

14TH NATIONAL MODEL A RALLY, TE ANAU, NEW ZEALAND

BY WES HARTLEY

A VISITOR'S ACCOUNT OF A CLASSIC OLD-STYLE RALLY

What to do when there's no bridge?

WITH THE EXPERIENCES of the April 2017 Canterbury High Country Run, followed by the 13th National Model A Rally in Napier, New Zealand, still firmly in our memory, we had high expectations of this year's National Model A Rally.

IN THE EARLY 1980s, members of the Canterbury Chapter in New Zealand slowly transformed a trailer load of Model A parts into a completely original 1928 Phaeton. The Canterbury Club Car, as it has become known, was registered for road use in 1986.

The Phaeton has been lovingly maintained by the club ever since for weddings and parades and whenever a member's car is out of action. In its 33-year restored life, it has covered 24,000 miles. This April, I used it, as an overseas member of the chapter. This has led to a mutual sourcing of vehicles for when Canterbury Chapter members attend rallies in Australia.

The Phaeton, painted Arabian Sand, is original in every respect, including the need to use hand signals when turning or stopping. It does not get much more original than that.



*Wes Hartley and Beverley Biggs
with the Canterbury Club Car*

Knowing something of the rugged beauty of the terrain, my wife Beverley and I, joined by my brother Frank from Los Angeles, happily reunited with the Canterbury Club. On April 13th, we headed off from Christchurch in convoy with *A Ford Script* editor Graham and Anne Evans, along with John and Sandra Olliver. It was a real reunion, as we had hosted both the Evanses and the Ollivers in October 2018 for the 25th National Model A Meet in South Australia.

Driving in a Phaeton served up a reminder that the weather was definitely in late Autumn mode, as we set out on our first day to Omarama, encountering other Model A people en route.

OUR SECOND DAY VENTURED DEEP into the hinterland of the South Island as we traveled for an overnight at Cromwell, followed by a tourist Sunday in historic Arrowtown and tourist center Queenstown, before arriving at rally headquarters in Te Anau in the picturesque region known as Fiordland.

Our 1928 Phaeton behaved flawlessly in her first three days on the road. But her passengers increasingly dressed as if we were on an Antarctic adventure, wiping the ice and frost off the car each morning before bracing for a day of crisp-air, open motoring. It was everything one could hope for in re-creating the era of late 20s and early 30s motoring. This is something that Kiwi Model A people know how to do so well.



Model A's and the TSS Earnshaw at Walter Peak Station

AFTER THE MONDAY WELCOME DINNER, on Tuesday we got down to serious motoring. Our journey was to Walter Peak Station on the western side of Lake Wakatipu, where the iconic 1912 Edwardian steamship *TSS Earnshaw* daily brings tourists to marvel at the cloud- and snow-covered mountains that descend into the lake's crystal clear waters. It was truly magical.

But we did not arrive by steamer. Our only access was on what the Kiwis call a "metal" road in "good condition." For the uninitiated, that means a gray gravel surface, with jagged rocks. It soon had all 140 participating cars covered in a fine, gray dust that penetrated every crevice known to a Model A.

The return journey of 240 kilometers (150 miles) included tight mountain corners, heavy second-gear work for the ascents, with deft use of gearbox and brakes for the descents. Our Fords traversed waterways at fords. All this was amid spectacular mountain and lake scenery beyond

description in any tourist brochure.

At Walter Peak Station, many Model A people jostled to have their car photographed near the *TSS Earnshaw* — a delightful mix of boating history and early motoring that held tourists in awe.

Because Walter Peak is a sheep station, our cars had to carefully negotiate the Kiwi equivalent of a traffic jam.

The return to Te Anau raised a serious problem for several participants, given that the next day would include a concours and judging, as well as a public car display. Vehicles that had been pristine Tuesday morning, came back looking like they had just emerged as barn-finds. Many participants stayed up late into the night, endeavoring to restore their beloved Model A's to some appearance of respectability.

THE DISPLAY DAY was a fun event. It included not only a Model A gymkhana, but also a special feature of the



The Kiwi version of a traffic jam



Pulling apart and putting back together a Model A chassis



Single-lane bridges add to the occasion.

New Zealand Rally experience. Teams pulled apart and put back together an entire Model A chassis — with the winning team achieving the task in just 48 minutes!

Wednesday evening featured a “Southland” theme. Most participants dressed for the occasion, including some dodgy-looking mechanics from Christchurch. Peter Bayler and Collene Rillstone took the prize for best dressed “Country Style.”

THE FINAL DAY OF SERIOUS RALLYING, on Thursday, April 18, offered the option of driving to Borland Saddle or to Lake Manapouri South Arm, both with rugged climbs and glorious scenery.

Those on the longer tour of 208 kilometers (130 miles) were treated to a myriad of mountains tipped with the first winter snows, glorious lakes. We also encountered many of New Zealand’s famous one-lane bridges over deep ravines and fast-flowing rivers. The scenery

demanded to be described only in superlatives.

THE CLOSING DINNER and farewell breakfast heralded in Easter and a three-day return journey to Christchurch. This journey included the beautiful city of Dunedin, with its rich Scottish heritage reflected in much of its architecture.

We then traveled to the old port city of Oamaru, where our Model A’s matched the 1920s and 1930s theme of the historic quarter.

THE 2019 MODEL A RALLY in Te Anau lived up to every expectation. The camaraderie of over 300 participants, including 18 from Australia, three from the US, and one from the UK — along with 150 Model A’s of every shape and condition — added to the magic of the event. For those who thrill in re-creating motoring from 90 years ago, it does not get much better. A journey of 1,150 miles, just one tire replacement, and a lot of fun made the whole experience unique.

Beverley and I express our appreciation to the Foveaux Ford A Restorers Club of Invercargill for organizing this event and to the MAFCA Canterbury Chapter for embracing us and allowing us to experience a very particular way of engaging in our mutual love of all that is Model A motoring. ☺

Wes Hartley and his wife, Beverley Biggs, both MAFCA members, live in Busselton, Western Australia. Besides being active members of the Model A Restorer’s Club of Western Australia and the Canterbury Chapter of MAFCA, based in Christchurch, New Zealand, they are both passionate advocates of period dress and long-range Model A touring.



Canterbury Club Model A’s in historic Oamaru