

Vanishing

Economy rallies used to be all the rage from the oil crisis-stricken 1970s to the heady 80s but disappeared altogether. **Eli Soloman** investigates



IN THE EARLY 1960S FUEL CONSUMPTION WAS THE manufacturer's selling point through economic downturn and post-war austerity. It was therefore not uncommon to see Singapore's local motor importers boasting of astronomically low consumption figures for the cars they were selling.

In the 1920s, local Citroën agents Eastern Auto that its smaller \$1500 models were capable of 50-60 miles per gallon (4.7 - 3.92 litres per 100 km). By any standards, this was a bold claim as even a Prius today would struggle to achieve this average.

By the 1950s, the "Elegant yet Economical" Fiat 500, priced at \$3,850 outdid all before it with a top speed of 55mph and fuel consumption of 63mpg.

With the formation of the Singapore Motor Club in February 1948, a variety of events needed to be drawn up to appease the beaeth of members and that meant not just speed trials, sprints and hill climbs but Road Safety events, Courtesy Trials and Reliability Trials and Economy Rallies.

The Economy Run, an American invention from 1936, offered owners and manufacturers real fuel efficiency numbers during a coast-to-coast test on real roads and with regular traffic and weather conditions. When Mobilgas, which sponsored the event, entered the UK market in 1952, motor clubs throughout the British dominions soon followed with equivalent events.

The first Malayan Economy Run, organised by the Singapore Motor Club, was held over Easter in 1955 in austerity-gripped Malaya. It was the sensible thing to have. The Annual Mobilgas Economy Run, or what some dubbed as the "Race of the Flying Horse" was a very well attended event held over three days. The event and took drivers, co-drivers, and a scrutineer sitting in the back seat (to prevent the driver from freewheeling), over 800 miles (1287.5 km) of terrain beginning at Ipoh and ending at the Orchard Motor showrooms along Orchard Road in Singapore.

Subsequent events would start at Cheras Road in Kuala Lumpur at midnight and end at the Standard Vacuum Service Station at Tanglin in Singapore.

The Mobilgas Economy Run evolved over the years into a somewhat gruelling event usually dominated by the medium-size British car. By the 1960 event, the course had been extended by 70 miles (112.65 km) to a distance of 816.5 miles (1314 km). The event had by then gained a certain notoriety that was affecting both club and sponsor