

Rally of Queensland 2012

In last May's Highway, I wrote an introduction to competing in the International Rally of Queensland (RoQ) and how the recce on its own was giving me cause for concern – wet and slippery tracks, muddy tracks, sharp corners at the bottom of steep inclines, off camber corners. And I might hear you saying “well, that is what it is all about” and yes, I know that but spectating and actually competitively driving the stages are two different things as I was to find out.

To put into context the Rally of Queensland has an international stature, but is not on the WRC calendar. I suppose it would be equivalent to the Welsh or Scottish rallies.



The 'beast', tooled up and ready to go for scrutineering

I previously mentioned that the rally headquarters was based in Caloundra, about an hour's drive north of Brisbane and on the coast, but that all of the stages were located in and around Imbil, which was a further hour's drive north and inland. This also housed the main service park, official finish and the camp ground for those who did not have to start each morning from Caloundra. The APRC, ARC and Classics started from Caloundra each day while the QRC and all-comers stayed at Imbil. This also meant that the QRC and all-comers did not compete in the Saturday night super special stages held at Caloundra.

So back to the event. On the Friday am we were to have final re-scrutiny, except the guys did not turn up and then at 5 pm all cars and crews were to be parked up for the official start at Kings Beach in Caloundra.

This was fine apart from the weather, it poured down all afternoon and all evening making the spectator turnout very low as well as damp and cold for us crews. The official start, over the starting ramp, did not commence until 8pm so a long wait in the rain.

Alistair McRae was there with the works Proton team and there were other cars from Skoda and Citroen as well as many Evo's and Wrx's. Amongst the classic cars were several ex works or replica works Toyotas and there was one other Charade (a 1600cc De Tomasso version).



Alistair McRae's Proton



The rest of the Proton team



A Mitsubishi Triton ute – not what you would expect but was well sorted and finished in a good position



Honda Civic of one of the ARC leaders



And the most ferocious car of them all – well almost

The early cars – mainly APRC and some more known drivers had a quick interview on the starting ramp, but for the rest of us it was a quick car number, name of driver and navigator and then move on and get off the ramp! And so that was the start, we then went round the corner to the trailer and loaded the car on before driving back up to Imbil and the now wet and soggy camp site.

Saturday morning arrived and the weather had cleared into a typical Queensland day – wall to wall blue sky. Being almost at the end of the field we did not start until about 1030, so time for a few checks on the car. One spotlight bulb had failed as had the nav map reading light. So it was a hurried drive off to find the impossible in Imbil, but the local garage did surpass itself and a quick return to car, fit those items and check all was working as well as changing tyres and tightening down a few potential loose items in the car.

And then it was time to go.



Booking in prior to commencing Stage 1.

The car in front was a smart looking Celica GT4 and the final car behind us was a well campaigned Datsun 180B. Yes, we were second from last in the field. All in all there were 18 cars in our class – the all comers, but we were the only one in class P1, up to 1400cc.

My aim on this event was to finish it and not break any records or components in the process.

Stage 1 was muddy and very slippery, even where the previous cars had formed the track. It was also badly cambered towards the edges with many corners “not to cut”. On this latter point I started following the earlier cars tracks and found that they mostly were cutting the corners, so.....

Afterwards and when watching the in car video, I heard Gavin my nav said, “yes, you were taking it steady”. My take was I was driving like an old woman. But we got through with no dramas.

After that stage it was onto stage 2, a 27km stage. It was muddy and slippery in sections, hard gravel surfaces or hard packed mud in others. There were also several creeks to cross which were taken slowly – you never knew how deep they were or what rocks were below the surface. But I was getting the feel of the car as well as gaining confidence in the tyres, so getting a bit more competitive.

Following our Hirstglen and tree episode, we had fitted a water pressure warning light, and midway through the stage 2 it started flickering on, although the engine temperature was not too bad and the car was performing well. By the end of that stage the light was on permanently and the temperature had started to rise. So there was a problem somewhere below the bonnet.

We had another stage to go before a service and refuel halt, but when waiting for it, I noticed a lot of water dripping from below the bonnet. After the initial panic this turned out to be a displaced windscreen washer bottle. So out came the cable ties to secure it. But at least there were no other water leaks clearly visible but the



The front rego plate had to be saved twice after creek crossings – even the cable ties were being broken!

temperature issue was hinting at a possible cylinder head failure. At this point our only source of water was the drinking water, so that went into the hot radiator so that we could at least continue through stage 3. This was to be the way for the rest of the weekend – get to each stage start line and fill up the radiator with more water, and keep an eye on the warning lights and temperature gauge during the stages. Some of the sections on the longer stages were very fast ‘public’ gravel roads, and with the red light illuminating in 4th gear I had no alternative but to go to 5th gear. That would be around 140kph. A lot of confidence in the pace note accuracy was needed!!

On day 1, we had a total of 9 stages to compete in, ranging from 6km to 27km in length. Some of these were run twice in the same direction while others were run in the opposite direction.

Despite there being rather a lot of corners, it is surprising how many of them you remember on the 2nd run through, and fortunately not for the wrong reasons!

Although we started on 2 minute intervals we did manage to catch up and overtake other cars, and no they had not necessarily stopped or were having issues. The Celica GT4 was one such car – we caught them on 2 separate stages. Overtaking was difficult as you don't want to get too close because of the rocks being thrown up, yet close enough to let the other driver know that you want to get past.

Stage 5 was the BP Ultimate sponsored stage, with some large spectator points on it. The main point was located at a high speed corner, and specifically an off camber corner that tightened with a few very large trees on the edge of the road on the inside corner – so no chance to cut that one. The stage also differed between gravel and bitumen surfaces, just to add to the enjoyment. A few cars came to grief but at least no injuries.

Due to our start times, it was likely that we would be driving the last stages in the dark, so lamps were fitted at the early afternoon service halt. This proved good as the bolts holding them kept coming loose, despite being tight to start with. So after 3 stages off sorting them, and by the final stage of the day, they were good and in fact on that stage, despite a small spin, we caught up with 2 other cars just at the finish line. It is all recorded on video.

Day 1 complete, back to the camp ground and prepare for the next day.

Sunday awoke to 3 degrees and frost on top of the car. Only 7 stages to do this day, most of which were repeats from the previous day either in the same direction or in reverse. The car was going a lot faster by this point and hitting those creeks even harder. Knowledge as well as bravado was gaining the upper hand. Nothing too dramatic occurred to us – well sort of nothing until the start of the last stage. But we still finished the event and were not last.

Now....some of you might have seen a certain u-tube clip. The cause? Well, one hand on the wheel (other on the handbrake) and a torsion differential, loose surface and worst of all a foot that went below the brake pedal!
But what great advertising for our sponsors!!

If you have not seen the clip, well.....

And so onto the next event.



A replica? Works Toyota Celica