

The Hartley Report – Darwin Run

Wes and Beverley Hartley were following hard on the heels of the travelling Model Aers and safely arrived in Katherine Saturday 21 May, having left Busselton a week earlier - 4200 kilometres.

Katherine is alive with Model As and it is exciting to see. Many are here in Knotts Crossing Caravan Park which backs on to the Meet HQ.

It will be a good Meet and the local organisers are full of enthusiasm and genuinely appreciative that so many made the effort, with many visiting the Territory for the first time.

Wes and Beverley



Whim Creek Pub - en route to Katherine



Beverley Biggs at Infinity Pool at Lake Argyle



Entering NT at last - 500 kms to go



Safely at digs in Katherine - time to unload

The atmosphere in Darwin has been hot and humid, but there has been a strong sense of camaraderie amongst participants.

The run up from Katherine to Darwin was hot and we experienced our first hiccup that turned out to be a fuel vapour lock. At a stop along the way at Emerald Springs, the Queenslanders, headed by Lindsay Harris, descended on the car. I had suspected a condenser, but after the electrics were checked out, attention was paid to the fuel line. "Bugger", says Lindsay, "we don't have any wooden clothes pegs". Not a problem as a local sapling is harvested of a couple of sticks, then attached to the vertical fuel line with two plastic ties and "bingo", we are running smoothly again.

I am leaving this innovative repair attached as it has generated numerous comments and I tell it as a "Lindsay Harris Miracle Story".

We have had a variety of optional trips to the Aircraft Museum, the wartime underground fuel storage tunnels, Military Museum and the Art Gallery (the attached photo is outside Art Gallery 25 May).

The Wednesday sunset Parliamentary Reception hosted on the Speaker's Green overlooking the Timor Sea by the Speaker of the NT Parliament, the Hon Kezia Purick MLA, was beautifully catered and our host's speech both witty and topical. Many sat in the Parliamentary Gallery afterwards, as Parliament was sitting.

Parliamentary Reception - Darwin - 24 May



Beverley Biggs and Wes Hartley with Speaker of the Northern Territory Parliament, the Hon Kezia Purick MLA, at the Parliamentary Reception for Model A Meet attendees.



NT Art Gallery line up - 25 May

Thursday May 26

The big rollout of Model As to the famous Darwin Mindil Markets on the evening of Thursday 26 May was a great hit with tourists and locals alike, with many vehicles featuring on Facebook (so we have been informed) - see following photo - and many were surprised by the sheer number and diversity of models on display.



Facebook photo from Darwin's Mindil Markets - 26 May

Friday May 27

Was the 100 mile round trip Mandatory Run to the Jumping Crocodiles on Adelaide River. It was very informative and enjoyable, with cameras running flat out.

Many participants subsequently retired to the famous Humpty Doo Pub for lunch and a cooling ale en route back to Camp HQ. (See photo)



Thirsty As at Humpty Doo Pub - 27 May

Saturday May 28

Today is Saturday 28 May and our last full day of the Meet. Many cars were seen at the Saturday Parap Markets and tonight is the Final Dinner and we await news of the September 2018 Meet in Adelaide. After a farewell breakfast Sunday morning 29 May we all begin the 200 mile trek back to Katherine where everybody will disperse to all points of the compass after a very creative Meet.



Parap Markets Darwin

Saturday May 28

Farewell Dinner

The Farewell Dinner on Saturday 28 May was an excellent affair with good humour and genuine thanks expressed to our NT host organisers. We also were addressed by the Chief Minister of the Northern Territory, the Hon Adam Giles MLA, Chief Patron of the NT Meet.

Well received was the presentation from the South Australian Model A Ford Club for the 25th National Model A Ford Meet, to be based on Murray Bridge from 29 September to 5 October 2018 under the theme of "Rally on the River" (bit of juggling for the AFL Grand Final that year).

At the "Awards Night", key emphasis was on "People's Choice" in both Katherine and Darwin. Katherine locals Noel and Kath won the Katherine "People's Award" and Wes and Beverley won the "People's Award" for Best Car in Darwin with their 1928 Model A Sports Coupe.



Wes and Beverley - "People's Award" Best Car in Darwin.

Peter and Kaye Eardley won the award for "Most Distance Travelled" (including record number of flat tyres), in addition to picking up one of the major raffle prizes.

Sunday May 29

Farewell Breakfast is about to get under way, then trek to Katherine for loading and for the Hartleys heading back to Busselton via the Centre Route.

A great time has been had by all.

The Return Journey:

The return journey to Katherine from Darwin on Sunday 29 May went smoothly and then it was time for packing. Some cars travelled as far as Mararanka, while WA cars mostly headed west from Katherine.



Model A at the Devil's Marbles, near Tennant Creek

The Hartleys headed south and Monday night 30 May was spent at Three Ways, where a good time of fellowship with Victorian, Tasmanian and Queensland crews, including Steven and Toni Bishop from Devonport in their rather nice 1928 Roadster, then Tuesday morning 31 May saw them all heading off in a Mount Isa direction.

Principal among these adventurers was Brendan Collier and his co-pilot Leon, in their magnificent 1929 Speedster which had created a great impression wherever they went, attired in flame suits, goggles and Tiger Moth pilot head gear.



Brendan Collier - 1929 Speedster

Before leaving Three Ways there was the obligatory photo at the John Flynn Memorial - a man who did so much to open up remote Australia.



John Flynn Memorial - Three Ways NT

As we headed south towards Alice Springs on 31 May we teamed up with our friends from Horsham, Neville and Lynne Eltze, in their great 1928 Roadster that was also a highlight at the Busselton Meet and their close friends Neville and Gayle Thomas in a 1930 Business Coupe.



Around the camp fire - Alice Springs - 31 May



Hartleys and Horsham crews en route to Alice Springs

We all enjoyed a good night of fellowship before our Horsham friends were off to Coober Pedy on Wednesday 1 June, whereas our agenda was a modest journey to Eridunda Roadhouse where the Stuart and Lassiter Highways meet.



Ready - The long haul - 1 June

Leaving our Model A, car trailer and tent in situ, we were off in the Ford Ranger for an early start to Kings Canyon, a 550kms return journey from our base camp. In contrast to the heat of Darwin and Katherine, it is very cold and wet in the centre of the Centre.

Non-stop rain, rock falls in the Gorge, rolled up trousers to walk through flooded paths and floodway rapidly filling with fast-flowing water across roads, made it a day of contrasts and not quite what we had planned.

Back at Eridunda we tried to thaw out and have decided to stay an extra day as Uluru it is forecast as cloudy for Friday 3 June, whereas today, in the words of John Williamson, it is "Rainin' on the Rock". What a land of contrasts this Australia is.



Base camp at Eridunda



Flooded roads en route to Kings Canyon



Wet Kings Canyon - 2 June

Saturday 4 June will see us heading to Coober Pedy, then on to Port Augusta, before the Nullarbor run and home.

It's great when you are having fun!

The decision to set up a "base camp" at Eralunda, where the Stuart and Lassiter Highways intersect was a good one, as we were free to drive the "modern" Ford Ranger at a reasonable clip and know that our camp was in situ when we returned.

After the cold and wet of King's Canyon on 2 June, the weather on Friday 3 June was perfect for travel and Uluru (Ayer's Rock) and Kata Tjuta (The Olgas) were at their finest, with clear blue skies and mild temperatures - at least hiking was a little better than sitting in a driving position all day.



Uluru NT - 3 June



Beverley at The Olgas - 3 June

Saturday morning 4 June saw us arise in thick fog and it was cold, but time to pack up after three nights of camping in the same location.



Cooper Pedy - 4 June

Soon we were back on the road heading to the South Australian border and stopped for fuel at Marla, the first roadhouse in South Australia.

Being amongst the stragglers on the home run, due to our touring about, we were greeted as long-lost friends by Boro and Erene Mihajlovic of Albury NSW, who were having major dramas with the crankshaft in their 1929 Roadster. They had trouble on the way up to Katherine and had left their car at Marla and got a trip to Katherine where they were taken under the wing of Dean Roberts in his "modern" for the journey around Katherine and to Darwin.

Upon their return they worked on their car and were joined by Steven and Toni Bishop of Devonport, Tasmania in their 1929 Roadster and their Harley-Davidson motor-bike camper trailer. They were also having dramas and the jury was out as to whether it was fuel, electrical, or sticking valves. They decided to push on to Coober Pedy, but were reluctant to leave Boro and Erene. By the time we arrived at Marla, the Bishops had pushed on and the Mihajlovics had managed to arrange for a truck to pick them and the Roadster and trailer up on the Sunday morning and take them to Adelaide. They encouraged us to head down the track.

We arrived in Coober Pedy on the evening of Saturday 4 June and by then the Bishops had tried everything on their Roadster, including installing a spare carburetor I was carrying, but power could not be sustained. I asked if they were members of RACT - which they were - and suggested they ring RAA and let them own the problem. Shiva, a very experienced Indian mechanic, duly arrived and worked on the car. He said he would be back Sunday morning to take it for a trial run. This duly happened, but Shiva then realised the Tasmanian car was not going anywhere. RAA and RACT liaised for shipping the car and trailer back to Devonport, which initially devastated the Bishops, as they had been planning to head to Broken Hill. More phone calls and we secured a second truck heading back from Darwin to Adelaide.

So Sunday morning 5 June the Model As were the talk of the town and vehicles were towed to the depot yard and the loading began. Bono and Erene had arrived in one truck from Marla, so it was like a family reunion. However, passenger numbers in the trucks were restricted, so we had to strip the back seat area of the Ranger where we had the fridge, and wardrobe etc., in order to build up cushions to seat newly acquired passengers heading for Port Augusta. What a comedy day! Lots of new friends were made. The Bishops' road-train ran out of fuel! The scene of trucks on the highways ferrying fuel in jerry cans to kick-start a 20 tonne truck into life is the stuff of legend - but in the midst of disappointment - we couldn't stop laughing at the madness of it all.



Coober Pedy Rescue 3 - 5 June

Sufficient to say, cars were saved for shipping to their respective homes; passengers safely rescued; and by the morning of Monday 6 June, the Hartleys in Port Augusta asked if anyone minded if we headed west (for that was the plan, after all). There is a wonderful bond these old cars produce and whilst the attrition rate for several competitors was heavy, they were more than enough stories of friendships made to compensate for the pain.

By Monday night we were in Ceduna; then Tuesday 7 June we made it to Cocklebidy in WA; Wednesday night 8 June to Esperance; and arrived back in Busselton late afternoon on Thursday 9 June, after two days on the Nullarbor of non-stop rain and headwinds - raining continuously from Penong SA to Norseman. One thing discovered is that days of blasting rain at 90-100km/h speed bleaches white-wall tyres perfectly - better than any previous solutions, including Jif, so our A (for a while) has the whitest tyres in existence.



Nullarbor Station SA - 7 June

Overall, we travelled 10,400 kilometres in the Ranger, including 9,000 kilometres towing. In addition, having left the Ranger and trailer in Katherine - we travelled nearly 10000 miles in the Model A to all points on the Meet, including the return run from Katherine to Darwin, as well as the many trips organised in Darwin and surrounds. A real adventure and the Best Car Award in Darwin was an added bonus!

We can't wait until the next National Model A Ford Meet in Murray Bridge, South Australia, in late September 2018.