ISA president Jean Marie Balestre rocked the already shell-shocked rally world last week with a series of proposals made during the Tour de Corse World Rally in Corsica. The most far-reaching of the proposals—made official policy three days later—presented was the severe limitation—and possibly even elimination—of Group B rally cars. Group B, you will recall, is the virtually unlimited sports car class which, because its homologation rules have required manufacturers to produce only 200 of the machines, has spawned such powerful exotics as the Ford RS 200, Peugeot 205 T16, Lancia Delta S4 and Audi Sport Quattro (Autoweek, Dec 2, 1985).

The rules changes come in two segments: those for immediate (or at least, 1986) application, and those which will come into effect in 1987. The most important immediate change stops all homologation of “evolution” versions (even more highly tricked cars with much more liberal homologation requirements) in both Group B and Group A. In addition, new rules will require automatic fire systems for both driver and engine compartments; formerly, only one extinguisher was required. This is in reaction to the accident in Corsica which claimed the lives of Monte Carlo rally winner Henri Toivonen and his co-driver, Sergio Cresto (Autoweek, May 12).

Other restrictions will limit the length of rally stages and the use of some bodywork materials and undercar skirts. More radical are the changes for ’87, which include complete cancellation of Group S (which was to become the new “Super” formula next year, with a homologation limit of only 10); prohibition of Group B cars with more than a certain amount of horsepower (with a possible total elimination of the class); and a completely restructured championship, awarding a title only to Group A touring cars.

Long-range effects of the FISA decisions may take a while to be realized fully, but for the moment, this much is clear: The age of the limited-edition wondercars is nearing an end. Manufacturers who have pumped huge sums of money into development of Group B and Group S cars now have little to show for it, but may gain in the long run. The reaction of Stuart Turner, Ford’s director of European motorsports, was restrained: “When we announced our return to international rallies we did express reservations regarding use of Group B cars and have always been concerned about the possible introduction of Group S. We have always favored a return to regular production vehicles for international rallies and a general reduction in power outputs and maximum speeds. We feel that Group A cars are more easily recognized by the public.

“For the overall stability of the sport we have concerns regarding the timing of these proposals and the speed with which they would be implemented when considered in the light of the enormous investment that manufacturers have made in Group B cars.”

Speeds and spectator safety have been a major concern with the newer, turbocharged Group B cars, particularly on asphalt rally stages (Corsica is the only all-asphalt rally on the current schedule). Added a Ford spokesman: “We feel the decision is sensible for rallying but don’t see it as a solution to safety. A Group A car is every bit as dangerous as a Group B car. The solution to spectator safety is not to make cars go slowly. All we’re pleased about is that it (the new policies) takes rallying in the right direction.”

Cal Club promotes Riverside TransAm

For the first time in professional racing, an amateur regional club is taking responsibility for promoting a professional event. California Sports Car Club (Cal Club), the Los Angeles-area region of the SCCA, will be the promoter of the SCCA’s Riverside TransAm race May 18th, which opens the 21st season of TransAm competition. Cal Club, with an effort spearheaded by region members Jim Smelling and Andy Porterfield, used its own resources to round up sponsors, contract concessionaires, cut program publishing deals and learn for itself what it means to promote a race the magnitude of the TransAm. What’s more, before the first race car puts tire to asphalt the event has paid for itself; it’s not only new, it’s good business.

BMW tests reworked GTP

A revised BMW GTP will see action during the Charlotte IMSA weekend, but not on the track. Instead, the car will fly in Lockheed’s Atlanta wind tunnel for aerodynamic fine tuning. New BMW US motorsports manager Erik Wensberg described last weekend’s testing—500 miles worth with David Hobbs and John Andretti driving—at Ohio’s Transportation Research Center as a success. A problem in the original bodywork design led to Bobby Rahal’s crash at Sebring, causing the team to withdraw temporarily from competition.

In addition, the fuel system—thought to have led to two fires—it also being changed. Essentially, BMW’s Formula One fuel system is being adapted to the GTP. Final decision on when the team will race again will be made after the Atlanta test.