s, Fiat two Spiders, Toyota two Celicas, BMW two 2002s, etc. Jacques Cheinisse was reluctant to enter his troops, especially as Fiat had little chance of winning. After the British Renault dealers pressured, he finally sent two A110s, one for Th  rier and co-driver Vial, and the other for Nicolas and Claude Roure. The stages were slippery, and even Jean-Luc Th  rier made an unforced error in the Leicester forest. A short time later, the ignition shaft broke, and he retired.

Jean-Pierre Nicolas was now the lone factory Alpine in the rally, although Pat Moss, a brilliant British rally woman, had an A110 entered by Renault UK. Following 35 hours behind the wheel and as many special stages, a short rest period was offered to the crews in Glasgow and then back to York, where it appeared clear the Fords were controlling the proceedings. At the finish, Timo Makinen was ahead of Roger Clark and Markku Alen. Nicolas could not close the small gap that could have given him fourth place. Finishing fifth was a great result considering the difficulties of this unusual rally. He knew that his last chance to win a round of the 1973 World Rally Championship would be in Corsica in December. Until then, Alpine could not be caught in the championship. The small Dieppe-based brand had clinched the World Rally Championship title!

AN IMPERIAL FINAL

Renault reigned in Corsica since 1956 and the first Tour de Corse Automobile. All the island's drivers are "addicted" to this race with its 10,000 bends, and after the Dauphine and R8 Gordini, they opted for the berlinette. There were 14 in "Group 4" and nine in "Group 3". Jacques Cheinisse sent his trio, reinforced by Jean-Fran  ois Piot – a former winner there in 1966 with an R8 Gordini - and the unofficial support of Jean-Pierre Manzagol, the Bastia native from the Doria garage. Half of the field was berlinettes (23 out of 50!). In the service park, the discussions turned to Fiat missing out the action and the motorsport ban decreed by the Messmer government

as a consequence of the threats linked to the conflict between Israel and Egypt associated with Syria.

Marcel Callewaert was back in action alongside Jean-Luc Thérier, like in the good old days of the R8 Gordini. The Norman was still in contention for the French Rally Champion title, as was Jean-Pierre Nicolas, partnered with Michel Vial. Bernard Darniche had an "A110 Bis", that is to say, with a type A 310 triangulated rear suspension. The legendary Corsica stages, like Coti Chiavari, Zonza, Aullène and Zévaco, put Jean-Pierre Nicolas in the spotlight before the snow prevented the rally from continuing, forcing the cancellation of eight stages. The competitors were directed to go to Ajaccio. Jean-Pierre Nicolas led ahead of Jean-François Piot (navigated by Jean de Alexandris), the unexpected Guy Chasseuil (on a Ford Escort), Jean-Luc Thérier, Jean-Pierre Manzagol and François Serpaggi. Piot and Serpaggi shared the stage wins the following day, while Nicolas had serious gearbox problems. He had only one gear left (4th), and from then on, he had to "play" with the clutch, which showed signs of weakness. Michel Vial encouraged his driver. Fortunately, only 50 kilometres of liaison remained, and the number 1 tricoloured berlinette, like an omen, crossed the finish line. It was a joyful moment as Jean-Pierre Nicolas finally had "his" victory. Alpine placed five berlinettes in the top six (Nicolas 1st, Piot 2nd, Thérier 3rd, Serpaggi 5th, Manzagol 6th). Jean-Luc Thérier was the French Rally Champion and Alpine World Champion!

On top of the world in terms of sport, the brand was taken over by Renault. That was 50 years ago!

Let's give Jacques Cheinisse the final word:

"Alpine, a transcendent human story or, quite simply, a story of men!

Men who surpassed themselves, driven by a shared desire to win, whether they were glorious drivers and co-drivers or those who tried to manage them. Our strength was the cohesion of the team, its unity, and the solidarity that motivated its members. We had what the others did not have, "the Win"."

Jean-Luc Fournier

FINAL CLASSIFICATION
1ST WORLD RALLY CHAMPIONSHIP
SEASON 1973

1.	ALPINE RENAULT	160 points
2.	FIAT	89 points
3.	FORD	76 points
4.	SAAB	45 points
5.	VOLVO	44 points
6.	DATSUN	34 points
7.	CITROËN	33 points
8.	PORSCHE	29 points
9.	TOYOTA	27 points
10.	OPEL	25 points
11.	BMW	20 points
12.	LANCIA	17 points
13.	VW	16 points
14.	PEUGEOT	13 points
	Etc...	

APPENDIX

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

TYPE	Alpine A110 Group 4 1973 season
ENGINE	Renault Gordini 4-cylinder in-line Longitudinal rear-engine
CYLINDRÉE	1,796 cm ³ – Mignotet preparation Bore x Stroke: 82,5 x 84 mm
POWER	170 hp at 7,200 rpm
ALIMENTATION	Two Weber 45 DCOE carburettors
IGNITION	Battery and distributor
DISTRIBUTION	Lateral camshaft Two valves in V per cylinder

TRANSMISSION	Rear-wheel drive
GEARBOX	Type 364 with Hewland differential 5 speed + reverse
BRAKES	Ventilated discs Ø 254 at the front and Ø 250 at the rear Ferodo brake pads
RIMS	Aluminium Gotti 13"
TYRES	Front Michelin Racing 19 x 13 Rear Michelin Racing 21 x 13
FRONT SUSPENSION	double wishbone Anti-roll bar Two spring/hydraulic damper combinations
REAR SUSPENSION	Broken axle and push strut Four spring/hydraulic damper combinations
BODYWORK	Polyester resin and fibreglass
FUEL TANK	90 litres in safety cell
LENGTH	3,85 m
WIDTH	1,60 m
HEIGHT	1,13 m
WHEELBASE	2,10 m
FRONT TRACK	1,36 m
REAR TRACK	1,34 m
WEIGHT	700 kgs

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ABOUT ALPINE

Founded in 1955 by Jean Rédélé, the brand has set itself apart with its French-style sports cars. In 2018, the brand presented the new A110, a sports car faithful to Alpine's timeless principles of compactness, lightness, agility and driving pleasure. The Alpine Business Unit was created in 2021 and thus became the brand dedicated to innovative, authentic, exclusive sportscars of the Renault Group, benefiting from the heritage and craftsmanship of its historic plant in Dieppe and the Alpine Racing and Alpine Cars teams engineering mastery.