

Targa Tasmania 2010

After months of preparation on the car, including a rebuild on the engine, there were a few problems still to be ironed out. Time was against us. We had just 11 days to go until the "off".

The cam has been delivered and the initial problems of it not turning in the head were traced to of all things the up-rated springs – too tight – but overcome with a bit of force.

So that was another weekend wasted.

So the next issue was to connect the cylinder head to the block. What is so simple I ask? And what can go wrong? The gasket is the wrong size. We have over-bored the cylinders but the gasket was made for the standard bores. So another delay while that is sorted.

And the car? Well it is still with the experts (with the original engine) who play with computer chips. We hope to have it back in the next day or so that the swop over of engines can take place and then we will be flying.

Using Ian's special computer programme he considers that we should be able to do 0 – 60mph in 9.5 secs, with the 30 – 70 mph time taking about 10.5 seconds. Which for those all knowledgeable amongst you, is not far short of what a Porsche 911 will do – about 9 and 10 seconds respectively! And they are our competition in our class.

I am hoping to run the car on this Sundays autocross complete with new engine, gearbox and adjustable computer chip, but am not being too optimistic.

Other things in hand now – crash helmets being purchased to suit a new intercom system (bought from Demon Tweaks with a saving of over 100GBP), and of course we have all of the advertising/sponsors stickers ready to place on the car. All we need is the car.

With just one week to go (Friday 16th) the new engine is completed and installed into the car and it runs which although not properly tuned does have to be run in before returning to the dyno tuner on the Monday morning for final tuning, idling and increasing the rev range.



The engine assembly on the workbench (tyres and a seat!)

Sunday is spent installing the intercom, putting on sponsors logo's, installing battery isolators and a host of other small tasks, and in the evening being taken for some serious driving miles by Ian.

Monday and the car returns to the Dyno tuners. After 30 sessions on the dyno, it finally satisfies everyone – the car, now a 1330cc unit, is producing 83 kw (111bhp) of power at the wheels and probably 147bhp at the engine. It is quite an improvement over the previous engine performance, added to this it is generally a 40% increase in power over the standard higher spec of engine. And it sounds good!

I arrive at Ian's after work on the Tuesday night to see the car and hopefully drive it but was told that there was a problem with 2nd gear synchro, but "take the car for a drive anyway to see what you think of the new performance" I was told. So dutifully (we navs have to do as

told) I took the car out for a gentle drive. I managed about 5 km for a wee blast up the local motorway before there was an ominous clunking sound from the drive train. Having stopped on the side of the motorway, the engine seemed fine but when in gear the car would not move, so an SOS call and Simon with trailer arrived to take the rally car back to the workshop.

With just 2 whole days left, we had no choice but to remove the gearbox again and find the cause of the problems.

Simon, our service and engine development manager, arrived early on the Wednesday morning, removed the box and discovered, attached to the internal magnet were all the teeth from the 3rd gear – totally stripped. Once again our supply of spare gears came to the rescue and the gearbox was cleaned, reassembled and installed into the car by the Wednesday night.



The stuffed 3rd gears

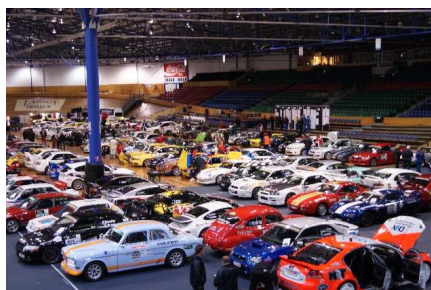
There was no apparent reason for the gears to have been stripped, and not due to my driving, but I have to ask if the 'synchro' problems were an indication of the gear disintegrating. Well that is my excuse anyway.

Thursday am, the car was taken to our 'friendly' suspension specialists for lowering and setting up for tarmac rallies. This took about 3 hours to do but on return to Ian's it was loaded onto the trailer ready for the 1800km drive to Melbourne and then ferry to Tasmania. Also loaded was a spare engine (the original one), and 2 complete gearboxes and the box of spare gear sets. We would have at least 3 days of rallying assuming the gearbox broke each day!

Friday morning we set off for Melbourne with the service barge (the Landcruiser) towing the rally car and Ian's Z4 following in convoy. A long boring journey with speed limits generally not exceeding 100kmh on primarily single carriageway roads which are very closely monitored by police patrols along the route.



Re-tying down the car on route



Parc Ferme in the Silverdome

Saturday pm we arrived in a cold Melbourne and had a few hours to wait until loading onto the overnight ferry to Devonport. A fine excuse for some light refreshments before the week of supposed abstinence.

Sunday, we arrive in Devonport and have the 2 hour drive to Launceston. In order to get some miles onto the rally car, Ian drives it very carefully just in case the gearbox problems are still persisting. Our first task is to sign in, get the roadbooks, determine where the measured distances are and get the tripmeter calibrated. We had estimated that the speedo was about 11% out now due to the new gearing and smaller wheels. The actual calibration distance was 10km long on the Georgetown Road. We checked this out a couple of times and then returned to the Silverdome in Launceston, got scrutineered and put the car in parc ferme for the night.

Targa 2010. At long last it starts!

Following the last minute preparations which we had, and the gearbox being changed literally at the last minute, so amongst all the spares we carried, which actually was just a few odd hoses and other old bits and pieces, we also had 2 complete gearboxes - one from the standard 1600cc engine and the other from a GTTi Charade plus a complete gear set. So one way or another we would have at least 3 mornings when we started the rally. We also took the original engine with us just in case the new one expired and a swap over was necessary. We were prepared!

Now for some nav talk. The timing on Targa is different from what I have been used to so far. Each stage is given a base time and a Targa trophy time. Beat the base time and you get zero penalties. We only managed to achieve that twice, coincidentally those which I drove on as the co-driver. The Targa trophy time is slightly more generous than the base time and can fluctuate depending on the road conditions – dry, intermediate or wet. Achieve every stage time equal or faster than the trophy time and you win a trophy or plate. This was our real goal. Fail just one of those stage times and no plate. Each category of cars has different trophy times so for early modern, our class and category 8, we would perhaps have to complete the stage 1 minute faster than cars in the classic section even if they have several litres and goodness knows how much more horsepower under the hood. But that is how it is.

So those were our real goals – achieve the Targa trophy times. Actually just to finish in one piece was my goal!! There were a lot of sharp corners in front of solid trees to get past.



The cars parked in Parc Ferme at Launceston

The rally was to be run over 6 days, 4 of which were on roads centred around Launceston in the north, the 5th was spent driving down to Strahan in the south west, and then the final day crossing the island from Strahan to Hobart where the event finished. Altogether some 2000km of driving with 600km of closed road tarmac stages. Apart from Day 0, we would have 8 stages to run each day and these varied in length from about 5km to 53km long.

Day 0. Tuesday, saw the start of the event. It was a sunny day and all we had to do was drive about 70km north to Georgetown where the Prologue was to be run. This was a blast around the streets of the town from which the start time would be allocated for the rest of the week – slowest cars leaving first. It is quite a good policy as it means that as we would be leaving at 30 second intervals on the stages we should not be catching up with too many cars or indeed be getting overtaken by many.

Georgetown itself is a large sprawling town, set out in blocks. So the route took us down roads for several hundred metres followed by generally a 3 lefts or 3 rights (90degrees), although there were a few tighter bends to consider, roundabouts, long ways and short ways, car parks and speed humps!. The latter were ignored.

Because of our gearbox problems, Ian did not go too large with the car although the words 'gentle' could not be applied. Anyway we got through the stage without drama and out of 265 starters we were the 45th slowest. There were many cars of higher potential being driven a lot slower than us. But also many with higher potential being driven harder

Day 1. Wednesday. The weather had turned and it was cold and wet as we left Parc Ferme after the customary and daily breathalyser. What do the local constabulary think we are? This was a warm up day with shorter stages between 4 and 14km long spread over an anti-clockwise route north and west of Launceston. There was a lot of water lying on the road which caught several cars out, but although we were on dry tyres, the wet caused us few problems. At least 2 telegraph poles had to be replaced after cars collided with them. Considering the conditions, I was horrified to know that we had been hitting 170/180kmh in places. Fortunately I was either reading out the pace notes or my eyes were closed and not looking at the trip meter at the relevant moments.

For both of us this was the first time of using real pace notes on an event. We had paid for them as opposed to spending a week driving the roads and making up our own. They were incredibly detailed and accurate, although there were several moments when courage was leaving me. Accelerating hard over a series of blind crests you just hope that you have counted them properly because if you think you still have one to go and reach the last one which happens to have a 6 right immediately afterwards – it is going to be an ugly few moments! An adrenalin rush it was not!

Anyway day 1 completed within the Trophy times and we returned to Parc Ferme with nothing to do apart from get the car washed. The gearbox had held out for another day.

Day 2. Thursday and another 8 stages to undertake during the day. This day was a clockwise route well to the east of Launceston, with some memorable stage names but also some really twisty roads. We were finding that we were catching up with a lot of cars during these stages and by the end of the day were running in the first 10 cars.

I was also getting into the way of the navigation, developing my own systems of making sure where we were in relation to the pace notes, checking distances to times periodically and such like.

The penultimate stage of the day, Ross Arden and a mere 12 km long, was a very fast stage, but with a recent coating of bitumen chips, which caught a few crews out who had not taken that into account on their recce notes. We were not going fast enough! Although at one stage I noticed the trip meter showing 166kph, Scary stuff!

The real icing on the cake for me was being able to drive the final stage of the day – around the town of Longford. It did not really need a navigator which was just as well as Ian lost the route at the first corner, So that meant I had to go faster. Gearbox? Did we have an issue with it? I forgot about that as the red mist came and I left the start with a lot of wheelspin and lots of red lining. On the straights I was red lining in 2nd gear (120kph) hitting 3rd gear before braking for the next corner. Many 3 rights and 3 lefts. Plenty of spectators and action. Result was a 2:25 sec run where the base time was 3 minutes. All of our service crew were watching on the stage and were impressed with how the car looked, sounded, handled and importantly was being driven.



Me driving in Longford



Ian driving somewhere else

And then back to Parc ferme in Launceston. For me it was worth the whole experience just to do that one stage. Who needs the evo's or WRX's?

Day 3 Friday. The car is still going well with no evidence of gearbox problems. Today's route again consisted of 8 stages but we were well to the west of Launceston with some long stages to negotiate. The pace was hotting up further with the average speed in dry conditions ranging from 88 to 105kph.

On Palooka, the 4th stage of the day, I was sure that we negotiated several corners on just two wheels although not necessarily airborne on the 'yumps'.



Yes, charades can get airborne

Mount Roland was the 5th stage of the day and was 26km long and designated as 'wet'. It was wet when we started but dried out as we negotiated a series of sharp hairpins uphill, overtaking cars including a BMW 325 on route! Taking hairpins uphill is all very good but the other side of the hill has also to be negotiated, but down the way! More scary stuff. Notes from the day say that I was getting used to the pace notes, how and when to call them, and when to repeat the call with the right tone of urgency in the voice.

Day 4. Saturday. This was the day that we moved from Launceston to Strahan in the south west of the island. Stuart had opted to remain with the Landcruiser (service vehicle) in Launceston and go direct to Hobart for the finish as the roads would have been closed between Strahan and Hobart. This meant that they could spectate on Riana, the 4th stage of the day.



Working the suspension hard

We had one moment on the Cethana stage, the 2nd stage, which was a reverse of Mt Roland but also continued for a further 15km. Conditions were very slippery, with drizzle at the start, low mist on the top of the hill and then gradually drying out as we went through the hairpins at the descent. We had also overtaken several cars on the ascent of the hill – a Porsche 911, jag, BMW again plus others. A long 6 right, and the camber caught the rear of the car out, but it was expertly controlled by Ian (with a few turns of the steering wheel left and right) and off we went. I spent those split seconds deciding which tree looked the softest to land against. I also did note that there were several groups of spectators on the corner – a clue perhaps!.

On the following stage, Gunns Plains, I was a second or so late in calling a ‘Turn narrow 3 right over bridge’ which saw us heading towards a telegraph pole. Fortunately the car stopped, a frantic bit of reverse gear and we were off again. Within a few hundred meters, there was an ominous clunk from the transmission followed by a lot of vibration, but the engine seemed to be ok, gears were ok but getting into gear was tricky at times, however, we did continue to the end of the stage, pulled over and jacked the car up to look underneath at what we suspected was a failed engine mounting. We could not see anything. So we continued to the next stage. At the start we had 15 or 20 minutes to wait, and on further examination found that the rear engine mounting had disappeared, and as might be expected, you could either just see it, or just get to it but not both. We then accosted a local farmer whose house was beside us and got him to cut up several sections of timber which I jammed into the hole where the rubber mounting should have been. Hopefully this would get us to Ulverstone - the lunch stop. It didn't. All it did do was get us away from the start more smoother, then the wood all fell out. So we persevered and got to Ulverstone where the lunch halt was just 20 mins long. I sprinted to the nearest Repco auto shop, but they had closed, then went to a filling station repair shop and cut up several lengths of hoses and ran back to the car parked in the high street with 5 mins to spare. (Just as well I keep fit!). I fitted the hoses into the mounting location and used a cable tie to hold them in place, and then we were off. We had been told there was another Repco in Burnie, the next town on the route, so made the necessary phone calls. Yes they were open till 3pm, no they did not have a mounting for a Charade, but they did have some mountings. So on the way past we shot into that Repco got the mounting which might have worked with a bit of adaptation and returned into the rally mode.

The afternoon stages were interesting but our times were not good although we did keep within the Targa Trophy times. Being further down the field we were by now being overtaken by faster cars. But we noticed that these guys were only faster due to acceleration and breaking abilities, we could keep up with them on the corners. So perhaps that 1600cc engine in the garage might have a use after all...

Into Strahan, we then had to find Roy and Simon, so that we could get the mounting sorted. Of course just when we really needed it the Landcruiser with all of the tools etc was in Launceston, so between us we bagged, a trolley jack, nuts, bolts and torches, so that the new mounting, which fitted like a dream, could be installed. I cannot believe how helpful other service crews were in lending or giving us stuff. Once sorted the car went in Parc Ferme and we went for some beer!

Day 5 Sunday and the final day with a run over the hills to Hobart via Queenstown with a further 8 stages to be run. They started off in the wet and then gradually drying out the further east we went. The longest stage of the rally was Mt Arrowsmith at 56.4km long.



Queenstown Stage - the stage was 6.4 km long and we averaged 72kmh – a slow stage

As the conditions were wet we had 35 minutes to complete it in, and in fact achieved it in 33 minutes, but although it felt as though we had good grip, Ian did mention afterwards that it was very slippery!

The final stage of the day was a spectator stage around a new Industrial Estate. Few spectators turned up due to the cold wind, and in fact the chicane cones which should have been in place were removed as they were blowing away. So another stage for me to drive like a loony, and yes yet again I beat the base time handsomely.

After this it was to the finish at Wrest point Casino in Hobart.

Out of 263 starters we finished 119th. Ok, only 165 crews finished and there were literally only a handful of 2000cc and below cars with the rest being 2200cc and above complete with turbo's etc, so the little shopping trolley did well. Having taken copious spares with us, none were used or needed, and we were all relieved to get to the finish without major drama, and Simon and Roy were great in helping us achieve that.



Phew! one contented driver but what about the poor nav?



The team l to r; Stuart, Ian, Simon, me, & Roy

Footnote: I have competed at the autocross and at Mt Cotton hillclimb since returning – the car is just so different on those known circuits. But at the Hillclimb we did have problems with the gearbox which on removal of the swarf filled casing was found that all of the bolts within the LSD were loose or had come loose and were rattling around inside the box. The LSD had not been touched in the gearbox overhauls.

Anyway as a result we have purchased another lower range of uprated helical gears and these will be getting installed this week. So yet another bunch of dollars spent.