

Targa High Country November 2010

The Targa High Country (THC) Tarmac Car Rally was billed as the first traditional Targa event held on mainland Australia, the other 2 Targa events are of course held on Tasmania.

THC is run by the same organisers as the Targa Tasmania Tarmac Rally, but this event was held in the mountainous region in the north of the State of Victoria. The rally was based at Mount Buller, a winter ski resort but apart from most of the competitors staying in a few select hotels, was all closed up. It is of course the end of the season here being summer.



The Charade on the road up to Mt Buller



View from Mt Buller, blue sky but a heavy frost!

There are many impolite comments made about the Victorians, especially from the perfect Queenslanders, however one such comment that they cannot escape from is their driving. They are awful drivers. They have been so persecuted by the Police for speeding infringements that most drive several kph below the posted speed limits just to make sure they do not get pinged, which does make it all the more extraordinary that in this State, permission from all bodies through to State Government was given for a closed public road tarmac rally to be held.

At the drivers briefing all crews were well advised to obey road rules and no speeding as we could get pinged for just being 2 kph over the limit.

But back to the rally. The description for the event said that “over 220 of the worlds finest cars would be taking part” so that meant (my interpretation) that our Charade was also one of the worlds finest cars. The entries did range from a couple of Lamborghinis's, countless Porsches, Evo's, WRX's, RX7's and other fast cars. There were a number of different categories depending on the age group of the car, ranging from classics through to early modern, modern and showroom and of course 4wd. In our class which was early modern we were up against Porsches, WRX's the RX7's, a Honda type R and a few other models registered between 1990 and 2002. Despite the distance there was a large entry from Queensland

On the Friday evening we had the Prologue which was held in the nearby town of Mansfield the closest town to Mt Buller and about 45km away. This was basically a closed street circuit around the main street and houses of the town.

Unlike on Targa Tasmania where the Prologue determines the running order for the ensuing days , on THC it was a demonstration run, therefore full on speed was not essential and the organisers did not want any mishaps occurring.

Running the street circuits is my only chance to drive on these events so driving at a demonstration run speed was not on the cards. We have a very hot Charade and there is only one way that it has been designed to go – loud, hard and fast. So as soon as the lights lit at 10 secs to go, the revs

jumped to 6000rpm and then when the lights went out, clutch was lifted and away we went. It was all 3 lefts or 3 rights anyway. Ian, normally used to the driving was my navigator for this stage. Mansfield being a farming town has lots of farmers arriving in town in their oil dripping utes. Unfortunately they have to wait for traffic at some junctions (still dripping the oil), and it is these very junctions that we had to negotiate at speed. Most were ok but one had me doing a neat drift towards a very solid kerb with a slightly more solid tree just beyond it. It would hurt and be embarrassing, but just in time the tyres found traction and off we went. A close moment!



In Mansfield approaching a corner that tightened and narrowed



Also in Mansfield car with attitude and rear wheel almost giving air.

Anyway we covered the 2.87km in just 2 minutes which gave us an average of 85kph. Not bad when the speed limit is 60kph. The cars were left on display in the main street of Mansfield for all of the locals and others not so local to view while the crews all found local restaurants to eat in.



Fiat 131 Abarth in perfect condition but did not last beyond stage 2.



A trio of Sprite/Midgets



A Renault Alpine A110?



Celica and a Perana (V8 Capri) which was its first outing and had a huge amount of power. It finished well, much to the crews delight and surprise.

For both days 1 and 2 of the rally we were to complete 8 stages on each day. Those who had been reconnoitering the route were saying that the stages were fast which would suit virtually all of the other cars but not us. That is our excuse as to why we started as car 41 (slowest first). But we did have virtually the smallest engine in the event at just 1330cc



The cars gathering before the run down to Stage 1 – we caught up with the yellow Ford Falcon in front. Bet he was upset that a 1300cc car could catch his 4.5 litre V8



A well sorted Escort getting attention from the service crew it was not handling as well as it should have been – Something about sway bars needing adjustments.

The first stage of the day was to be a downhill section (7km) from Mt Buller towards Mansfield – it was all hairpins, but at least was dry and completed in 4 mins 26 seconds. We headed towards Mansfield but then turned north-west towards Wangaratta. We then had three stages of 8, 16 and 9km respectively before heading on the 50km drive to Wangaratta for the lunch halt.

After lunch it was the long drive back again to complete those 3 stages but in reverse this time. In order to win these events not only do you have to have a powerful car but also service crew placed at convenient points along the route. These crews were earning their money as we returned on the route. Dotted along the way in lay-bys were the fuel crews and maintainers, In several cases cars were receiving more than just a tweaking of suspension. Once we got onto the stages there were several which had not made it out through having suffered mechanical failure or re-alignment of the body shape. At the finish of Stage 7 there were 2 Evo's which had both destroyed their clutches

and/or flywheels on the start line of the stage 2. Clutches exploding was the official report! Our top speed was about 170km but the averages attained on the stages ranged from 90kph to 115kph

And then finally stage 8 was to be a 17km blast back up the hill to Mt Buller – all hairpins apart from the first 2 or 3km.

Day 2 began with the same downhill stage as day 1, but then instead of heading towards Wangaratta, we headed South-east to Eildon. We had left Mt Buller in low cloud and damp conditions so I was a bit apprehensive of the road conditions on stage 2.1., however by the time we had arrived at the marshalling area we were already out of the cloud and the day was beginning to brighten up. The road conditions for Stage 2.1 were noted as intermediate although unlike on Targa Tasmania there was no increased timing allowance.

We completed the stage just 7 seconds slower than the previous day, partly due to the road conditions, wariness of the driver and that second bottle of wine the night before! His, not mine I might hasten to add.

Then it was a 60km drive to the next stage of the day –a short 10km stage. Still no drama's although the navigator was having a few moments, like turning 2 pages over on the notes!!

The stage 2.3 was a 28km stage. Not long by Targa Tasmania standards but the longest for this event. It consisted mainly of wide roads and a lot of bends increasing in severity, and of course a 900m long slight uphill straight with cones down the middle – these were located on a blind crest, but being uphill we just kept pedaling hard.

Towards the end of the stage we encountered the first incident which had occurred in the cars ahead of us – a vehicle on its roof. At least the crew were ok. And then immediately afterwards 2 Porsches were stopped and a Hillman Hunter. No damage to any of them and no obvious drama. Note that slower cars were running ahead of us – Porsches even.

And then it was off to stage 2.4 which had originally been scheduled as stage 2.5 as well, but the organizers had decided to cancel it which meant that we had over 90 minutes for lunch in Eildon under the increasingly hot sun. Not much fun in a rally suit.

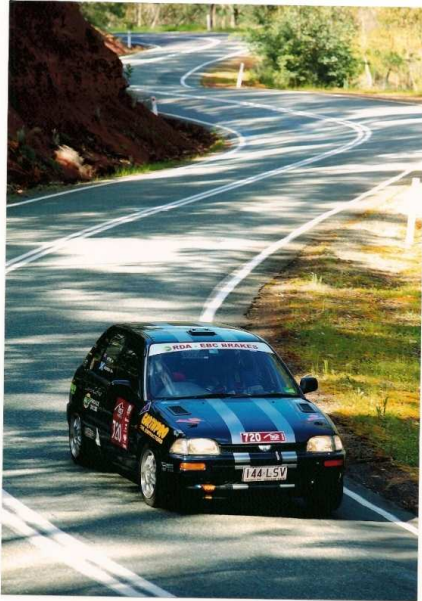
And then it was back to Stage 2.6., the 28 km stage which was now being run in reverse. As we arrived at the start, the notice board gave an indication of 'several' cars off in the first 2 km's and a few off further into the stage. It must have been carnage with the competitors following us on the first run through!

The stage was just lots of corners of varying severities and then finally that long 900m straight. The notes began with Crest leading to an 8R then 900m; little crest and 10L then 550m: crest hug 10R becoming short 10L 300: little crest straight on 50 caution 7L etc.

A 10 is just a slight deviation left or right and we should be able to take it flat out. A 9 is brake and then accelerate through the corner. An 8 is brake harder and drop to 4th gear. But these are at speeds possibly up to 130kph. At the end of the 900 metre straight we were flat out in 5th gear doing 8000rpm and 175kph (115mph) so when the call is for a crest and then 10L the nerves were being stretched a bit in the navigators seat. Doing those speeds on a motorway are fast but we were on roads similar to those shown on the photograph below – trees either side and not really motorway standards. Some of the Evo's reported that they reached 220kph or 145mph

But we survived and went onto the final stage which was another 16km blast up the hill to Mt Buller. Unfortunately this time we were caught by another car – an Alfa GTV. He only caught us as Ian made an error on one of the hairpins where we went straight on with wheels locked up – something about not being in the right gear was the excuse. Luckily it was a wide hairpin. So the Alfa caught up and

my words on the in car camera were not to complimentary as he was overtaking us on a very 1R corner.



The typical roads



Waiting at the start somewhere possible stage 1.7 and up amongst the classic cars

At the finish when we stopped behind him, he came up thanked us for letting him past etc, but was amazed that he could only catch us on the corners – we had the same power as him on the straights very surprisingly. But if anything our car should be better on the corners. So thoughts go to tyres, suspension settings or driver training even.

So we finished the second full on tarmac rally and again did not disgrace ourselves. We came in 1st in class, but in the modern category (including early moderns) we came 80th of 98 finishers and 116 starters. Overall including all of the classic cars we came 117th of 169 finishers from 203 starters. Not bad considering we have just a 1330cc engine and are up against some major teams and works sponsored teams.



The outright winning cars Porsche (3rd), Lambo (white) (2nd) and Lambo (black) (1st)

And then it was an early start the next morning for the 1800km and 21 hour drive back to Brisbane prior to preparing for an autosprint and the Queensland Challenge over the next two consecutive weekends.