

My First Rally.....

National Trials, Round 2: Wanganui - 4th November, 2007

Having booked a couple of days off work to make it an extra long weekend, we ventured away from home Friday morning - Colin, Me, and our "Equipment Manager" (aka camera girl) Kim. A long 10 hours later, through a constant stream of road works, windy roads, food stops, toilet stops and more food stops, we made it to Wanganui. It was here that the crack in the co-driver's planning appeared, and the lack of a map saw us heading for the nearest gas station for directions to the motel. A couple of loops later and a bit of juggling with the parking situation - there being not a lot extra at the motel and us (i.e. Colin) having to back the trailer into the parking space, wind up the jack with a set of pliers, and unhook the tow-wagon to park it on the road. We had arrived at our base for the next 3 days.

Scrutineering Saturday....

We arrived at scrutineering early (surprise) to see that about 20 odd others had the same idea. There were a few disbelieving looks as Colin drove the Landy from where we'd parked to the testing station at the top of the hill. One guy even clicked off a few photos because his mate had just picked one up and was working out what he could and couldn't do with it.

Paperwork got sorted, number got confirmed - 507 - and in she went. No worries til they put her over the pit - suggested some gussets to the bottom mounts of the roll cage; we don't have a support bar for the back of our seats; and the spring hangers at the back are not standard - something Colin had fleetingly thought wasn't quite right not long after he bought the Landy and started fixing bits up, but hadn't worried about since. At this point I'm dutifully standing in earshot but staying out of the stuff I don't know about (which is pretty much all of it) and I'm just about set to start chewing my nails off wondering if they're going to be so pedantic as to not let it through. But they pass her fit to run and standard enough for A Class so the log book's noted and now I've got another job to do - co-drivers get all the good stuff - taking the paperwork back for the final signoff and get the rest of our info - while Colin heads back to reload the Landy.

Back at the motel we back everything up under the trees so that we're all hooked on for any early getaway to the trial site in the morning. We start eyeing up the weather and wondering what it'll be like tomorrow, not sure what to expect, not sure what to hope for.

Our suspicions were confirmed on the numbering - the vehicle number is the driver's licence number - even though nowhere have we actually seen this specifically written, which is of no help to anyone new to the trials or anyone that's been out of it for a while. So now that we had that sorted, it was painting time - the crookedly fashioned numbers (which I guess go with every other crookedly fashioned parts of the Landrover) where all Colin's doing - with superb supervision from the rest of his crew - we almost ended up with 507 on one side and 506 on the other.

After dinner gear got checked and packed, lunches made and departure time sorted. I'm pretty sure Colin's the only one who was awake every hour. I had the alarm set for 5:30 and it never even had a chance to go off. The kettle was roaring at not many minutes after 5:00 which meant we were well ready to hit the road by 6:15, just a bit earlier than planned, and we were first vehicle in the pits - they were still putting signs up when we got there... Unloaded, sorted gear out, layered up with warmer clothes, had a look at the terrain and the lay of the land, wandered around the rest of the vehicles that had arrived in the meantime and then coffee time, drivers' briefing, then on with the show.

We head out onto the one way track system that they'd set up and look dubiously at the entry and exit points of the hazards, because they're a bit tight and as much of a hazard as the hazards themselves. We find our way to our first hazard and line up behind the first vehicle, which worked out nicely as we're second away. What worked out even better was that they showed us which line not to take and which hump not to hit - so thanks Simon for having a bad start to your morning (which ended up not much better than ours). When we walked this hazard the first thing I noticed was the hill and the cornering back down the hill and I was sure this very first hazard would be my very first roll - which might've been okay because it wouldn't have been a big roll. So after Simon and Adele (#337, D Class, from Counties Club) stuffed it up, off we went - up and around the first yellow (yay, no roll!) over the hump and straddled the ditch and she wound up good and loud and just kept biting in - I could feel that we were only just moving, and then the tyres bit in and bit in good. We're through and it's zero and I can't believe it, zero on our first hazard - now that was unexpected. I had to check that my hands weren't shaking before I signed the scorecards.

Getting ourselves squared up for the start of hazard 19 (our second) was a test in itself. There'd been just enough rain to make the grass slippery and the poor Landy needed a bit of a run up to get up the hill. There was no walking this

hazard. We watched a couple of others go up before us, lined it up, discussed 1st or 2nd gear, which basically consisted of me saying "I have no idea, it's all up to you." Then we're off, through the water hole, up the hill, and bouncing along the sides of the track, through the gorse - which is only on the co-driver's side - and thud - we're stopped at the 40. The only way out of this hazard is back down the way we've come - back through the gorse bush! So we find our way back down onto the track and head for hazard 21.....

We park up as there's quite a queue here already and walk up the hill to see what awaits to test our great blue standard landrover. It's up one side of the gut, across and down the other side. It's a long hazard, and I'm thinking 'they can't be serious, this can't be one hazard, what are they thinking?' and the standard joke going through the competitors is 'take your lunch' or 'take your spare tank of gas...' That aside, there's some quite gnarly sections in this hazard, and in particular I'm looking at the drop-off to go across the gully (which, in reality, is probably no worse than we've done at Colin's place on our club fun days, but it looks a long way down when you're standing on it...) After a while we realise there's a bit of an issue at the start, like if we take the high side we could roll (oh, really?) , and if we take the low side? Well, we could still roll (Oh!). So I fake the confidence that I'm not really feeling at this point and try and talk Colin into some way in between, but "No" he says. "If we stay on that line that everyone else has taken we'll be okay. If it feels like it's gonna go, I'll pull out." So I shrug my shoulders and get myself settled in. Then into the hazard we go - we make it along the iffy sidling - it feels like she might go and I think Colin's going to pull out and I think that'll make it worse, so I yell out "No, don't stop, keep going!" So he does and she bites in and we're up the first pinch then down the drop-off, which is a bit hairy but okay, then up to the next pinch, which we think is going to stop us, but up she goes then along the next sidling, which is a bit touchy-goey and just past the 20 we think we've hit a peg but no-one says anything so we keep going and just as we're lining up thinking about going for the 10 (a good 20 metres more down the course), the marshal stops us. So I sign for the 20 and then we've gotta get out of this hazard. I try and tell Colin to stick to the left and stay away from hole but he's in a whole other place and doesn't listen to me (oh, he has so much to learn...) So he backs it up a bit and heads down (sort of to the left, so I'm thinking 'yeah, okay'). And then the front right wheel heads for the hole and I'm thinking 'what are you doing?' (and I think I'm saying it too, but at this point there's no point - she's in). The first tow wagon takes us from the front and that just makes matters worse - the front wheel just gets wedged in harder, and then the same wagon just doesn't have the grunt to pull us out from the back - if they'd done it from the back first, maybe they could've...? Colin's trying to ask

me - because I was already out of the vehicle - if the drive shaft had popped out. "I have no idea" I say, and not really trying to look because I don't know what I'm looking for anyway. So he has to get out and look underneath for himself. The marshal has managed to rally up a tractor to pull ole Topsy out and with a couple of gentle tugs from the back she's out of the hole and we're out of the hazard. Colin's fairly sure at this stage that when we get to the next hazard he can get underneath and pop the driveshaft back in. But when he gets under there's no drive shaft, and I'm sent away to retrace our track and look for a "long piece of steel" - another very important co-driver role: finding misplaced parts. I get back to the hazard we'd just left and just as I call out "anyone seen a drive shaft?" I spot it, sticking halfway out of the bank that we got hooked up on. Another vehicle is going through the hazard and just happens to stop about a metre away from it. "Stay there, I'm taking that bit..." And back I go, full of hope that we'll soon be on our way again. But, no - there's something fatal with the flange so he's taken it off and we now have 2 wheel drive. We decide to poke our nose in the next hazard - a water hazard - and take the 100, then look at the next one. The next one looks okay, we'd probably do alright, but the entry and exit's a bit steep and there's some doubt about whether we'd get up it with only rear wheel drive. We park up and discuss if we keep going or not and decide not. The terrain of the course didn't lend itself to running 2WD and the recovery on hand was certainly not going to be enough for that, and at the risk of the vehicle for the next rally as well.

I was disappointed that our day had finished so early, annoyed that it happened exiting a hazard and wasn't our fault. If we'd done the damage while going through the hazard then okay, but the recovery on that hazard was inadequate, and that's justified by that fact that they cancelled the hazard just a handful of vehicles after us. It is the nature of the sport that vehicles will break, but I would've liked to squeeze in a few more hazards before we got broke. Although our official result for the day was DNF (and we have the certificate to prove it), I prefer to call it a O.J.S - Only Just Started.....

-Natalie