

South Taranaki AGM

March 19-21 2010 in Hawera

BY Bryan Lawrence



Leaving home on Thursday we headed off down the Mata straights to find a three-car accident. One car upside down in a drain, one with its axle ripped out and the third badly dented down one side. The road is one of the best in Northland but still accident prone. After that we had a good drive all the way to Hamilton, staying the night at Ed and Annette's.

Next morning, we headed out to Whatawhata, down through the bypass to Otorohanga and on to Te Kuiti for morning tea. We arrived just after the other group we were to meet there. Upon leaving there were 6 P76's and Philip and Jude's Saab. The P76's being those of the Tubman, Reid, Sutherland, King and yenning families along with us.

We were heading to Mokau for a river cruise organised by Ed but stopped in Tainui before going to meet the boat. We attracted a lot of admirers and photographers while parked in Tainui. We were cruising on the MV Cygnet, the original cream boat off the river. She was a lifeline for all the families on the river from 1913 until 1950.

We enjoyed a knowledgeable commentary from on the boat, the Mokau River and local history from skipper Neil Colman, who with wife dawn own and operate this wonderful old 22 seat river boat. We cruised for 12kins up the river which is lined with white baiting stations 30 metres apart. Some have very basic huts at their landings while others have much bigger huts, some with ranch slider doors.

It takes about an hour to get to the picnic site, disembarking to a



clearing amongst native bush where we could listen to the native birds and relax in this tranquil setting. We went for a short bush walk and feed some eels in the river. This was a great trip, thanks Ed.

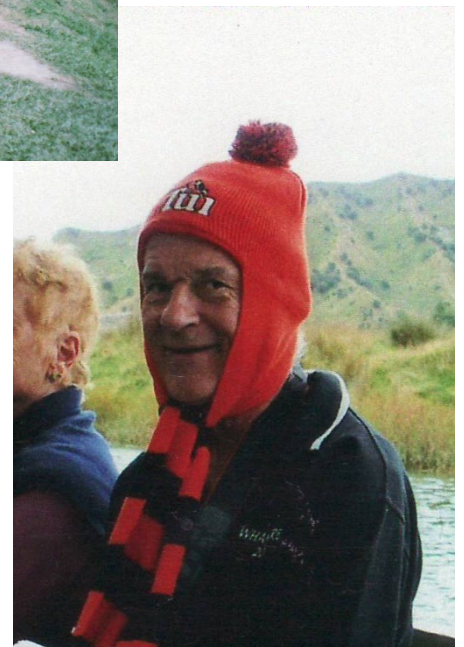
We cruised back to pick up the cars and head onto Hawera.



(Left: Here we see the picnickers in their tranquil bush setting. This was a great way to enhance the journey south for those attending from the north. Below we see Philip on board the boat in his "hat". I could ask where did he get that hat but coming from the Wairarapa I know where he got it.)

On the way to Hawera we turned onto a back road at Waitara. The road narrowed to almost one lane and cresting a rise we were confronted by an old suspension bridge crossing a stony river below. It was the Bertrand swing bridge and barely wide enough to take our P76's! That must be Ed's navigating again? We came back onto the main road at Inglewood and proceeded to Hawera and a welcome dinner at the Hawera Gentlemen's Club, after the hubbub that is everyone checking into the motel together.

The Club was built in 1901 and was a nice old building with ornate ceilings and lots of dark woodwork. We were welcomed to the Club, Hawera and the event as a whole by our host Lance Wagstaff. Lance and Waitara man, Andrew Larsen were the organisers of the weekend and by chance Lance is President of the Gentlemen's Club. We had a very good meal and drinks were enabled by the use of a courtesy van for members so inclined.



Saturday saw us breakfasting at the HGC before convoying off to Inglewood where we parked all the cars in front of the railway station for a photo shoot before walking up the road to the Fun Ho Toy Museum, a Kiwi icon.

(Left: Here we see the photographer being photographed while admiring a selection of Fun Ho trucks; the man's other passion besides Leyland's Linda and photography. We present Paul Heath ladies and gentlemen.)

From Fun Ho toys to Mikes Organic Brewery. Variety is the spice of life and Mike had a few nice varieties for members to sample, in moderation of course. This brewery has had four owners all called Mike. When the current owner tried to change the name to White Cliffs Brewery, he quickly learnt to revert to Mikes Organic Brewery and that's what it is today.

From here most travelled a short distance to the Waiau Estate Winery for lunch. Some took the longer route by turning left instead of right - a little glitch to remedy with better instructions next time. The lunch at the winery was very nice indeed.

From here we went to West Quay in Waitara for a ride on the train, an old diesel that took us to almost the end of the line. We couldn't cross the bridge to get to the end due to it being under repair. We had a bit of excitement when the wheels picked up a long length of number 8 wire left too near the track by some PD workers. We were carried in a vintage passenger car and an open freight car which offered great views and ventilation. We rode back to Tahora Station at Waitara Road for afternoon tea. Many men were seen crawling over tractors and other bits of equipment stored around the place!

Next stop was Heath Manor or as we expected the Colin Johnston Collection. A fine collection of fire brigade memorabilia, gramophones and records, both round and cylindrical, mind boggling die cast models (I love this place) a history of the development of radio's in New Zealand and a range of the family cars, some owned for decades. These include an MGB roadster and a superb Rambler Classic.



(Left: And let's not forget the barrel nose Ford fire engine, an open cab model that was just like home to Merv Cox. Here we see Merv, reliving old memories or thinking how much things have improved! This appliance is housed in a replica of the old Waitara Fire House.)

Most of the gramophones and records are displayed on the mezzanine floor of the fire house which you can see on the next page behind the

Rambler and a lot of Leyland people. The Johnston family also have a 1929 Dodge sedan that Colin's father bought new. It is in fully restored condition but wasn't on show on the day we visited.

Our last stop for the day was to visit Ross Calgher Racing and see his P76 Benson and Hedges race car and have a bit of a tour around his pretty technical workshops. The P76 is the only remaining B&H P76. A lot of attention was given to his Dodge Viper race car too. Amongst other neat toys, his technician gave us a demonstration of the camshaft grinding machine. This visit was considered a highlight of the trip by many.

We made it back to the motels in plenty of time to get ready for the AGM and dinner at the Southgate Conference Centre. Lance gave us a guided tour in his courtesy van around the perimeter of the Fonterra dairy factory to illustrate just how big it is! After a very good dinner and Ross Calgher's entertaining speech we returned to our motels.

After another lovely breakfast at the Hawera Club we returned to the Southgate Conference Centre for a P photo shoot. Dozens of photos were taken but Paul was the official photographer and below we see his line-up of Leyland's complete with drivers.

Leaving here we took a long scenic drive through some back roads to arrive at the Tawhiti Museum. You have to visit to appreciate it really. We spent the morning looking through the old part and then went to look at the new part called Whalers and Traders. You are taken by boat through a live enactment of a defended trading post under attack. There was continual musket fire, Maori warriors jumping up from the reeds on the river's edge and lastly, a cannon that fired right next to the boat nearly causing me to jump out in fright.



This was an extremely well-done exhibit. The warriors of course are all mannequins just like all the other people within the displays in the museum. The models and mannequins on display in the museum can only be appreciated by you visiting them yourself.

We had a light lunch in the cafe and started saying our goodbyes to those that were leaving for home. After sorting out who was going where we returned to our motels for a rest and many of the men went off with Lance in search of his many sheds full of his car collection.

Some of us were happy to rest and refresh in anticipation of our return journey the next day because as always, it was not to be a trip up SH1 for us. There is always another way and Fred will tell you about it soon enough. (Ed: I stayed the night with the Firth's and was quite surprised to see 7 P76's still in the motel car park the next morning. And we were the only car not going north damn it, but Alan and Jane needed to get to Palmerston North somehow and it was on my way home whereas the other way was not.)

The Follow on by Fred

Lance led three car loads of petrol head's to see the contents of three of his many sheds. The number of cars and their stories in various stages of repair and disrepair was staggering. There was a mixture of personal projects, mates stored cars, customer restorations, race cars and a good number of Lance's finished cars. Makes included were Rolls Royce, Jaguar, Toyota, Saab, Holden, P76, Van den Plas, Triumph Stag, Austin Healey, Morris and others, especially Mini racers and a totally restored Mini Countryman. And that's not all of them! There was also Lance's first ever restoration, an Austin 7.

Then to top it all off we had a look around lance's Toyota dealership workshop. I was particularly taken by a Marcos Mantula Spyder under overhaul. I understand these were available as a kit car to any stage of construction, so can I have one please. I'd use a P76 motor of course. I looked them up in my copy of the A to Z of sports cars, page 206.

Thanks very much Lance, the whole weekend was the best.

Monday morning, we left our motel and had breakfast in Stratford. As we got back into our cars a lady stopped to tell us she had a purple P76 while she lived in Australia. She really loved that car. After she left a man came and photographed the cars. We left Stratford to go through the Forgotten Highway to visit Whangamomona again. We stopped at each Heritage Site and when we arrived at the Moki Tunnel we got Peter Venning to park his car in the

tunnel so we could take a photo then it was onto the Whangamomona Hotel for a cup of coffee. Just as we were about to leave Eric Connor turned up on his motorcycle.

On arriving at Morgan's Grave Heritage Site some of us walked to the grave site through a nice bush setting. Morgan was in charge of a survey party and was only thirty-five when he died way out here. Onwards, we took the Ohura Road to SH4 and then onto Te Kuiti.

The Ohura Road is very winding, I'm glad I don't live on it. At Te Kuiti we said more goodbyes. The Venning's and us followed Ed until he turned off to Hamilton. We refuelled at Ngaruawahia then went nonstop to Whangarei. We lost sight of the Venning's somewhere near Meremere.

We arrived home safely after a very enjoyable weekend. Thank you to all those who made it so.