

NATIONALS WESTERN STYLE AND THAT GOOD OLD NULLABOR

On the way there.....

For us "Westerners", the Tassie National was in four phases. Travelling to Hobart, the National meet, post tour and travelling back home to WA.

There are many who attended the event who are far more talented with the pen than I to report on the National Rally and post tour so I will stick to the Westerners' travel to and from the event.

As usual, faced with the tyranny of distance (some 2,200 miles) to the ferry in Melbourne, some innovative ideas were required. Eventually Stuart Syme suggested that we make it an adventure by taking the cars on the Indian Pacific to Adelaide and then travelling the Great Ocean Road in Victoria to the ferry terminal.

Although this was probably the most expensive way, the four WA entrants, John and Sue Bell, Ian and Margaret Baxter, Stuart and Delys Syme and Bev and myself thought it was a great way to go.

On arrival at the depot in East Perth I was greeted by the comment "it (the 1976 Le Sabre) was too wide, too long and would not be loaded". The other three also were faced with a more than less favourable welcome. Common sense prevailed and the Buicks were loaded - the Le Sabre on the bottom deck and the other three cars (because of their height) on the top deck, driven on by a very competent lady employee of the rail company.

Whilst the cars faced a cold and dusty journey, the humans were wined and dined in style on the two-day journey. Meals were three course and showed great ingenuity in that they would have been prepared in a difficult environment. The cabins were small but adequate with en suites. Whilst the meals were probably the feature, the time in between was spent reading, playing cards, viewing the scenery, spotting the wildlife and of course swapping lies.

Unloading in Adelaide went without a hitch with the drivers of the older cars allowed to start and drive the cars off the wagons themselves. We then departed with the Le Sabre in the lead, navigated by Bev with the aid of "Loopy Len", the Tom Tom GPS system.

First stop was the Taillem Bend Bakery for its highly recommended pies, then onto Keith and south through Naracoorte and to Mt Gambier for the night.

Wednesday saw the Bells and the Baxters depart to Melbourne to conduct business whilst the Nicholsons and Symes travelled to Apollo Bay along the scenic Great Ocean Road.

Thursday saw all of our contingent arrive at the ferry ready for our departure to Devonport and the exciting prospect of the Tassie Nationals.

After surviving the crossing through monstrous waves and swell (well it seemed like it to me), it was in truth a relatively smooth crossing, participants arrived in Devonport.

It was great to catch up with those whom we had met on previous nationals and to make new acquaintances at the welcoming breakfast.

Some 18 days of fun, excitement, fellowship and great scenery followed until it was time to depart Burnie and head home.

After a leisurely day spent touring around the Penguin, Ulverstone and La Trobe areas visiting some ? 30 odd quilting shops and catching up with some Tassie friends, we arrived at the ferry terminal and were put in line with the other Buicks.

We now faced the terrifying and sea sick inducing crossing across Bass Strait to Melbourne. Once on board it was a light smorgasbord meal and to bed for me while Bev did a little socialising.

Coming back.....

Sunrise heralded our arrival into Port Melbourne and it was a weary bunch that assembled in the lounge ready to disembark. Delys departed with great haste once the gang plank was lowered to catch a tram and then a train to the airport to take the quicker but less comfortable way home.

The Bells, Nicholsons and Stuart swung into the carpark to pick up Stuart's new companion for the journey, an ex partner, whilst the Baxters disappeared up the road to stay in Melbourne and take a more leisurely run home.

With Bev navigating it was through the back streets and up onto the Westgate Bridge. Bev's directions were excellent but the driver of the Le Sabre took the wrong lane, deviating at the last moment and the other two Buicks were forced to take the exit.

Stuart's police training and John's pilot experience helped them to regain the correct course so no real damage was done.

Breakfast was at a roadhouse and then onto Horsham to visit fellow Buick enthusiasts, David and Marge Barnard. Lunch at Dimboola and getting a little lost trying to get back onto the highway - not Pete's fault this time, hey John.

Murray Bridge was our overnight accommodation and at hotel reception, Stuart was stressing the need for a twin room, not a double one! Perhaps I should have mentioned before that Stuart's ex partner was from the police force and his name is Merv.

The following morning it was decided that the Bells and Nicholsons would forge on while Stuart and Merv would take their time and perhaps catch up with us along the way.

We followed the back way through Palmer, Mt Pleasant, Angaston, Nuriootpa, Clare and Crystal Brook to the main highway and onto Port Augusta. The day was full of great scenery but marred by strong winds and dust storms. After a break for lunch we moved forever onward to overnight at Wudinna.

Travelling about 900 km or so per day we moved onto Ceduna and onwards to face the Nullarbor.

With John's mighty 39 in the lead travelling at about 55 mph, the ground was quickly covered. The Nullarbor can be a very testing place for man and machine and this was no exception with strong winds, rain and low temperatures. With the Buicks proving the saying that they pass everything on the road except the service stations, it was reassuring to find fuel available at regular intervals and not too far apart. It should be remembered that when these roadhouses were originally set up, they catered for cars such as FX and FJ Holdens.

Somewhere along this section Stuart made a reappearance along with partner Merv. Looking like a pair of gangsters on the run, there was a burgundy flash as they passed, at the speed limit of course, but it did raise the question of just how fast the mighty 50 Jetback could go.

Overnight at Madura Pass and up again the next morning forever onward. Fuel in this stretch is very expensive - the dearest we paid was \$1.97 per litre at Caiguna.

Our objective was Merredin in WA but this proved to be a little optimistic and we decided to stay at Southern Cross. On arrival we again met up with Stuart and Merv who suggested we stay a little further down the road at a very small place, the Moorine Rock Hotel.

We were greeted by a very friendly publican who showed us the rooms, giving the choice of an inside bedroom with shared ablutions or a roadside and noisy motel unit. The Bells chose the inside room and we took the outside unit and both worked out fine.

Friday night in Moorine Rock is a big occasion so with the two locals and a truckie in the bar, we become involved in the festivities and then adjourned to the dining room for our final dinner. Overall it proved to be a great experience.

Saturday the Bells left for Corrigin and their daughter's farm. The Nics headed for home via the Bakers Hill pie shop and Stuart and Merv took a leisurely drive home, visiting the Kellerberrin Mens' Shed and a new museum which was being set up.

Our own bed - BLISS!

Footnote: I believe the Nullarbor Plain is one of Australia's last great adventures, with its excellent wide roads and long straight stretches, interesting scenery with access to the cliffs of the Great Australian Bight in a few places and an ever changing landscape which will surprise. Bev and I have crossed "the Plain" on many occasions and although some sections are a little boring, we still treat it with the wonder it deserves.

Peter Nicholson (WA Buicks)