



ROAD TO MANDALAY

1st Feb – 24th Feb 2015

Todd had worked hard on our Tudor for over a year preparing her for Roger's second, and my first, International Rally. He fitted a new engine and everything else you can name. My request was comfortable seats, seat belts and a roll bar as I had heard what could happen on these rallies. Todd found us some lovely leather Volvo seats which were so comfortable we wouldn't have been without them and also the seat belts. Our car left here on the 22nd Dec along with a Volvo from Auckland and arrived in Singapore mid January after four weeks at sea.

Six months before our departure we applied for Visas and international driver's licences, had vaccinations, gathered three boxes of parts together and a list a page long of rally stuff such as safety triangle, torches, duct tape, fire extinguisher, tow rope etc.

We flew out of Auckland on the 24th January for a few days in Bangkok then onto Singapore for a day so we were fresh to meet up with the others on the 30th.

We had two days staying at Raffles Hotel. On the first day we collected our rally pack and rally books. Late afternoon we took a bus armed with Tulip



directions to get back to the Hotel. It was so exciting to see our car again and in one piece. After the scrutineering and sharing our First Aid Kit with others we were on our way back to the Hotel which took us about two hours in the peak hour traffic.

That night we had a casual get-together on the lawn with the other participants. On the second day we serviced our cars and I got to talk to the ladies I'll spend the next 24 days with. All, like me, were first time navigators.

That afternoon we had a welcome briefing on the rally route, safety etc and for those who were first time navigators we could meet with the organiser for a few tips and a quick lesson on how to do Tulip navigation. Quite a few ladies were doing this rally as a practise for P2P next year. It was a bit mind-boggling at first as we were told it'll take a week to feel comfortable with it all. It turned out not to be that bad when we started putting it into practise (it took only two days). The trouble with me at the beginning I was so busy taking photos and video I forgot the press the trip meter. Soon got used to that. That evening we had the welcome dinner which was very posh but very enjoyable. Lots of chatter of rallies others had been on and future ones they plan to do.

Day three we were up early and at breakfast at 7.00 with the rally organisers and their team of mechanics, doctors, and photographers.

All the flash cars were parked outside Raffles but we were all leaving in number order so we now could park our Model A outside the front door as we were number 5 and starting at 9.05.

It was a wonderful sight with cars lining the block to the parking lot underground. All the locals were out to wave goodbye it was quite a moving sight and a few ladies got a little teary. We were flagged off, me armed with rally book and time pad in hand that was to be my companion along with camera, video and Roger for the next 24 days. Onto the causeway to the border which was hassle free with two lanes just for the rally cars so we were on our way to our first stop that night at Desaru which took us all day with lovely drives through villages and palm oil trees. We stopped for our first time trial 'Plantation Playtime' which was my first in a palm oil plantation. What a lot of fun. I gave up following the route book and trip meter. We needed our seat belts and roll bar for that one. We had seven days in Malayasia and really enjoyed the Cameron Highlands with all its greenhouses growing chrysanthemums, roses and all sorts of veges and tea. Being a lot cooler it had a lot of Hotels for the tourists. The rally had its first accident the second day in with a Bentley being tail-gated by another and ending up over a bank landing on a palm oil tree. The driver broke ribs and the navigator broke a wrist. We had timing gear problems and water pump problems but nothing that we couldn't fix. on day five we ended up with the replacement timing gear breaking and we had to spend the whole day on the back of a flat deck which was no fun at all. Todd flew over to Georgetown (Penang) with a new one which was fitted early morning so we could carry on. It was fortunate that we had two days here. By now a number of cars were having problems and gear boxes were coming from Germany and parts from England. It was so hot everything was getting melted under the bonnet including us in the cab. Duct tape is a wonderful thing to have on a rally. On day 7 we said goodbye to Todd and headed to the Thai border and on to Trang. Another interesting day fitting in another time trial 'Fields of Athenrice' around the paths of a rice paddy.

We had 7 days in Thailand enjoying lovely countryside and villages where all the schools kids came out and welcomed us, along with all the village people with flags and friendly smiles. We enjoyed Malaysia but Thailand had a different feel about it from the time we crossed the border. Lots of different crops and trees and rubber trees which we didn't see in Malaysia. We had two days in Kanchanaburi (The Bridge over the River Kwai area) and visited the museum and area where the film "The Railway Man" was filmed. We brought and had fitted a new temperature gauge and water bottle here for \$15.00. We left here onto Phrae with its very interesting Hotel and its graveyard of over 100 old worn out buses. The hotel had a collection of everything from tin trunks, pencil sharpeners, beer cans - you name it, it was there. It was very run down but the food was good and it was only for one night. From here we headed for Chiang Mai with lots of hill climbing where we lost a tooth on our second gear so we had only first and third and we had to take it easy from then. We found the tooth when we changed the oil the next day. We had two

days in Chiang Mai, a city we love, so we unpacked the car and were off to walk the streets, visit the night market and have a street meal. The next day we did the maintenance on the car, had lunch then with our friends took an hour's drive into the hills to ride and feed the elephants, getting back in time for dinner. The next day we drove on to Mae Hong Son where we did the "Tiger Woods" time trial amongst the trees where tigers roamed, and a Regularity Run "Pai River".

On day 18 on to Mae Sot with day 19 a rest day to prepare our cars for our crossing the border into Mawlamyine, Burma. Another lovely Hotel and a nice area to look around. Coming into Mae Sot we passed a refugee camp, with huts made of bamboo and dried leaves lining the walls and roofs. Some of the refugees have been in this camp for 30 years. While in Mae Sot we were out looking for a car wash when our gear stick snapped at the base. Luckily we could turn around and roll back to the Hotel. The mechanics and Roger found a backyard garage and had it welded back for 50c. It's not straight anymore but what do you expect for that sort of money! That night all the talk was about crossing the border as it was a one-way road with a sheer drop down one side. Buses required a walker in front to guide them around the bends. We weren't looking forward to this, particularly with no second gear and no brakes apart from the handbrake, but we were not alone. They had taken our passports so we could cross without any problems, so all we could do was have a good night's sleep.

We were up at 5.00am ready to cross the border into Burma and received great news at check-in. We were not going to travel the usual road as they had opened the new road for us. What a shame, as I was looking forward to this part of our adventure. Crossing the border was simple, going in groups of five. We were thankful to those who made it happen as there were miles and miles of trucks waiting, thousands of people on foot and 72 vintage and classic cars. After crossing the two-lane bridge from Thailand into Burma you suddenly change sides of the road as Burma drives on the right hand side of the road, not the left. We were so lucky no cars were coming. We drove on the new road for four hours coming to a T and could go no further so we all turned around and drove through a village arriving the other side 15mins later. The new road was fantastic with huge cuttings and replantings. We had to go through streams as some bridges still have to be built. This was a great day, finishing at the riverside town of Mawlamyine with us all staying in three different hotels. We were at a small hotel with villa accommodation right on the river with an outside patio dining room which we all enjoyed that night.

We took an afternoon walk here with our friends from Northern Ireland, coming away saying it reminded us of India as the buildings and people looked more Indian than Burmese. After talking to the locals we discovered

they are mostly from Pakistan in this area.

That night we heard the sad news that our organiser Phillip Young was so excited about the border crossing he was clowning around on an ice cream bicycle and fell off hitting his head and was now having surgery in a Bangkok hospital. That was major accident number two with lots of small ones in between.

The next day we drove to Nay Pyi Taw, a ghost city in the middle of nowhere with an 8-lane motorway, dozens of beautiful huge hotels and grounds, but no people. The only people were in the small villages on the outskirts. We had a huge apartment and had to get a golf cart to take us to dinner beside a man-made lake. It was fantastic, with live entertainment, fairy lights and beautiful food.

The next day (day 22) we were to head for Inle Lake on a route which had very steep hills and was going to be very difficult with our car in the state it was, so we decided to take the main road straight to Mandalay. We sensed if we went with the others we would end up on a flat deck and be out of the rally. We saw the others off then went back to the main road to try and find some fuel. Having no luck we ended up back in one of the small villages where fuel was sold in 1-litre water bottles. None spoke English so they smelt our fuel then the fuel in their bottles and decided the red colour one was the one to use. Twelve bottles later we doubled back and were on our way to Mandalay. In this ghost city there was a huge shopping complex, service station and housing areas with not a person in sight. Five hours later, on a dead straight concrete two-lane motorway, we stopped to ask directions and the car wouldn't start. She was so hot we needed help to push her into a hotel carpark. We had some lunch, got some ice and wrapped it around the fuel pump to cool it down. She then started straight away and off we went to our Mandalay Hill Resort Hotel for the next two nights while the others enjoyed Inle Lake. Mandalay is the second largest city in Burma and is beautiful, with a Palace surrounded by a moat in the centre. The people are lovely and so friendly.

On the second day we walked around the Hotel area and down to a temple and shopping area. Roger went off in a taxi and brought a new battery and we waited for the others to arrive late afternoon. By mid-afternoon Jim and Nikki arrived to set up the check-in and hotel room keys and more bad news for us. Accident number three happened yesterday afternoon on the way to Inle Lake when a rock came from nowhere and badly injured a Belgium competitor's face. If it had not been for a retired dentist who looked after Ingrid only five minutes after it happened, prior to our doctors arriving, she would have died. After 15 hours riding in the back of a Hilux they flew her from Mandalay airport to Bangkok Hospital for surgery. They'd organised a Lear Jet from Singapore. It was very sad news as she was such a lovely lady and they had both done P2P with Roger and Alan. Everyone started to



arrive and a lot came up to us and said we had made the right decision as the road was difficult and two cars were on flatbed trucks on their way to Yangon. Everyone loved and enjoyed their boat rides on the lake but pleased to have made Mandalay. That night we had another beautiful meal as we had all made it to Mandalay but it was not the end ... Bagan was still to come. On the road again visiting the U Bein's Bridge - the longest teak bridge in the world - and lunch at Mount Popa with views over to the Buddhist Monastery on a nearby hillside. We drove on through lovely countryside, crossing the finish line mid-afternoon at the Aureum Hotel. That night we had drinks and nibbles in the tower overlooking the ruined temples followed by a dinner and prize giving by the pool. The following morning half of us were up at 4.00am for a one hour 15 mins hot air balloon ride over Bagan and the ruins, followed by a champagne breakfast. A wonderful ending to a wonderful adventure.

We all meet back at the Hotel for a 9.00am departure as we had a 13 hour drive to Yangon on a straight concrete motorway again. These two lane motorways are amazing, built by hand with household concrete mixers, lined with painted red and white bricks and planted centre islands watered by hand by the locals.

We arrived in Yangon late afternoon and had to park up and be escorted in by police in groups of 10 so by the time we arrive it was dark and took as a 1 hr in the heavy traffic. This was our last night together. The cars were to go into the warehouse in the morning, so I find a map, had them mark where the warehouse was and we went out for a drive around the city before we took her to the warehouse about 11.00am. With only one flight a day out of Yangon we couldn't get out for three days so we changed hotel to a cheaper one up the road and enjoyed an evening with our new made friends who flew out the next day. There is not a lot to do in Yangon but we did a lovely sunset boat trip and a three hour train trip plus the markets and the temples.

The Road to Mandalay was a wonderful adventure travelling over 7862kms and everyone just wanted it to go on as it was so well organised and fun. We had tense times, sad times, but most of all lots of fun and laughs together seeing and driving through fantastic countries. Staying at fabulous resorts and hotels - and one not so great, but interesting - eating lovely Asian food, and meeting lots of the local people.

Sadly, three weeks after we arrived home Phillip Young passed away after his fall, and Ingrid will require ongoing surgery for another year.

Isabella finally arrived home on the 22nd April after five weeks at sea. She was x-rayed by customs and steam cleaned by MPI and cleared. It was good to see her come in the driveway and home.

The A Team

