

Targa Tasmania 2009

Last year you might remember that a certain motoring journalist from the Daily Telegraph transported his Triumph GT6 out to Tasmania to compete in the Targa Tasmania and I presume that he wrote daily reports of his progress to which I know a lot of folk read. Well this is my daily report, and more, of this year's event.

The Targa Tasmania is a road rally held in Tasmania – that is the lump of land at the bottom of Australia; some might even call it an island. To give you an idea of its size it extends from the south coast to the midlands and from Norfolk to about the Welsh border. Now, I knew Hobart was in Tasmania, but as to any other towns or even where Hobart was located I had no idea. But as now I have learnt there is also Launceston on the north coast, Hobart on the south east corner and Strahan (pronounced Strawn) on the west.

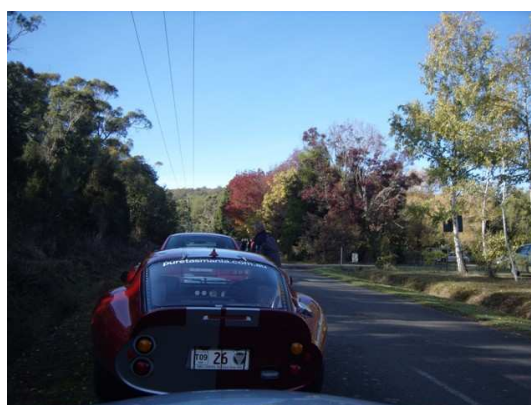
Tasmania was the first part of this continent to be inhabited by the convicts, and basically they found it a pretty cushy lifestyle compared to back in the UK. Certainly the Scottish and English names of the creeks and small townships lay claim to its ancestry.

The locals say it looks like Scotland or England or even Wales. So we shall see.

My second impression of the place (the first being very cold) was that it was a bit like Canada - lots of yellow and red maple like trees in the fall. But then many of the older buildings look straight from the UK - large residences definitely full scale models of mid 1800 century houses and even the smaller properties had a resemblance to typical brick houses of the mid 1800's found all over the UK.



Transport section Somewhere in Tassie



Waiting at a stage somewhere in Tassie

The Targa Tasmania is an annual rally posted as “The Ultimate Tarmac Rally” and scheduled to run this year from 28th April to 3rd May. The first 4 days are centred around Launceston, then we move for one night to Strahan, and finally concluding in Hobart.

Now, Launceston is Tassie's 2nd largest city and the nations 3rd oldest city. It is the gateway to the north and eastern areas, and just an hour's drive from the ski slopes of Ben Lomond (thought that was in Scotland!)

This year there are a total of 300 or so cars taking part of which 23 are on the tour. On the event there are several classes: the tour; the rookies (they only do 2 days); the vintage class; early classic; late classic; early modern; modern; showroom. Each of these classes have several sub classes just to add to the confusion. The tour (us) do not do all of the stages, only about ¾ of them and we are running in standard cars (well almost).

What is the Tour? It is a watered down version of the real thing where standard cars or your average Australian owned cars can enter. We drive most of the rally stages at, of course, within the official road speed limits – 60kph for built up areas or 100kph for other roads. The teams/cars are split into various packets of nominally 10 cars preceded by a packet leader and followed by a packet follower. Overtaking is not permitted. The organisers do attempt to

arrange cars in order of abilities/performance therefore the logic is that a Ferrari 599 (456kw) should follow a Z4 with 220kw. They will and do change cars around during the week. The main issue is to be safe and drive within your limits and the speed limits. Ha bloody ha!!!

The real objective of the 'tour' is to get the experience of Targa without the expense of having to prepare a rally car and finding that this is not for you and of course the driving and speeds will reflect this.

So this is the story of me with my driver (Ian) along with his supercharged BMW Z4 on the 2009 Targa Tasmania – **THE Ultimate Tarmac Rally**.

Day -3. Saturday. With a long week scheduled ahead decided to spend the day at the beach near Brissie – lovely blue sky day and about 29 degrees. Superb day for relaxing.

Day -2. All nice and relaxed for a 0730 flight on Sunday morning the 26th April. In fact it was a very warm morning so got up, dressed in shorts, a light t-shirt and thongs (flip flops to you Poms). Off to the airport with the flight arriving in Launceston (Tasmania) at 1000am. It had been fairly wet there. Disembarked from the Jetstar plane and faaaark was it cold! 7 degrees. Walked over the airport buildings where upon fido was there sniffing all of the luggage to make sure nobody was bringing in illicit food and veggies – as if, all we had were hot water bottles. Went through to the luggage carousel and the same fido was tramping over all of the bags still sniffing out food. Neurotic or what, these Tassie's?

Phoned Ian, who was duly waiting for me outside. Jumped in to the beamer, got the heaters on full blast and went to the motel in Launceston – dumped bags, changed into jeans, runners (trainers to you lot) and added rugby shirt but still freezing.

We then went to the sign on and scrutineering at the local velodrome (known as the silverdome). Actually not used for cycle races more for the locals to cycle round and keep warm! This is also to be the parc ferme for the event.



The cars in the Silverdome (Parc ferme)

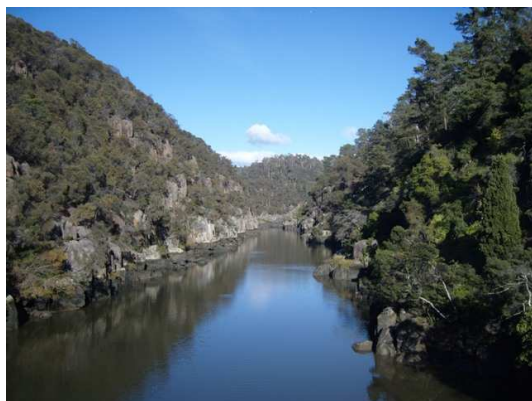


and the Tour cars, parked separately in the Silverdome

At the sign – on were given all of the stickers for the car. So it was back outside and attached the various decals. A few cars were around us – some spluttering and crackling, sounding as if straight from the NASCAR races, others included a Fiat 500, a Caterham 7 looking car and some Evo's etc. Then it was round to the scrutineering marquee – no probs for us there, then to get the car washed and have a look in the silverdome where I managed to buy a jacket and another shirt. And then it started pouring with rain, well I was sure it was going to be sleet but temperature was still 7 degrees – body still not acclimatising. I even told some of the others that it smelt like snow – they did not believe me but the clouds looked full of the stuff. Then we had a short drive round Launceston got some cereals for breakfast and found a bottle shop for the necessary slab of Boags (crate of local ale) and returned to motel room where said tinnies (beer cans) were demolished in true Aussie style.

Day -1. Not too much to do today apart from a tour lunch and a party in the evening. So we went to see some of the local sites in Launceston - the cataract gorge. And yes there was snow on the hills in the distance. Vindicated!!

We then headed to the country club for lunchtime session which included a chat/threat by the tour leader – behave on the public roads or else!! We should not exceed the speed limit of up to 100kmh, but of course some of the roads/bends are that tight which normally you could only do about 30kph. So as we can use the whole road, maybe we can keep within the 100kph limits!



The cataract gorge at Launceston



Views between stages and south of Devonport

Revisited Silverdome and left the Z4 along with all the other cars in the parc ferme, and had a good look around the other cars.

The evening was back to the country club for an evening reception, transported by the courtesy bus – plenty to drink and eat and lots of good videos to watch, then back to the motel by 2100hrs.

Day 0 the prologue. Well, still cold and no, not acclimatising yet. Anyway today we started in earnest on the rally. The prologue is all about driving around a street circuit in Georgetown which is about 50km north of Launceston and nearer the coast.

Before we left the silverdome, the “tour” was split into 2 groups, each led by a tour packet leader. Our packet had 10 cars in it and we had a Daytona in front and a Ferrari 599 behind, plus other BMW’s and a 6.0 litre modified Holden Monaro similar to a Vauxhall Commodore in our group. The other packet started with a BMW and finished with a Triumph Herald. Nay luck there!

The purpose of the prologue is to get the starting order sorted out for all of the main competitors, but was just a (60km/h, cough!) fun run for us.

But first we had to drive there, obviously. We left the Silverdome, and drove at a good pace, of course observing all of the speed restrictions on route and got to the BHP Billiton Temco manganese foundry north of Launceston for their 1000hrs tea break complete with scones and where all the workers came out to see the cars or better still partake of the free food and tea supplied.

After 45 minutes we left and had a spirited drive to the start of the prologue. We arrived there and had 20 minutes or so to wait while the stewards and police drove through the circuit to check all was ok. Now we were also going to drive the circuit but of course at a much more steadier pace and keeping well within the speed limit which being a built up area was 60kph. This route was through the housing estates etc. Anyway the tour leader tooted his horn and all 10 engines started (for our tour packet) and we drove forward towards the start and then no stopping at the start, we were off, at the clappers! I was trying to read corners out to Ian but he was really following the Daytona in front but I enjoyed trying to read the instructions.

It was a real rally stage, with not to be used roads cordoned off, and lots of spectators. But at 5.01 minutes it was all over. So that was 5 minutes to do 5km – a good average of 60kph, but on the straights the speeds were possibly slightly higher. And that was the Prologue completed for us. We then parked up in Regents Park where all the main competitors had been gathered and quickly walked back to where I thought we would be viewing the main stage, but in fact we were going straight to the sponsors marquee to which only certain folk were invited – the tour group and select individuals, and with a grand stand view of a hairpin, served lunch with red or white wine, beer and Tasmanian Salmon. We then spent the next 2 hours watching the also rans (other competitors) behaving like hooligans around the circuit. In a fuel stop in Launceston I asked one of the navs (we navs do talk to each other!) what speed and times they had achieved. This MX5 took 3.45 mins to do the circuit and reached speeds of 150kph. So proving that the other guys in our packet did hold us up!

So that was our rally day completed and then it was a slow drive back to Launceston the Silverdome to park the car amongst all of the other cars, and then got the free bus back to our hotel – to a venison dinner for me and a salmon dinner for Ian, polished off with some Drambuie. Man, life is tough down under!

So tomorrow the story really starts with us doing 6 out of seven stages and a start for us at 0550hrs – urgh!



BMW M3 without the bonnet or good graphics?



One of two Lamborghinis at the Georgetown Prologue. This one came 2nd o/all, the other crashed

Day 1. Set off for the silverdome at stupid o'clock and then waited around for an hour in the freezing cold – there was a good frost on the ground just to freeze the toes!

This morning's start was the official start of the rally so once we eventually left the parc ferme, we drove in packet convoy to the country club that are main sponsors and also are hosting several receptions. Fortunately the spiritual advisors were on hand as we had a beautiful day albeit still cold. We left the club with temps of 1°C and of course the hood was down in true Queensland fashion.

Drivers were breathalysed at the start of course and surprisingly read zero. (Ian says unsurprisingly, I beg to differ!!)

The route today was an anticlockwise circuit heading east, north and then west of Launceston. As the tour section we had 7 stages to cover whereas the rally people had 9. Of course being narrow lanes, the maximum speed we were permitted to drive at was 100km/h on these stages which we kept to religiously. I was frantically reading out the corners from the road book which of course does not cater for every corner. But having the Terratrip made life a lot easier to work out where we were.



The spiritual advisor outside the Casino!



Waiting for the start at the country club

On most stages we were achieving a time (noted for a matter of interest as we are not racing!) just under the due time. We are not allowed to overtake the preceding cars but slower ones may be shuffled around towards the back of the individual packets so as not to delay/upset the more frustrated drivers.

In fact the Daytona in front of us was a pain in the neck and the Mustang in front of him was even worse – slow, inconsistent speeds and using all of the road (on touring sections and the correct side on stage sections - wally). At the beginning of stage 6 the 7.0 litre Mustang was relegated, deservedly, to the back of the field. Perhaps he was suffering from handbrake problems (i.e. wife in passenger seat). She certainly was unable to navigate twice during the day.

I am not sure what they put in the water here, but at every stop the boys disappeared to the nearest bushes, the girls went to the opposite side of the road, except the aforementioned non-male gender navigator who insisted on staying on the boys side with only a cigarette between her lips.

Once we got rid of the Mustang, then we went a little bit more enthusiastically within the 100km/h limits, of course, although still caught up with the 5.0L V8 Daytona after less than 1km despite being given 200m head start at the start. In fact he has the same engine output as Ian's Z4, but was unable to match the acceleration. So needless to say we were all over his rear bumper for most of the stage.

The stages varied in length today from 5.5km to 11km and were mostly twisty. Some of the countryside reminded the Ferrari driver of his home county of Devon, although I did not recognise this. As the navigator my eyes were either looking at the book, to the heavens or closed.

Packet 2 lost a Porsche 911 Targa to a bank on a corner early on in the day, otherwise all seemed to survive the day. Can't say too much about the rally cars at this stage, though.

Went out tonight for a 'tour' group dinner followed by a 4km walk home. Great for beating the cold and the breathalyser in the morning.

An early start again tomorrow.

Day 2. 30th April. Left the motel at silly o'clock again for a trip to the silverdome. And yes arrived there first (need to do something about that), but at least today were only heading off at 0715 for a 43km drive to our first stage which was in fact the 2nd stage of the day – the competitors had their first stage starting at 0806hrs.

Today's events were all located in a long clockwise circle to the east of Launceston, and there were a total of 9 stages, which we did 6 of them. The first transport section was 43km long and as we drove up through the mountains the temperature dropped to -2.5° but the roof

remained down. Whilst the 2 modern Mini Coopers for VIP drivers and at the back of our packet, also started with their hoods down, because ours was down, they did not have the intestinal fortitude to maintain our values. The wimps did not last until the first control, hoods up and teeth chattering. Reasons were claimed to be the inefficient heating system of the car! Girls blouses!



The cars in temps of -2.5°C waiting for the first stage



18.5 litre V8 Hispano-Suiza Delage Special, and still competes.

So what of the stages? The early ones were tremendous – 8 to 14km long, up and down hairpins with potentially slippery and icy roads, and to which my instructions were not always heeded by the driver as the red mist had come down and he was looking more at the car in front! However when I said hairpin left in 400, there were a series of left turns before that which confused him, er... and me. Any more than 3 words at a time a driver is confused. Poor dear!

But they were fantastic roads, giving it large and having the whole road to yourself, well at least not worried about on-coming traffic. The scenery was supposed to be superb, but I did not notice any of it – 230bhp at the wheels, 2nd gear and blind right handers.....awesome.

Our lunchtime halt was on the east coast of Tasmania, where it was warm (15°C), surf beaches and beautiful vistas and held at 1100am. A complete contrast to Launceston in temperature, types of trees and of course the weather – it was dull and overcast there all day.



St Helens on the north east coast – a complete contrast to the western half of the island and almost warm

After lunch we had a 48km transport section to the next stage at Elephant Saddle, where Ian had memories of an incident the year before when his then navigator driving had a minor mishap... no more to be said, apart from why I don't want to risk driving.

Anyway after this section I drove the 120km transport section to get the feel of this high-powered Beast before I drove in the final section of the day – a drive through the streets of

Longford, which was FUN! Tomorrow I might be allowed to drive another street section If I am good and buy tonight's wine for Ian.

Summary of the day – Awesome!!!!!!!!!!!!

Day 3. Today we got up and it was pouring with rain, on the upside therefore it was less cold, but on the down side it meant the roads were slippery – not good when there are a bunch of hooligans driving around.

So today, we were west of Launceston all day and initially had a 53km transport section out to the first stage. Once there we saw lots of TV cameras and additional Police presence only to be told that the State Premiere (of Tasmania) was driving one of the VIP Mini Coopers at the back of our packet. Anyway as mentioned the roads were wet this morning although the rain had stopped by this time.



Even the coppers had door numbers!



The old and new 'Italian Job'?

Ian had been chatting to the owner of the Ferrari 599, who unprompted offered to let him drive to the first stage in the rain as it turned out, so I was therefore without a driver. Resulting in me driving the Z4 for the 53km section and Dudley, the Ferrari's owner, as my navigator. Ian was not offered the chance to drive during the stage!

We then had 2 stages to complete before a long transport section to Devonport on the north side of the Island. I was to drive this street circuit, but as we can only assume due to the presence of the Premier, the speeds were extremely tame.

After Devonport we had another 2 stages to drive in before completing the entertainment for the day. These were both long and fast sections.

Once we had completed them we then went to watch the actual rally cars compete on their final stage of the day. The speed some of the lunatics drive at is unreal. Take into account the cars range from Fiat 500's to Lamborghini's, it is not surprising, really.

Day 4. Today the entire rally circus left Launceston to end up in Strahan for Saturday night on the west coast of the island. This was via Penguin (on the north coast) and then headed south to Strahan. The earlier than normal start was due to our initial 87km transport section before we had the first of our stages to encounter - a 37km long stage which included 1 stage from yesterday afternoon plus another but all going in the opposite direction. These were typical Tasmanian roads – twisty going up and then down hills and a lot of fun and using the entire width of the road plus some. The video is the proof of our superb driving and navigation skills! We then had a 2nd stage to drive before going to Penguin for Lunch. After this we had a 118km drive towards Strahan with 2 stages to drive.

Having left Launceston in the clear dawn the rest of the morning looked as if it were going to turn out well, but the further south we got the darker the clouds became and by the time we reached the 4th stage at Rosebery we were encountering heavy showers. Ok for those tin

tops, but our hood was down. So we had to drive faster to make sure the rain flew over the top of us.

The final 2 stages were run in wet conditions (still with the hood down) with the last one being high speed downhill. And yes, the back did misbehave a bit. Meanwhile I kept my head firmly looking at and reading the roadbook.

Perhaps now is the time to point out that the roads being closed are main roads – not side roads and between 8 and 47km long. Imagine closing the A20 from Maidstone to Folkestone for 4 hrs just to allow petrol heads to drive like nutters! That is what we were doing.

Strahan is the first and only port on western Tasmania and is a curious place. The port was obviously significant at some stage bearing in mind the size of the customs house. On the way here the evidence of mining was significant judging by the spoil heaps and covered in vegetation linking their age on either side of the road. There is still some mining going on but it was obvious that extensive mining has occurred over the years in this area.



The HM custom building in Strahan



How does that bloke get out of the car?

The rally arriving in Strahan more than tripled the population for the night – with crews and their service crews,

So far yet to see how folk think that this is Scotland. It looks more like the wildernesses of Canada to me.

Saturday night in Strahan is very hectic especially when the rally comes to town. 4 people to every table place etc. At least the alcohol dispensary units had stocked up for the night.

Day 5. Sunday morning woke up to the sound of rain – constant heavy drizzle and cold to boot. Hood remained up until we started the first stage which was just outside Strahan, and heading towards Hobart.

The Daytona which was now 2 cars behind us managed to spin on the 2nd corner and plant its nose into a bank. And we missed it – the incident not the car!

The first stage was 33km long and very wet and slippery. Our speeds were a bit slower than previous due to the conditions and closed the road between Strahan and Queenstown. We then had a 6 km drive down into Queenstown – another mining town and has to be the depression capital of the world, before starting the next stage at the end of the town (just to bring some light into their lives). This was just a 15km stage of Alpine like roads with 500m drops on one side. I preferred to look at the other side, and averaged 65km/h.

Following this we had a 15km transport section to the longest stage – the 47km Arrowsmith stage which we completed at an average of 86km/h. Fast enough thank you!

The penultimate stage for the day was just 15km long and on the same main road between Strahan and Hobart. Another road closure for 4 hours! We then had a 56 km drive to the final stage for the week – Tungatinah. It was only 9km long and as the conditions were now dry I accepted Ian's offer to drive it. It was a bit tame though.

And then it was back to the finish at Wrest Point where we all had to drive through the finishing line, and in the VIP enclosure enjoyed a very small glass of red wine or several while all the real rally guys crossed the line.



The 'PureTasmania.com.au' sticker appropriately adjusted

When you have had no drink for 6 days, then.....

For us petrol heads it was awesome. The atmosphere – I can't describe it, the wine was good (that small glass) and oh, the presentations etc and champagne being sprayed. Out of this world.

The winning car was a Nissan GT-R, 2nd was the Lambo and 3rd was an Evo IX

Now, we had been discussing getting a rally car and doing the Targa proper next year for the last couple of months and having experienced the week everything says "do it". So we are looking for a cheap rally car now.

Anybody fancy a holiday in Tasmania next year to service a vehicle? No expenses paid. Get your own way out here, service a vehicle in the cold, rain and dark and in puddles. But feel the experience of Targa. It truly is awesome.

We travelled about 1485.99km on transport sections and drove on 349.04km of stages during the 6 days. Added to this we had to get to the ferry port at Melbourne which is 1800km from Brisbane and Hobart is about 250km from Devonport, the other end of the ferry.

To reinforce the facts that the vehicles used are literally everyday cars, below is a list of those in the 'Tour' section:

V8 Ford Falcon

Porsche 911 Turbo, 993 and 911's

Nissan Skyline GTR

3.0L Holden HG Premier

Holden HSV clubsport R8

5.0L V8 Daytona Coupe replica (given time both car and driver should improve!)

6.0L modified Holden Monaro

BMW M3, and Z4 (supercharged)

BMW M coupe

Ferrari 599 with a knackered exhaust (bolts fell off.)

5.7L V8 Ford Falcon Coupe

Mini Cooper S (modern)

6.0L V8 Holden Commodore SSV

7.0L V8 Ford Mustang

Nissan 350Z track

Triumph Herald Coupe – awesome power at 51 bhp.



Waiting at the start of yet another stage



The Finish. Various class winners already on the podium