

# *The 2007 Western Australia Tour.*

*31st March – 15<sup>th</sup> April*

*By Lesley Xerri*

Our trip took on a life of its' own..... A few years ago I organized a trip to WA which ended up fizzling out, due to personal circumstances of all involved – including ourselves. Late last year Tony said to me “let’s just jump in the TR and drive to WA, we’ll play it by ear and stop when we feel like it”. I didn’t hesitate in saying “You’re on, let’s do it”. We had Kate and Ian Cuss and Ray and Sharon Mullins around for dinner one night and told them of our plans. Ian said “Can we come too?”, Ray said “Can I come to?” and so our adventure was on.

We had another dinner to decide on when to go and view the planned itinerary (had to have one now that bookings would be required). Timing was an issue due to work commitments and we finally decided that since we had to fit into school holidays, we couldn’t wait for me to return from a conference I was attending. Kate had mentioned that she wanted to fly one way, so the boys set off on Saturday 31<sup>st</sup> March and Kate and I flew over to Perth and back to Kalgoorlie on Tuesday 3<sup>rd</sup> April. The boys had arrived in the afternoon and showered and changed their jocks (probably for the first time) and picked us up at the airport dressed in their blue truckies singlets (emblazoned with “A cock in a frock on a rock” courtesy of our gay weekend in Sydney where we took in Priscilla Queen of the desert and the Mardi Gras!). Kate and I were in hysterics!

They had a few stories to tell, but not all I’m sure (what happens on boy trip stays on boy trip). During their journey Tony kept me up to date on their progress via SMS and we talked every day. Everyone at conference wanted a daily update on their journey! A few minor car problems on the way... Ian’s accelerator fell off a few times, flat tyre (at Renmark SA) and required a spot of welding on the accelerator linkage (Port Augusta SA). He also dropped a front overrider over the Nullarbor. A friendly motorist pulled Tony and Ray up and told them that Ian had gone back to pick up his glasses case! Ray’s car chugged along beautifully as always, but also had a flat tyre in Kalgoorlie. The Princess decided she’d be a little precious and had a ‘not so nice rattle’ in the engine, she was also spluttering when under duress in overdrive, and getting a little hot under the collar.

While the boys were waiting for our plane they’d caught up with Eddie Martin (ex member – sold his TR to a guy in Esperance about 18 months ago). He was wrapped to see them and showed them his garage full of parts and of course, the boys left with a few bits and pieces! He had a story to tell about anything and everything!

Next morning we had a look around Kalgoorlie and Boulder – met a bloke with a saddlery store and a very interesting collection of saddles, including the one belonging to ... (can’t remember Hop a Long I think).... Took in the Super Pit, an enormous open cut gold mine lying right in town. And headed off to our next stop – Merredin. Drink, eat, sleep and we were off again.

This time to Busselton via York. Beautiful little heritage town with a Motor Museum (of course). The boys had their heads under the bonnet of the Princess trying to determine the noise and thought we might have a broken ring causing the noise. While they were busy a lady by the name of Isabel came up to have a look at the cars. She was all dressed in white and told us that when we got to Beverley we had to go and have a look at her home.

She said “I won’t be there, but it’s unlocked, go in and have a look.” Apparently she’d designed it in the imagery of a serpent wrapped around a lake. We asked her what had brought her to Beverley and she replied “Magic”. Well, I decided she was a white witch. Sure enough, we got to her place and a lizard was drinking from the pond and her home certainly was designed as she said. Her wardrobe was full of everything white and all the décor was white as well. Except for the mouse droppings on the bed. (Bet that was a pet mouse and was white too!)

Onward bound, Tony and I were both on our phones trying to get a set of rings (unfortunately not stock standard). A bit of a problem with Easter in the way. Our staff spent several hours trying to source a way to get a set to us. Richard King (WA co-ordinator) sourced a set for us and drove in to Perth to pick them up. We stopped in Narrogin for a Patchwork shop and the ladies left the shop to come and check out the cars. Turns out one of the ladies has a cousin in Cobram.

On to Busselton for 3 nights. In peak hour Easter traffic just on dusk, Ray’s car decided to stop. Yes, just stop – easy fixed, just reattach the wire. So by now we were in the dark and Ian’s car decided to lose all power when putting head lights on. So here we were parked at the Info stop with 2 motor cycle policemen and a radar gun. Had a chat, as you do. Got to our accommodation, drinks, dinner and bed.

Next morning Ray decided that he and Tony should fix the overdrive problem. Decided it was the switch, so seats out, carpet out, tunnel off, change the wires and put her all back together. Ian tinkered with his electrics and we arranged to meet Richard in Mandurah in the afternoon.

Overdrive problem fixed (in fourth anyway), Ian’s electrics not fixed, but we don’t usually do night driving when on a TT! Went to Busselton Jetty – 2kms long and the longest jetty in the Southern Hemisphere – photo shoot with the cars and then a 4km walk.... Ready for lunch! So off we go to Mandurah. We’d just finished lunch and Tony’s phone rang, it was Richard, he was right behind us and knew Tony because he’d answered the phone – very nifty idea – as opposed to “I’ll be the one wearing a red rose on my lapel”! Richard brought along his partner Rachael. A lovely couple, not sure what they thought about us though! However I think they’ll be traveling to Port Macquarie for Concours.

On the way back to Busselton, Tony and I were leading, Ray behind us and Ian and Kate at the back. We were on the highway and came over a hill to find a Police car diagonally park over our lanes, jump out of the car and urgently bring our cars close and a 4wd into the turning lane. Had no idea what was going on.

A couple of seconds later one of the Policemen was talking into the radio “He’s braking hard, he’s braking hard” whilst pulling his pistol out of his holster. Screeching tyres and a commodore comes screaming down the road, sees us and proceeds to rip up the highway divider doing a u turn back up the other way... pursuit vehicle a second behind. The two policemen jumped into their car and were off after him too. Kate thought it was all pretty exciting, but I was furious. We had just been used as a road block and could have been killed. Ian and Kate first then Ray and us. I’m sure our deaths would have been a terrible tragedy.

Drinks, dinner, bed and we were off on our Margaret River/lighthouse day. Stopped at Dunsborough where an idea came to mind. Let's print the photos at Busselton Jetty and use as our postcards. Brilliant! Chatting to a guy who was admiring our cars and noticed we were from Victoria, he said he was too, Korumburra! Lived around the corner from both of us! I went to school with his little sister who is the best friend of my cousin!

We stopped at a couple of wineries in the Margaret River area, photo shoot of the cars with the biggest Australian flag you've ever seen at Voyager Estate. On to Cape Leeuwin lighthouse, the South Western most point of Australia. The lighthouse area was locked up, so backed the cars up to the fence and took shots with signs and fence in between – a bit disappointing really. The cars caused a sensation with the tourists. We organised our tour of the lighthouse and had lunch. Ian was trying to talk the ticket guys into letting us bring the cars in and they were adamant that there would be mayhem if they let us... too many people and all that. So we did the tour and by this time it was 4:30. On the way out Ian decided to give it another go and before he could open his mouth the guy gave him the key to the gate! Cars in and great photo's! Guess what? Drove home in the dark again!

Next day we were off to Albany. Wanted to climb the Gloucester tree on the way and the tree top walk at Walpole. Paid 10 bucks per car to get into the Gloucester tree and there was about a 2 ½ hours wait. One of the guys in the line told us about another tree which is free and no queues so off we went. I wouldn't climb it – a tree used for fire spotting and all you have to climb is rungs belted into the side of the tree! The tree top walk was marginally better for a height challenged person – especially when the tourists decided to bounce all the way! Got into Albany and grabbed Chinese for dinner, when Ian was accosted by a dozen drunks trying to take his keys, push start the car and write their names on the back. In hindsight, perhaps parking on the footpath under shelter (of rain) was not such a good idea. Guess what, drove home in the dark again!

Albany day and we decided to do the coast road out to the Canyon Rocks, Natural Bridge and the Blow Holes. On to Whale World which was interesting as much as shocking to think they stopped whaling in 1978. A sad, hard life for the whalers and a sad, hard death for the whales. They couldn't sell any oil to the boys for the TR's, no matter how hard they begged! Drinks, Seafood dinner and bed.

Time to head off to Esperance. We arrived late afternoon and because it wasn't dark yet, we decided to visit Anthony and Judy who had bought Eddie's TR. They were so excited to see us – there are no other TR's in Esperance. Anthony used to own a red TR3 which he sold to a Victorian some years ago. While we were there checking out the garage one of their friends arrived to let them know he was home – from Albury – just picked up a race car he'd bought from one of Ray and Ian's racing buddies. A lovely guy by the name of Russell - drives a truck from Esperance to Melbourne for a living. Guess what? When we left it was dark! Anthony called to invite us for dinner the next night, but we decided we'd go out instead. Drinks, dinner and bed.

Next morning we decided to do Cape Le Grande National Park. First stop to climb Frenchman Peak. Wet and raining but that didn't matter. The treck was pretty easy going at first, then the climb. Well, there was no track, just white posts indicating where you should climb, which was physically challenging and although I tried to do it twice, impossible for

me to maintain mental calm. The others looked like specks at the top and got to look at some magnificent views. We stopped at Lucky Bay where (on a sunny day) kangaroos sunbake on the beach... none that day, however we had fun backing the cars onto the pristine sands and taking photo's of the brightest and deepest blue seas I have ever seen. On to Hellfire Bay and back to Esperance for lunch.

As we were driving to Taylors Jetty Restaurant there was a fairly aggressive driver behind Ray (in back), right on his bumper and followed us into the carpark. I swear Ray hadn't turned the engine off and this guy had his head in the door. A Vintage Car Club member. Yack yack, so excited to see us. Went into the restaurant and perusing the menu when another guy turns up – Ed, the Chairman of the club! Word was out! Jenny came down to meet us to take us to Russell's workshop to see the race car – and his truck. But we decided that we'd do the Tourist drive first and then go... So Ray had a passenger for the first time on the trip. Went to Russell's and got to sit in the truck, I was so excited, I've never been in one. This machine was 12 years old and has done 2.6 million km's and it looked like new. Lots of chrome and beaut lights!

Left there and went to get changed for dinner and had drinks. Ed and his wife turned up for a bit more of a chat and we got to the pub there were 6 people sitting at the table. Russell and Jenny and another couple who have worked on Anthony's Doretti. Bigger than Ben Hur. Turns out Russell had a load to take to Melbourne and was going to leave on Friday morning, when he heard when we were leaving he decided to leave on Thursday and catch up with us on the Nullarbor. The girls ended up at one end of the table talking knitting and patchwork and I ended up talking cars with the boys... Surprise surprise! Richard called to see how the cars were going. Dinner and bed.

Early start in the fog and dodging brumbies on the way to Norseman. Straight through to Caiguna for lunch. Pretty boring driving, so we decided to play car cricket on the CB's – Nullarbor Rules. On to Mundrabillah for the night. After check in Kate and I went to the rooms while the boys moved the cars. We just cracked up laughing, I reckon they would rate at minus 1 ½ stars! Not to worry, clean and only for sleeps. A couple of drinks and off to dinner where we see an MGA pull into the servo. 2 guys camping their way back to Perth. Nice blokes, joined us for dinner and a few more drinks. Lots of laughs, dinner and bed.

Next morning, who drives in as we are about to drive out? Yep, Russell. Had a chat and were informed that we had to stop at Penong for lunch of whiting and Reggie was the best cook. He'd meet us there. The owner of the MGA knew Russell from way back and they were good buds – incredible. Off we went, next stop (apart from ½ dozen photo stops) Penong. The coastal scenery along the Nullarbor is quite amazing, hard to believe so close to a fairly arid plain. As we were getting back in ours cars, I spotted the truck traveling with Russell, changed to channel 40 and let them know to look right. Russell toured passed in his big black truck blasting his horn and waving crazily. Arrived at Penong and said our good byes to Russell. Had the best whiting ever and off we went again. Arrived at Wudinna and guess what – it was dark. On the way Ian and Kate collected an owl which left a bit of a dent in the front apron. Two days of car cricket and we were all cricketed out, so we decided to give that a rest. (I was really the winner because my innings wasn't finished, but decided to declare it a draw.) Drinks, dinner and bed.

From Wudinna across SA to Renmark for our last night together. A new game got started – giving cryptic clues about places on the map. Like: Name the place spelt the same backwards and forwards and Name the two brands of fruit drink etc. This continued until Kate got car sick and we had to stop! The noise in the Princess was worse, but Tony and I pretended we couldn't hear it. She was running like a little beauty, no loss of oil pressure, no black smoke and plenty of oomph. At Renmark we had drinks on the banks of the mighty Murray and dinner at the famous Renmark Hotel. At breakfast next morning we caused another commotion with our cars being admired by coach loads from Warragul. Coach driver was a client of Tony's when we lived there! Fire alarms went off and fire truck parks behind our cars. No fire in the end, just teething problems with the renovations! Got photo's though.

We decided at that point we were glad to be going home, we'd had police and firemen... didn't want ambulance too.

From Renmark we journeyed to familiar territory – Mildura and Toolybuc – Boundary Bend for lunch and Koonoomoo (10 kms out of Cobram) where the boys met and it had all started 16 days before. As we switched off our engines Tony's phone rang – it was Richard, seeing how we were going. A couple more photos of the boys and their ever faithful TR's and we choofed off home.

Tony has spent the day pulling down the engine and we had a disintegrated compression ring (about 6 pieces) in piston number 2 and one break the same ring in piston number 4. Not happy with an engine only 4000 miles old, but an amazing feat for a robust motor. 8800 kilometres in 16 days. Up at 5 or 6 and home between 6 and 7 at night.

We've had an absolute ball of a time. Would recommend it to anyone. The road across the Nullarbor is exceptionally good (better than the SA and NSW roads we travelled on).

I would've loved to have gone both ways, but I reckon I might have chosen to fly back from Renmark to home!