

Targa Tasmania 2011

It is almost April and out here that means time for Targa Tasmania, and as usual it is always a mad dash to get things prepared, travel arrangements, accommodation and not to mention the car.

Not so much preparation required this year. The engine has been sorted, the gearbox sorted (several times) and the sponsorship logo's still remain on the car. However there are still a few minor maintenance tasks to be done – engine tune, brake fluid change and just a general check over the car.

But there are 2 more major upgrades required. The car suffers a lot of engine movement on start up so we need to change or upgrade the engine mounts to see if that makes a difference and the other one is suspension.

When competing on Targa High Country in the mountains of Victoria, we were overtaken by an Alfa GTV, as it happened, on a hairpin corner. It was not far from the finish of the stage and event so that as we queued up for the finishing line the driver of said Alfa came up and thanked us for letting him past but commented that we must have some engine in the car as he only managed to make up ground on us on the corners.

As much as am sure that there is more speed in the car and especially on the corners, it is fast enough for me being in the front navigator's seat. But the comment did get me thinking because realistically we should be better round the corners but not so good on a straight line. These thoughts were compounded a few weeks later when looking at me competing around a car park test at the Willowbank raceway. The roll on the car is extreme at the least.

So Ian duly took the car to our suspension specialist who normally sets up Evo's, and to his surprise noted that we did not have any anti-roll bars front or rear. So it was off to another sponsor (car recycler) for a set of F & R anti-roll bars. Having got the units I went back to the garage and had a look at the bars, then at the underside of the car, and then repeated the process. First impression was where do these fit, second impression was how do these fit? Over the cars competition life the bars had been removed and many modifications done to the steering/suspension bracketry. Conclusion: some major welding is going to be required.

Anyway anti-roll bars and car went back to the suspension specialist who has since fitted them, and I think that there is a huge difference now. The car will take small roundabouts without even slowing down – it is like a go-kart. The next problem which we have always had is juddering on pulling away and the exhaust hitting cross members. So I had the exhaust cut and re-shaped, which initially was better but after a few Km's was back to square one. Back to the exhaust people and this time they bent a support bracket and put in a new rubber hanger. (Also have a lump of rubber over the cross members) and while the car is not smooth on take off, it is considerably better. So that has been our preparation. And we leave this week for the 24hr drive to Melbourne with an overnight ferry crossing on the 1st April (Friday).

This year is the 20th Anniversary of the Targa Tasmania so there are to be lots of firework displays in the towns that we overnight in, and far more importantly champagne parties!

This year also marks the first of the Longford Revival meeting. I was not aware of it but Longford used to host the early Formula 1 races in the 50's and 60's. Although most of the circuit has gone there is still the Golden Mile on which cars can run. I would think that it is about a mile long. Spectators are being encouraged to dress up in 60's clothing, and there will be a lot of displays etc, but no real circuit racing. Obviously an attempt at emulating the Goodwood Revival meetings. So that is also happening over the first weekend of April, and then the Targa rally starts in earnest on the 5th running through to the 10th April.

Reading the weather report for the north east of the island, people are being evacuated due to flooding!!

I was reading some information on the event and came up with the following "things to think about" by Geoff Hall, which might help to put the event into more perspective.

Targa Tasmania is different to just about any other competition. Effectively, you rally on more than forty circuits over five days. You only see each corner once; no second attempt, you can't hone your lines on the next circuit. Targa is the challenge of attacking corners where you can't see the apex or perhaps the exit and unlike other rallies you don't repeat a stage. This is the ultimate challenge; you have to give the unknown your best shot once and once only.

The roads are often narrow, the surface bumpy and you may get airborne in the process. The mistakes can be costly with cliffs, trees and other obstacles ready to trap the unwary. It won't happen to you, but it bears consideration when the red haze descends (drivers take note!!).

This event was designed to allow those with collectable vehicles to run hard on closed roads, to test their skills and the capability of their vehicles without having to worry about speed limits.

The roads are there to be driven, with additional cautions above those noted in the official roadbooks advised on the day eg; fog, gravel and stage classification wet/intermediate/dry. How dangerous you make the drive depends on you and whether you just plan to finish, shoot for a Targa Trophy or conquer everyone else.

There are some high-speed Targa stages where cars can reach their maximum (even Lambo Superleggera's); however the essence of the event is a series of sharp bends requiring rapid and smooth changes in direction. Acceleration is certainly handy, but you need to stop and turn and keep your corner speed to be successful at Targa.

A peek into any overnight stop will reveal just how hard Targa can be on a vehicle. Some vehicles undergo substantial work to keep going. Look for a reliable machine, which will allow you to relax at night. If you don't finish then even the elusive Targa trophy is gone.

For the Driver (and navigator), the ultimate question is can you drive the vehicle to its potential? – Targa Tasmania is not a place to find out the vehicle is beyond your ability. Experimenting with sideways motoring on slippery Targa roads may end in tears ... with roof modifications. You must consider the consequences, as there is no "kitty litter" to catch you on the corners.

Drivers should consider just how brave they are prepared to be. If you really enjoy hard charging down narrow, often unknown roads, then Targa is the ultimate challenge for you. If the certainty of circuit racing corners appeals, then maybe this isn't for you.

You have the whole road at your disposal on Targa stages bringing into play off-camber exits drawing you towards the rock walls and trees of native Tasmania. Something to consider when practising for the event.

You will also find locals and visitors alike crowding around certain corners. Besides these corners being easy to access for spectators, they are often the site of previous, er... crashes! This is not the time to let the red haze descend and just put on a show. Veteran navigators will tell you drivers like to put on a show - just bear in mind the potential consequences. It is quite easy to turn an exhibition into a demolition.

Navigators

Finding someone who is willing to call instructions while looking down at notes is difficult and they also have to trust that the driver will keep the vehicle out of the scenery. They deserve congratulations – a rare breed. (Yes, I agree with that).

Navigators are the eyes and hazard forecasters of the team. Knowing what is around/over the next corner makes the driver's task much easier.

You are provided with road books by the organisers, which provide reasonably comprehensive road condition information for the first couple of days – becoming more sketchy from day three onwards (I had not noticed any difference!).

How it all starts

The prologue does give you two shots at the same course around the houses of George Town. The first just a drive through familiarisation. Your time around George Town determines your start time on the event the next day. A fast time may mean that you sleep in and have a later start time on day one. Bend the car the night before competition and you will probably wish you hadn't pushed so hard. An early start is not all that bad – the roads have less gravel thrown up by wayward wheels and it's less likely that you will have fast cars harassing you. Remember that crowd-pleasing drivers are great to watch, but more likely to assault the fences and kerbs of this northern town. You certainly won't win the event by setting a blistering time at George Town. Starting early means early home and a chance to relax and enjoy Tasmania. In reality, no one will listen – just keep off the kerbs and out of the front fences.

Actual Costs

Obviously cost depends on the vehicle you choose and the level of seriousness of your campaign.

You can expect to spend a minimum \$20,000 to set up a very basic car depending on how mad you go with modifications and how much you can do yourself. It costs about \$15,000 to compete at Targa Tasmania including all travel, entries, accommodation (excl beer) so you do want to try to finish.

Get the Targa Tasmania bug

If you get Targa Tasmania right, the grin probably won't be erased from your face for a couple of weeks. Get it wrong ... you will probably come back to prove you could do it. Targa Tasmania is a bug, which can affect anyone keen on cars.

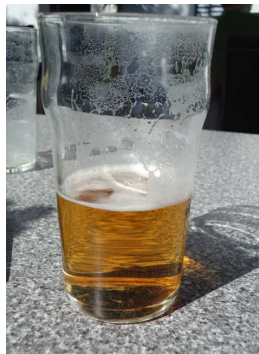
Targa Tasmania 2011 – the going got tough,

Still billed as the ultimate road rally, this year the organisers also claimed it to be the worlds largest tarmac rally' and with around 370 cars starting the event they certainly had justification for making such a statement.

It also featured rally prepared electric cars. Yes, those Tesla's were competing, but more of them later.

This year the event was brought forward to the beginning of April so as to coincide with the new Longford Revival meeting. So yet more petrol fumes to be inhaled. This event was heavily supported by Porsche who are celebrating 60 years in Australia and who shipped out several exotic Porsches from their Stuttgart museum including Le Mans winners and the usual road going Porsches. Walter Rohl was there in his 1983 world championship winning Porsche which I am sure still had the original bag of nails hidden in the engine somewhere. At least that is what it sounded like. He was competing in the classic category. There were also 2 new GT3's for local drivers Jim Richards and Greg Garwood to compete in the modern class. So I assumed that Porsche really were out to win not just the event outright with their GT3's but also classic and early classic categories.

Having had the long boring 1800km drive down to Melbourne on the Thursday night and Friday, we arrived at the ferry before any of the others (2 others driving the Monaros and Roy in the Land Cruiser towing the rally car) who had left several hours before us on the Thursday morning, so with a few hours in hand we immediately began to prepare for the forthcoming week.



Preparation in hand – the first of several, if I recall!

In the queue for the ferry on that Friday night, was one TR250. Interestingly, it still had UK plates on although was on temporary historic plates as well. During the event I spoke with the driver about the still current UK tax disc and he informed me that they shipped the car out especially for the event – it actually came out with all of the formula 1 gear for the Melbourne Grand prix and was scheduled for the return trip the Wednesday after the event. They usually competed in historic circuit racing and his navigator had not seen pace notes until the Sunday night just 2 days before the start of the event, when he arrived from the UK. Still they had thought it a good event to enter.



Brought all the way from the UK just for the event



The Charade being prepared prior to scrutineering

So there you go. A Triumph can be shipped out here, and complete the event, so anybody can do it!!

As well as us competing in the main rally, 3 other crews (service and friends) were competing in the Tour – a high speed run through the closed road stages using standard cars – well, sort of standard. There was Simon in the yellow Monaro; Stuart in the orange Monaro and Roy in Ian's BMW Z4.



This year as an added safety feature, all cars had to be fitted with a “rally aware” control box operating via GPS. Although not being fully utilised by the organisers it was more or less functioning 100%. It was programmed for each car, gave stage details, speed and average speed on the stage and the 2 features of importance; it would flag up if a car was in close proximity ahead (or behind), and a button to push when you wanted to overtake. For the car in front, the whole screen would go blue with the words overtake across it.

The other really good feature is that if the car went less than 30kph on a stage it would send an alert to the organisers (this could be cancelled by pressing another button), and if the car became stationary it became an SOS alert, which again could be cancelled. Considering the terrain and the isolation of many roads, if you had a mishap, you could be a long way off the road down a ravine and nobody would know the exact whereabouts for a long time. So that was certainly a bit of comfort. Although there were a few teething problems it was a great introduction.

This year although the majority of the stages were the same as last year, there had been a few changes as a result of weather damaging roads and bridges, However, still having the pace notes from last year complete with my comments I carefully transferred these over to the 2011 version. As we did not have time for any recce-ing, this process is better than nothing.

We were in a class of 4 cars, the other 3 being 2 litre engines, but overall in the Early Modern category with 66 cars in it. Each stage is given a base time and every second taken to complete the stage over this time is a penalty. There is also another time – the Targa Trophy time. A bit more generous and varies according to the conditions – dry, intermediate or wet. Last year we were struggling to attain the dry times, but intermediate and wet we could achieve. So would the close ratio gears make sufficient difference?

Day 0 was the usual Prologue. A blast around the streets of Georgetown on the coast and to the north of Launceston, where the rally was centred for 4 of the 6 days. The prologue sets the start time for the rest of the event with the slowest cars starting first on the subsequent days. We started day 2 as the 75th car away which was a great improvement on last year when we were about 40th away in the morning. And the cars which started ahead of us included all 3 Ferraris, some Porches, Evo’s and RX7’s amongst others, covering all of the differing categories. So how embarrassing for them with a Charade setting a faster time! Our time was 3:55 mins compared to 4:03 last year.



Quinn & Tillett in the Nissan GT-R



Audi R8 V10



Holden Ute 6.0 litre V8



Aston Martin Vantage



The Parc Ferme at Launceston



Lamborghini Gallardo Superleggera

Day 1 is a circuit to the north and west of Launceston including 8 special stages. The weather was good unlike last year, with clear blue skies, and of course this then meant that we had to keep up with the 'dry' times. But with Ian finding that the addition of the anti-roll bars front and rear gave the car a lot more stability than previously, we set better times. The first few stages criss-crossed rail lines at varying angles and some with dips or humps, but the car remained very steady. Often, when looking up at the road ahead (to keep the note reading in time with the corners) I was aware of vast numbers of spectators on the more tricky corners, which serves as a good warning to the navs and drivers. Our times were good and for the first 3 stages we even managed to beat the base times albeit they were generous and the remainder of the day we were well within the Trophy times.

Day 2 was another circuit but to the east of Launceston. It was an early start from the parc ferme with a long drive to the first of the stages, and it was cold. Well perhaps UK temperatures for autumn.



The 1969 Porsche 908/2 (1969 Targa Florio winner)



the ex-works Lancia Fulvia.



Jim Richards (multiple Targa winner) and 2011 GT3



Greg Garwoods ex Jim Richards 2010 GT3



Walter Rohl's 1981 911 San Remo winning car



1934 Jaguar SS Special

Although the roads were dry, in the shaded areas there were damp patches. The first stage was The Sidling – 15km of twisty road and hairpins going up the hill, straightening out over the top and the twisty hairpins going downhill. All taken in our stride apart from the sun getting in Ian's eyes at about 100m before hairpins. This year we were not overtaken but still managed to overtake 1 car, the ex works Lancia Fulvia. There were then a few more morning stages until lunch at St Helens on the east coast, a very isolated but tranquil spot and each year we have been there, the sun has been shining with respectable temperatures. Stage TS 12 had a 40kph section on it due to road repairs and then later while doing 120kph a wallaby decided that it would be fun to run out in front of the Charade, after all Charades don't go fast! "Oh Sh..!" said wallaby, as we heard a loud "thump" and the tufts of fur are still impaled on the front bumper! It had obviously miscalculated the high speed the car was driving at! Luckily for us (but not wallaby) the car has a very solid cross member running below the front bumper onto which the sump guard gets fitted. We suspect that that saved us a lot of damage.

After lunch it was a 75km drive down the coast for another 2 stages in the hills, which on the 2nd one we managed to catch up and overtake a 1969 Porsche 908/2 shipped out from Stuttgart. And then it was the Longford stage. A blast around the streets of the town and with me driving. This was also the first time that I had driven the car in anger since the anti roll bars were fitted, although I suspected that there was going to be a huge difference. The first couple of corners confirmed this and then the red mist came down and boy, was it fun. I was setting the car for each corner and just getting the tail drifting out, which helped with the steering and traction on the front wheels. As well as the in-car video, some colleagues also have external video on one of the corners. Being ever modest, the car looked really impressive going through the corners! Actually a lot of cars spun on that particular corner as well, great for the spectators but not good for the teams! The base time for the stage was 3 minutes. Our time was 2:10 and an EVO did it in 2:08. So not bad really. Last year I did it in 2:25 mins. We sort of paid for it though. The exhaust manifold had cracked, so it was off to the muffler shop (exhaust shop in the UK) for some quick welding and some modifications to the rest of the system as well. But as it was the last stage of the day, 20 mins from Launceston and an early finish there was no real drama.

Day 3 and the rally was stepping up a pace or two. This day was a longer circuit well out to the west with another street circuit in Devonport before lunch. The first three stages were short ones, just to wake up the drivers, with the 3rd having been shortened to just 5km due to weather damage to the road, and then it was a 34km drive to Devonport for the street section in the town. Having arrived at the start, we waited for about an hour before they informed us that the stage had been cancelled and we were to drive through at touring speed. Well, with 2 BMW's in front, and crowds having waited for some action we just had to oblige. Actually it was not as high a speed run as under full rally conditions, but it was a good blast through the streets. We still have not heard why it was cancelled but rumours say it was due to crowd safety concerns or because we were running late and would impact on the afternoon road closures. Whichever it was, it was a disappointment as it would have been a great stage to drive – very fast, wide roads and all 90 lefts or rights. Hooligan territory!

The main feature for us on this day was the 26km Mt Roland stage. In effect a drive through hairpins up the side of the mountain, across the top and then a descent through more hairpins down the other side. As the start was on a reasonable slope, I suggested to Ian that he might want to let the clutch out at 6 or 7000 rpm so as not to “bog” the engine on the start. Well, he took my suggestion literally – clutch was released at 7000rpm and rather than set off up the hill at a pace, we sat on the start with tyres pouring out smoke – a real burn out! But the car behind was lost from view.



The start of Riana. As usual waiting for the opening of the stage. We had the better of the silver Evo on most stages, but the yellow one was doing better than us this year. The arrow indicates where the road goes – a darker line in the trees before going round the side of the mountain. It was about 300m up to the start and the first bend from this point. On the Mt Roland stage the following morning we come down this road with a 120 degree left turn behind the camera.

Anyway having “warmed” up the tyres that stage and the remaining afternoon stages went alright with no dramas and we headed back to Launceston, where it was Targa fest night. All the rally cars were parked in the town centre – restaurants were packed with competitors and crews, and the streets crowded with the locals. And then it was back to the hotel to pack up ready for the next days drive to Strahan on the west coast.



Targa Fest in Launceston and parked away from the crowds (to avoid humiliating the monied teams) is one wee Charade

Day 4 was an early start and a 75km drive to the first stage, which although was 5km long was just a warm up for the ensuing stages. The 2nd stage was Cethana, a reverse run of Mt Roland the previous afternoon but longer. The 3rd stage of the day was where we lost the engine mounting last year, but again due to the weather this had been reduced from around 20km to just 4.5km. The 4th Stage was Riana which had some very fast sections on it with blind crests. 37km long and started very twisty with a few good uphill hairpins, long straights with many blind crests – takes some courage to tell Ian “crest straight on 250” when doing 160kph plus and it is the 3rd or was it the 4th blind crest? in a row on a long straight section. Of course if you have uphill sections you are bound to have downhill sections as well and Riana was no different. It also had a 40kmh speed zone in the middle due to weather damaged roads which lost us time on the Targa Trophy but a query to the Stewards saved our bacon on that one. Hellyer Gorge in the afternoon was another stage that we narrowly missed the

Trophy time by 5 seconds, but some grovelling to the Stewards and we managed to keep to our trophy times, or so we thought. After Hellyer Gorge we then headed further south towards Strahan with clouds darkening rapidly. We had just started the next stage Mt Black, which had been classified as intermediate conditions, when the heavens opened and we were in torrential rain for the remainder of that stage. The following stage was classified as wet and it most certainly was – 2 speed wiper stuff but we achieved the times with no real dramas. From my side of the car it seemed very stable with no aquaplaning. Ian, on the other hand was not so sure. The heavy rain continued into the final stage of the day, 33km long as we approached Strahan. It always seems to rain in Strahan! I had in fact marked the notes as V.wet, so it really was chucking it down. Considering that the dry time was 21 minutes and wet was 24 minutes, we completed the stage in just 20:42mins. Very pleased with ourselves, we did find that most people also beat the “dry” times as well. So a bit of deflation there!

Day 5 and the last day. All we had to do was get the car back to Hobart and the finish, completing 7 stages in the meantime. The first stage was Strahan which started from the outskirts of the town. Conditions were wet allowing us 24 minutes to complete it, but we again achieved a time better than the dry time of 21 minutes. This was followed by a short 6.5km stage after Queenstown. Fortunately we did not have to sit at Queenstown very long before starting the 2nd stage of the day. Queenstown would have to be the most depressing place to live on this planet. It is an awful place to even have to drive through and that is being generous!

The 6.5km stage from Queenstown is just hairpin after hairpin, rock face on one side and sheer drop on the other, but after this we went on to start the longest stage of the event, Mt Arrowsmith at 58km long (or 35miles long). It is a hard and fast stage and being classified as “wet” did mean a few slippery corners, but we still managed to better last years time by more than 1:20 mins. The next stage after this one the conditions were dry, as were those for the rest of the day, such is the local weather on Tasmania.

As the Devonport circuit had been cancelled, we agreed that if we failed on the Targa Trophy times I would drive on the last 2 stages. But because I had put in a couple of queries, well gravel queries at Strahan, we were confident that we were still on track for the trophy, so I stayed as the navigator. But I would have had so much fun on both those last 2 stages. They were both almost like street stages.

Following the “query” at Strahan we assumed correctly that we had retained our Trophy times so Ian drove the last 2 stages. And we did not check the results later on at Hobart. I flew back to Brissie on the Monday morning but when Ian went to collect the Trophy plates he found that we had missed out on them due to another stage. Unfortunately all of my notes were in the car being transported back to Brisbane separately, so by the following week I was able to confirm what I suspected and that was that I had marked a stage – Riana as being Intermediate whereas the organisers had it as Dry. Why would I have marked it as Intermediate ? We then had another couple of days to wait until Ian got the in car video’s back and yes the board clearly showed that the stage was Intermediate. So back in touch with the organisers and yes we were re-classified and have got our Trophy plates.

Having gone to Tasmania with the intention that we would not be doing this event again next year, it was so good that we might just do it once more, but with a bit more tweaking to the car first!

Almost forgot. Those Tesla’s – the electric Lotus Exige look-a-likes. There were 2 of them in the event mainly running in the Tour section, although they did do an occasional rally stage.

Yes re-charging was an issue for them, but they plotted their route by the caravan parks for 3 phase supplies and houses for 1ph supplies. It would take about 30mins to recharge from 3 phase and a couple of hours for single phase. From one of the guys on the Tour, he was impressed with the acceleration of the cars, but did note that as soon as they lifted off the accelerator they slowed very quickly. In fact that person did say he almost tail ended one of the Tesla’s as it slowed very quickly with no brake lights showing. But they were very quiet, and real rally cars are not quiet!

Power consumption wise they did seem to be quite good, but if you used the right foot too much the charge did not last. But they did well. One of them won the new class for electric cars!!!



The shape – very Lotus like and then the engine or rather the batteries. Cost for the car was in excess of \$200,000