

## TREES, TREES, TREES.....

Pio Pio brought us a tree-lashed 3<sup>rd</sup> placing. Colin's mis-guided enthusiasm trying to go for a 20 ended in the gross disfigurement of the right front guard. At least he had the good sense not to connect with any *other* trees using my side of the vehicle. Early in the day (2<sup>nd</sup> hazard of the morning) we cleared out a very crooked punga tree and landed wedged against a larger tree (so I couldn't even get out to hook the tow-rope on – oh how sad....) There were other mishaps with trees – one which Jo so wonderfully captured on camera – a punga stump, struggling to be a foot in height, stemmed our speedy approach into the mud hazard. Once again Colin and cameras just don't mix. On another occasion it was the trees that stopped us from going over the edge (and 2 digger pulls to get us out).

After Pio Pio there was some major work done to the Landrover – POWER STEERING!! – Colin's new after-work project. He got it in with a week to spare, and we even had time to straighten and repaint the guards, and to test it! We were so organised for the Tauranga rally it just didn't feel right. In the painting of the guards there was just one issue. All the old blue paint had been used up and we needed to get *something* to cover the rebogged guards, so off to Supercheap we went (for various other bits as well as paint) and picking one off the shelf that looked close enough. Well, there's a bit of a theory doing the rounds that you just shouldn't do that, because "ultra blue" is not just blue, it's bright and it's blue, and it's a bit like a Smurf. Colin had painted the front right guard, and it looked a bit out of place, so I suggested we make both guards look the same, and then had a 2-tone Smurf look going on...

From one extreme to the other – the dry desolate dust of Pio Pio, to the drizzly murky mud of the Kaimais. No matter what you were going to get wet, you were going to get muddy, and you were going to get stuck. The morning started out average and ended up bad. Our support crew – Carol, Brooke, Nathan, Brett, and Jo – as willing and confident as they were, took the sensible option and buggered off home. It wasn't long after they left that I was wishing I could've done the same – even tried telling Colin it was a good idea. But no, he wouldn't have a bar of it. However, we did take 200 points on one hazard because there was just no way we would've made it to the blue pegs to start – we'd struggled enough (and become frustrated enough) with the previous one. On our way up to hazard 10 we got word that they'd cancelled 11 because virtually every vehicle was just sliding down the hill (which *was* the hazard) and not able to drive it – there were some (we heard of later) that were opting not to attempt even the access up to the hazard.

The morning brought us frustration – getting to the hazards (which we would relive at points in the afternoon) – delight, in getting the points we thought we could; wet constantly, and muddy sometimes (when we didn't get wet enough between hazards to wash it off). A dryish change of clothes (for about 3 minutes) and a couple of hot sausages and coffees saw us into the afternoon, which started with a vertical downhill that I wasn't

keen on, and the longer the Marshalls took to finish their lunch, the less keen I became – nevertheless, down we went, into 2<sup>nd</sup> gear and floored it up the hill to 60 – a good start. A bit of chaos involved in getting along the congested and slippery tracks to a few hazards, but the afternoon was much more positive. We found our way into most hazards with a bit less drama and fanfare – didn't necessarily do much better when we got there. We nailed the wall of death – I just had to hang on, and that I can do... 20 points. We were the only vehicle not to complete the afternoon timed section – just too much mud for the heavy Landy – although we did manage to back out – no towing! We also hit more trees – 2 in one hazard. Hazard 22, Colin elected not to walk it and rely on the wisdom of his co-driver – “over the dip and hard left.” He did follow that plan, just that everything slid downhill (sideways) and we bounced the right rear guard off one tree and ended nose first on another – no damage to the front this time, just the rear guard.

We finished the day and were third of the three standard vehicles – we did manage to beat one C class and one D class vehicle in the overall standings. On a day like that our scores didn't look too bad amongst the boys with all the toys. And we have one more panel to straighten and repaint....

- *Natalie*