



Rally to the Rally or DOWN UNER CENTENARY TOUR 20/3 to 7/4/2019 [Link to Rally Blog by Dale and Maritta](#)

Before starting, we'd already covered a reasonable distance (Hobart to Devonport then down to Queenscliff to visit a mate living in a church and then back to Ivanhoe) although this was pretty modest compared with Trevor and Judy Eastwood who'd done the trip from Perth in 4 days! A few of us who had gathered in and around Ivanhoe had the pleasure of a BBQ at Alan and Noeline's on the Sunday night followed by a fascinating visit to Don Taig's phenomenal collection of home entertainments from the mid 18th century through to the present near Geelong.

Day 1 Melbourne to San Remo

Having had a day off to recover from all this, on the Wednesday morning we followed Noeline's detailed instructions as we wove our way through the delights of east Melbourne's traffic to the formal starting point at the Wandin reserve. Some of us were knackered before we started (it all serves to reinforce why we live in Tassie) I suppose, but eventually the entire group had gathered, wandered around, greeted one another, before finally passing under the banner to set off. After winding through the hills and various small, and larger, towns, we stopped near Jindivick for lunch at the Sculpture Gardens and Gallery where Laurie Collins gave a brief talk before demonstrating his plasma cutting skills by producing several Alvis badges from 2mm steel sheet for the fortunate few. There was another hundred or so km to go to reach San Remo which we all achieved in good order in spite of a slight gap in the instructions, cleverly inserted by the organisers to ensure that we could all map read or use the GPSs on our phones.

Day 2 Phillip Island A short driving day to recover from the previous day's exertions and to take in some of Phillip Island's attractions. Of special significance was our visit, by bus, to see the penguins coming ashore on the far western end of the island. Our organisers had set us up with a prime underground location to see these tiny birds (they're called Little Penguins these days but back in the day they were known as Fairy Penguins) emerge from the sea and make their way past us to their burrows. There were a few hundred of the little creatures, significantly outnumbered by those watching although they appeared to be completely unfazed by this.

Day 3 San Remo to Lakes Entrance

Another beautiful day - the organisers' relationship with the weather provider is clearly on a sound footing - and we were off on along the south coast on the first part of our 320km run for the day. It turned out to be rather more eventful than we might have hoped for. Our NZ visitors (Mike & Pat) encountered some fuel issues and when Dale and Mariatta stopped to help, they found themselves unable to get out of reverse gear. It's at long way to drive backwards. Eventually they were able to engage top gear and make Lakes Entrance in that state. The rest of us stopped for lunch at the Beloka Kelpie Stud where we were entertained with a discussion about Kelpies and their use as sheep dogs and watch the owner put both experienced and young dogs through their paces. It was here that the next "unfortunate event" occurred: a certain visitor from the other side of the world who shall remain nameless but whose surname starts with B and whose given name is that of your scribe managed to reduce his borrowed MGB to monocular vision courtesy of an aggressive timber barrier that threw itself into his path. He was somewhat concerned about how he was to convey this news to the car's owner. Sadly, after his sterling efforts in reaching LE, further inspection revealed that Dale's gearbox problems were terminal and trucking the Silver Eagle back to Melbourne was the only option.

Mike Williams



Day 4 was classified as a freewheeling day being between the two nights at Lakes Entrance. We left for the day around 10ish after a gentlemanly breakfast.

The first stop of the day was Nyerimilang Heritage Park, a beautifully located heritage home with picturesque gardens. It was built in the late 1880s by Frank Stuart as a base for fishing and shooting holidays. His son turned it into a family home when he came to live in the house and bring up his family around the early 1900s.



From there we drove to Metung, a beautiful waterside town with picturesque local harbours. Bruthen was the next stop with lunch for the hungry at the local Brewery. Then it was back to Lakes Entrance. Today we lost Dale and Maritta's car back to Melbourne on a flat tray because of terminal gear box problems.

Alan gave a demonstration of his panel beating skills around the front headlight area of the MGB. His appreciative audience were very generous with their advice and encouragement. The day finished with a fine meal at The Ferryman's Seafood Cafe.

Day 5 saw us heading for Bermagui and in compliance with the instructions of our fearless leaders we were fed, watered, packed and ready to go by 8.30am. It was a cool, overcast day - perfect for driving.

Our first stop was 20km into the day with a visit to the Stony Creek Trestle Bridge near Nowa Nowa. This is a great example of a wooden railway bridge, it was built in 1916 and in use until 1987. It is the largest standing bridge of its kind in Victoria at 247m long and 20m high. It is a great sight.



The Stony Creek Trestle Bridge

It was then onto lunch for us at Eden, after passing through the Snowy River flats at Newmerella, seeing the mouth of the Snowy and pausing for a break at East Cape Conran to enjoy the scenic coastline and then morning tea at Cann River.

After lunch in Eden it was onto Bermagui along some beautiful tight twisting hilly roads which are a driver's delight. We checked into the Harbour View Motel and at the managers insistence we placed cardboard under our cars to catch the oil drips.

To finish the day in a proper manner we had pre-dinner drinks in the garden of the Motel and a great meal at the local Italian restaurant.

Trevor Eastwood



Intense concentration needed to answer the quiz questions



Trevor Eastwood Serious discussion around Trevor Eastwood's Speed 20

Day 6: Bermagui Area

This was a rest day, with a short loop drive through some of the finest farm land on the east coast, including taking in the well preserved historic town of Central Tilba for lunch. We visited the unusual gold workings at the Montreal Goldfield - unusual for having the alluvial gold deposit running down to the beach and into the sea!

Day 7: Bermagui – Goulburn 237km

This was a spectacular day of Alvis motoring, conducted in cloudless and cool conditions – with a little wind later in the day. The drive north from Bermagui along beautiful tidal lake systems and empty, good quality roads is about as good as it gets for touring! There were various interesting old bridges to be crossed – rickety timber ones, a couple of opening bridges and other rivetted steel ones from Victorian times. The climb inland from Bateman's Bay to Braidwood is a fabulous winding road ascending the escarpment to 780m through a State Park then a National Park, mostly roaring along in 3rd with some stiff second gear sections. Braidwood is one of Australia's premier heritage towns, but we knew it from a previous rally so decided to crack on to Goulburn to visit the recently restored 1841 National Trust property *Riversdale*, making it 30 minutes before the 2pm closing time - and a very worthwhile visit too!

The Tour afternoon tea was arranged at another key historical property in Goulburn, the 1857 property *Garroorigang*. This house and garden is privately owned and lived in by a knowledgeable descendant of two families with continuous ownership and occupation since 1868, when it had been converted from an inn to a school for the sons of gentlemen farmers. [The most famous alumnus was probably General Sir Henry Chauvel who lead the famous and successful Desert Mounted Corps charge at Beersheba in October 1917.]

The house is notable for the fact that it has been managed with a careful touch by generations who have largely retained the house contents and furnishings while living there.



Northeys' SC 1250 ducksback crossing Wallaga Lake bridge north of Bermagui



*Rex Roberts joined us at Nyerimilang
in his 1924 12/40*



*Climbing hard up the escarpment between Bateman's Bay and
Braidwood; 2nd gear beckons...*



*Garroorigang: some of our visiting fleet of Alvises with the
former stables/schoolhouse/etc building behind.*

Day 8: Goulburn – Leura (Katoomba) 247km

We were joined last evening by ACCV members Richard Tonkin (TA14 – the first post war Alvis on the tour) and Marg and John Hetherington. This was the first cold day, although it was intermittently sunny. There were some head winds to challenge the meagre power of the 12/50's, especially when heading uphill as was the case for much of the day, although there was a lot of downhill in there too! Nonetheless this was a day of most enjoyable roads and scenery, the most remarkable parts being those that forced many cars to resort to first gear – the Abercrombie River valley had a narrow steep and winding descent through lovely bush followed by a wide, new and epic climb up out of the valley. It must surely be about the steepest 'major' road in Australia!

Lunch was at the extraordinary Mayfield Gardens complex near Oberon; a modern Australian take on grand European private gardens that is already well worth a visit and will be quite spectacular in the future as the shade trees grow to maturity.

Our destination this day was up on the Blue Mountains at the town of Leura, adjacent to Katoomba. And towards the end of the drive – one final test for all cars to execute the brutal climb up Mt Victoria in amongst traffic for the time since leaving Melbourne.

A challenging and spectacular day of Alvis driving!

Lesley & Bob Northey

Days 9 &10 - Leura to Sydney to Leura

Thursday 28th. Later start today, following the instructions took us around a left hand corner onto a Very!! Steep hill, but the 12/50 managed a gear change from 3rd to 1st and only just made the crest. We carried on to Scenic World, sounded more like an amusement park. However when we arrived and got our tickets we realised it offered 4 different ways to see this fraction of the Blue Mountains Scenery, so traveled by Cableway, Railway, Skyway with a short walkway in between. Each one with its own share of views and thrills.

After returning to the Resort we boarded the bus to the Katoomba railway station, then on to the train to Sydney Central station, train to Circular Quay, Ferry and Bus to Taronga Zoo for our Roar & Snore night.

The Zoo visit started with a nice cold tea followed by a visit to the tree kangaroos, squirrel monkeys, koalas, the sun bears and elephants on our way to luxurious tent accommodation. Pre dinner drinks and nibbles followed before heading to dinner which was delicious with more drinks. Peter gave up Coke and Trevor is 77 tomorrow. Dinner was followed by a night walk to visit the tiger, who was napping with his back to us.

Friday 29th. We slept, but there were animal roars/ calls loudly around 3am. It seems some guys had lost their wives and others had trouble with their tent doors last



Line up at the Montreal Goldfields near Bermagui

night, so we wonder how they manage to zip their flies!

At 7amish we walked to see the Tamarind, some shy gorillas and 3 magnificent Giraffes which we were able to feed. We then had our breakfast about 8am. This was followed by a visit to the turtle tank and a pat on the shell as the keeper carried it around. Nocturnal house with Australian Night life, including Bilbies, Potoroos, Echidnas, Dunnart, Feather Tail Gliders, Sugar Gliders and lastly Snakes.

From here we had free time to wander around the Zoo but had to be back at Circular Quay by midday for the cruise and lunch. Long lunch cruise boarded at 12.30pm and we were on the upper most deck. The 3 course lunch was more like dinner and included wine. Farewells were made to Adrian Padfield as he was flying back to UK that night. After 2 hours it was back to the wharf, onto a train to Central and a very brisk trot to get the Katoomba train, herded along by our Tour C.O. When we arrived our bus was there and took us back to the resort. Dinner was at the Golf Club with a Birthday cake for Trevor, followed by an early night.

Pat Bren



More of the wildlife at the zoo

Day 11 Leura to Cowra

The day dawned, as they say, somewhat inclement - the Fourteen's hood was left up and the wipers (only one speed, but self-cancelling) were on most of the way to Lithgow, where the front left tyre tube was replaced (hard to find a tyre place that stacks tubes these days).

Our destination in Lithgow was the Small Arms Factory, where we were given a most interesting introduction by a gun enthusiast, who hadn't actually worked there but wished he had. The factory was set up by the Federal Government in



The Antique machinery in the Lithgow Small Arms factory and the Company whistle

1912 when things in Europe were looking decidedly unfriendly. The factory employed up to 3,000, many of them women during WWII, as the men had gone off to war.

Until sold of to Thales, a French company in the 1990s, the factory produced a wide variety of pistols, rifles, machine guns and other weapons. It is still in operation with a smaller workforce making the AUSTYER rifle amongst others. Our guide had an amusing anecdote about how the local Lithgow men were concerned when the female workforce arrived from Sydney during WWII, that they may taint the morals of the local lasses with their big city ideas!

Onward to Bathurst and a run around the Mount Panorama Circuit - the Fourteen certainly wasn't built for those "esses," but it was a great experience. Our lunch stop was Abercrombie House, a few miles out of Bathurst. Not just another old country house, but a magnificent structure dating from the mid 1800s and now occupied by Christopher Morgan and his family - relatives of the original owners. The house had fallen into disrepair and been abandoned several times in its 170 year life, but the family have painstakingly restored it to its former glory. As well as the main living and bedrooms, the house, through three storeys has a myriad of smaller rooms, some being the old servants' quarters.

A highlight of the visit was Christopher's narration of the history of the property, accompanied by David Webster playing his violin (which he has brought with

him from England). The family has had a liking, maybe an obsession for Austin 125 Sheerline cars, many of the 30 plus owned are resting in the paddocks.

Onward then to Cowra for our two night stay, where we had very comfortable rooms at the Cowra Services Club Motel. We dined at the Oxley Wine Bar where we were joined by Peter Graham's son Robin, his partner Kit and daughter Charlotte. It was an excellent meal.

Richard Tonkin

Day 12 & 13 – Cowra

New South Wales' mid-west town of Cowra conjures up all manner of thoughts even before one visits or re-visits this impeccably presented town. Comprising some 10,500 souls before servicing a further 5,000 neighbours the most arresting image is of a wartime mass POW camp breakout and then a world-class memorial Japanese Garden complex.

Voted the 6th most desirable country town in Australia by a consortium including TripAdvisor is quite some achievement but it is the friendliness and amiability of the locals that immediately gets you into matters Cowra.

Approximately a dozen cars, primarily with an original or acceptable contemporary Alvis badge, are quietly confined in this lower level square compound with one side being high fenced. Suddenly, just before 10am, there is an

unmistakeable rumble and the 'breakout' commences with every vehicle off to take in some of the delights of this Cowra township.

Although the sky is somewhat grey and overcast there is much keenness to visit or even re-visit what must be one of the nations most significant gardens - the Japanese Garden and Cultural Centre. Some 2 hours later one has a sense of pride that a former grazing paddock sprinkled with eucalyptus gums and multiple large rock outcrops could be so delightfully transformed into a memorial garden to Japanese POW's.

The garden covering 5 hectares was designed by a Japanese expert. However it shows unmistakable Australian trademarks throughout its manicured lawns, winding paths, waterfalls, ponds and Japanese style buildings. The striking high point represents Mount Fuji with its elevated outlook over the distant countryside. Of interest were some of the Bonsai plants which marginally preceded the 1979 stage 1 construction date are still in situ. Special Cowra scones and mixed sandwiches were most welcome to all the Alvis Down Under Centenary Tour participants whilst discussing this cultural 'strolling' garden experience.



Soon after, another unmistakable rumble of these original or pseudo-designated Alvis cars began with a mass movement to the site of the real POW 'breakout' camp. This prisoner complex was initially constructed for Italian prisoners in 1941 but then was altered to cater for other nationalities as different theatres of war unfolded. 1944 witnessed a 'mass breakout' by approximately 300 of the 1000 Japanese interns. Today only foundation ruins of many of the buildings are visible on the gently sloping site - all overseen by a replica guard tower and numerous information boards depicting Australia's first instance of war action on its own soil.

Further touring exploration revealed that Cowra boasts a designated War Cemetery adjacent to the town's main eternal resting site as well as their Europa Park which was a 1940 Military training camp morphing into a Migrant camp in 1949. Some 17,000 European migrants called this their first Australian home up until 1955.

Still further exploration found Cowra's piece de resistance - the Lachlan Valley Heritage Railway Centre hidden on the outskirts of the town along the now closed railway line. Wandering amongst an extraordinary collection of historic engines, carriages, wagons, sheds, a massive turning roundhouse, rolling stock and even a memorial garden was a revelation. This WW1 and WW2 memorial complete with flagpole for ANZAC Day services must be unique to be housed in a former working railway operation that only closed in 1985. Lack of Government recognition and funding for such a treasure trove must be forthcoming.



Our finale to the many Cowra attractions was to be guests of the Cowra Antique Vehicle Club in their carefully restored former Cowra Railway Station complex. Historic photograph showed the site totally surrounded by floodwaters and then another totally blanketed in snow. This car club must have some of the most desirable premises in Australia and as a thank you to their generous convivial hospitality, Mark Weller donated a memento plaque to add to the many already on the various walls.

The day 13 route from Cowra to Canberra via Boorowa and Yass along the Lachlan Valley Highway was sublime – a well surfaced undulating winding road through what must be some of Australia's finest sheep raising country. Our 3 night base in Canberra at Knightsbridge Apartments offers exemplary self contained accommodation within walking distance of either the upmarket Manuka shopping precinct or the very trendy Kingston commercial shops and their myriads of eateries.

David Macdonald

Days 14, 15 & 16 - CANBERRA

After a lovely drive from Cowra via Boorowa, we all arrived safely in Canberra to start our 3 day stay centrally located in Kingston. Our time in Canberra combined some organised activities and free time to sightsee. On Monday evening we were joined by Ernest and Julia Litera, who are driving the Parsell's 19.82 Silver Eagle.

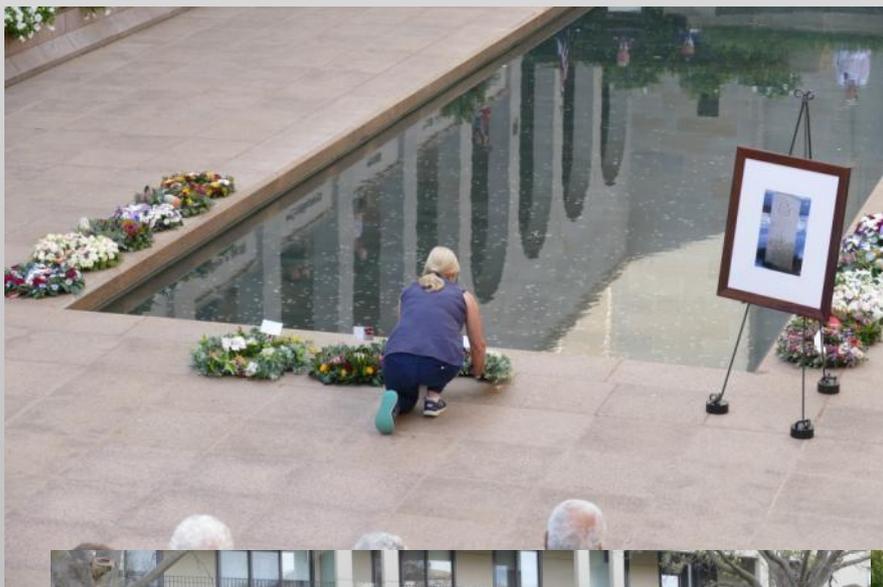
Tuesday started with a tour of the High Court of Australia which was a most informative visit and we all found out how the three courts worked - Court 1 is with the full bench of 7 Justices and it decides on constitutional matters, Court 2 is the Appeal Court and Court 3 is used for procedural matters. The High Court is an impressive building which uses timbers in the walls, seats, benches and tables from all the states.

After the tour everyone went their own way to visit the nearby National Gallery, the Portrait Gallery or the National Library. Our evening entertainment was a visit to the Bentspoke Brewery where we had a tour of the brewing process before a tasting of 4 of their 18 different beers followed by dinner. The tables with all the beers lined up would have been a Temperance Union nightmare. It is interesting to see how many of these micro breweries have started within the last 5 years.



Above: Parliament House

Below: Lesley Northey laying a wreath at the War Memorial



Wednesday morning saw us gather at Old Parliament House for breakfast in the Hoi Polloi Restaurant - this used to be the area where the journalists would gather for food, coffee and intrigue. This was followed by a tour of the two Houses of Parliament where we could sit on the benches and see the Prime Ministers office and the Press Gallery. It was a fascinating visit and we were joined by numerous school groups. We were told that 80,000 Grade 6 students visit Old Parliament House each year.

The afternoon was taken up with a visit to the War Memorial, which is always a sobering visit especially in the WWI area. Most stayed for the Last Post Ceremony, which was very moving and where Lesley was able to lay a wreath in memory of the fallen Northeys from WWI and WWII. A fitting end to the day. We were joined later in the evening by Bob & Denise Blackett and Norman & Sally Zylberberg who were with us for the rest of our rally.

Thursday saw a completely free day for everyone to go and do their own thing, which for some meant catching up with friends and relations, a visit to the National Arboretum with its wonderful collection of Bonsais, or perhaps a drive to Mt Stromlo - the choices in Canberra are endless.

The time in Canberra finished with a wonderful dinner at a local restaurant close to where we were staying followed by packing up ready for the next stage in our Rally.

Frances McDougall



Day 17 - CANBERRA TO TUMUT

There was a little patch of blue sky.....

....."about enough to make a sailor a new pair of trousers" as Granny used to say. Indeed it was small and seemed so distant, beyond the low black clouds which almost filled the sky and which kept us company for the first half of our travels. But what travels!

The route out of Canberra was well described in our route notes and we were soon on the open road. The Monaro Highway to Cooma usually provides a great drive through the rolling country of the High Plains, but not today; there were roadworks nearly every mile which caused bunching of trucks and caravans. But never mind we were soon at the Snowy Hydro Visitor Centre on the outskirts of Cooma. It was warm inside and the display of the Snowy Mountains Scheme very descriptive.

Then it was off through the town and past its memorial to the Avro 10 "Southern Cloud" airliner which crashed into the nearby bush in 1931 and lay undiscovered for about 40 years.

Soon we turned north and became part of the great rolling High Plains. The road was well surfaced and lent itself to fast fun motoring. Before we could tire of that the terrain became steeper and the bends tighter. The black clouds were still visible but gradually the sailor's trousers made way for a whole wardrobe.

We collected a sandwich lunch at Adaminaby, the new town of that name was rebuilt in the 1950s when the original one was inundated by the rising waters of Lake Eucumbene as the Snowy Scheme took shape. Then it was onwards and upwards to Kiandra where several elected to munch their lunch in a cool breeze. That was not surprising given the utter barrenness of the terrain surrounding a long derelict gold rush town. Where there was once a town with a town plan and 15,000 inhabitants there is now nothing but a shuttered hotel and a rock stamping machine.

From there it was pretty well down-hill all the way to Tumut. Some diverted to Yarrongabilly Caves and hot springs and others to Talbingo and its power station, "Tumut 3." There is not a lot to see beyond six water supply pipes each wide enough to fit a double-decker bus. But the force of the water as it reaches the turbines from a great height can be imagined. So on to Tumut with a comfortable motel and an Aussie Pub Tea where the portion sizes mimic the great brown land. Slumber calls.

John Hetherington

Day 18 - AROUND TUMUT.

"BRAINS BEFORE BEAUTY" I heard someone say as they approached a doorway." No thanks" was the reply, "DIRT BEFORE THE BROOM" as we entered the Tumut Broom Factory (est 1946). We were shown by two enthusiastic owners how brooms are made from Tasmanian Mountain Ash for the sticks and millet grown in Mexico. There is no other commercial broom maker in Australia and very few farmers growing millet. Harvesting it is hard physical work which no Australian wants to do. Brooms made in China retail for a quarter the price. Another local industry almost gone. A couple of members of the party had taken leave from their coven to come to try out new models and I believe some sales were made.



Gold was discovered in nearby Adelong in 1852 so there was a gold rush. It lasted long enough for some substantial stone buildings to be built to accommodate the machinery. Some of that was most ingenious. There was water driven power with multiple wheels on the same stream, a circular mill and a stamping machine amongst many others. The stone buildings have survived quite well but a flood in 2010 did as much damage as the previous 100 years of wind and weather. The complex is enthusiastically curated by Louise who gave us an overview of the site and then joined is for an excellent lunch, provided by Donna, using mainly local fresh ingredients. We dined in a brand new shelter and as we were the first party to do so, we christened it. What a start in life!

There is a fine but down-at-heal Art-Deco theatre in Adelong, with a similar pub opposite but we were too full of lunch to indulge.

Instead we visited Blowering Dam whose massive wall retains a sufficient area of water to permit the World Water Speed Record to be set at 318 mph in 1978 by Ken Warby. That record still stands. There was to have been an attempt to better it this year but the reservoir is only 24% full, meaning that its surface area and therefore length, is too small for an attempt. A sorry situation for the largest reservoir in NSW, but hardly surprising given the ambient temperature of 28 deg C when we visited in the autumn.

In the evening we had the Final Dinner. We had been asked to dress to a theme "Art-Deco" which some met brilliantly while the kit of others needed a free imagination to guess the connection. Speeches were at a minimum but due and proper thanks was made to the organizers: Noeline & Alan McKinnon, Maritta & Dale Parsell and Mark Weller. There was much laughter, much banter and even some music by our Resident Fiddler, David Webster as well as a duet by Jan & Mike Baker. As far as we know this was an Australian First. Well done! Prizes were awarded for good deeds during the rally and some for not-so-good deeds. Everyone retired thankful to get rid of their costume and turn in for an extra hour of end-of-summer-time sleep.

John Hetherington





Day 19 - TUMUT to ALBURY.

Elation to Almost Despair. We enjoyed an almost magical Sunday morning when we visited “Wayne Stuart & Son”, piano makers. Wayne makes grand pianos which are not only beautiful to look at but have a wonderful sound. He showed us nearly all the steps in building a piano worthy of any world concert stage – which is where most of them go, or else into the private ownership of a consummate pianist. He has successfully mastered the ability to extend the keyboard to 108 keys. This means that the lowest notes are subsonic, but can be felt and the highest notes are supersonic but add to the harmony. His best line was that if you have the ability to build a piano from scratch you can build anything, so wide are the skills, materials and methods used. Not only the building but the playing! We were fortunate to hear two of his pianos in use as we were treated to a concert by “Freddy & Steph” aka The “Neeman Piano Duo” from Canberra. They played mainly modern music or romantic music with a modern twist and certainly showed off the abilities of the wide keyboard pianos,



sometimes two on one piano, sometimes one each. Sunday morning magic! Stunning.

And then we were off to the “Pioneer Womens’ Hut, Café and Museum at Glenroy near Tumbarumba. At a pleasant spot we had lunch a building made of wooden cells rescued from the refurbishment of the nearby Correctional Centre.

After that it was a scenic, windy and sunny drive to Albury via a hilly route through Granya. The road then follows the Murray River which later runs into Lake Hume. Alas, Alack – we came to the “despair” part of the day. Where fish should gracefully swim, now cows peacefully graze. The water level is so low that farmers are grazing their stock on the meadows, surrounded by the long dead– by-drowning but still upright gum-tree trunks. These ugly things should be underwater but stand like old rotten teeth which in one place surround the old, submerged township of Tallangatta which had been abandoned when the river was dammed and rebuilt on higher ground.

A lovely drive but spoiled by the sight of drought in action with its implications. It has been a great few days so well planned and executed by the organizers. We are thankful to have taken part. As we enter Albury they can heave a big sigh of relief as we all look forward to another week of Alvis motoring in the Centenary Rally.

John Hetherington

Some thoughts on the 2019 Down Under Centenary Tour.

This is not a report on these events, rather some highlights for me of what were 12 thoroughly enjoyable days and evenings in some of the most beautiful scenery, amongst friendly and cheerful Alvis enthusiasts and of course, driving and being driven in, some of the world's finest proper cars.

The plan was for me to join the Tour on Day 7, at Goulburn, in the ex- Joyce and Kendall McSkimming TA14 Drophead (hereafter referred to as "Audrey"). By then the hardy participants had already travelled to San Remo, Lakes Entrance and Bermagui, having been flagged off at Wandin on the morning of Wednesday, 20 March. Wife Pauline, daughter Karen and her husband Sean, who flew down from Brisbane for the Rally, were to join me in Albury in the TE21 ("OSCAR") on Sunday, 7 April.

Now, being a careful chap, I had planned to have both cars in tip top order for the events, with a 2 week "buffer" before I set off, to cover any last- minute contingencies. We are all very familiar with Murphy's First Law – "If anything can possibly go wrong, it will." So, of course, something did. With about 5 days to go before I left, Audrey came down with a serious case of head gasket failure. Now, those of you who follow the American space program (everyone, surely), will recall that NASA puts problems into two categories – those that are "flight critical" – like there's a hurricane heading for Cape Canaveral hours before a launch or the Apollo 13 near disaster and those that are not "flight critical" – the Flight Director's dog has a cold or the Coke machine at Mission Control is out of order. Clearly, a blown head gasket was a flight critical item. A mad rush ensued – who had a spare Fourteen head gasket? Dale Parsell happily obliged, but the one that came with his and Maritta's TA14, "Daisy," didn't fit. Those in the know said it couldn't be so – the engine wasn't changed during its production run from 1946 to 1950. But others said almost every head (like we humans) was subtly different.

A call to Chris Prince, purveyor of Alvis parts in England, produced the promise of 2 gaskets by airmail asap (they arrived a week after I left – perhaps the Asbestos Police intercepted them?). Thanks to a tip off from Dale Parsell, a Knight in Shining Armour materialised, in the form of Dale Collett, of HJ Gaskets in North Warrandyte - phone 9844 1822. Dale visited Audrey where she lay in intensive care at "my" mechanic at Hurstbridge. He took measurements and went to the chap who was working on the head, to ensure the gasket would be a perfect fit. Long story short, I had the new gasket in a couple of days. The Hurstbridge folk installed it on the Friday before I was to leave on the following Tuesday, I ran up 135 miles in Audrey over the weekend to settle the gasket in (Smiths Gully to Yea and back is one of my test runs), back to Hurstbridge first thing on the Monday to have the head tightened, then off to Goulburn at sparrows on the Tuesday morning.

Now from home at Smiths Gully (the epicentre of the known universe and thus a long way from anywhere) didn't look all that far on the map. In fact, it was 667 kilometres, or in real numbers, 415 miles. Professor Google calculated that would take 6 hours 38 minutes (assuming no stops, sitting on the 110kph speed limit and no little delays like road works on the Hume Freeway).

Well, it took Audrey and I about 9 hours, made pleasant by lunch with John and Margaret Hetherington at Holbrook. So, Audrey and I arrived tired but happy to join the rest of the Tourists for dinner. The head gasket was, to borrow again from NASA, A-OK, and remained so throughout the Tour and the Rally. Many thanks to Dale Collett and to my friends at Saunders Garage in Hurstbridge – the mystery remains as to why Audrey needed a custom- made gasket.

Apart from a leaking tyre tube at Leura, in the NSW Blue Mountains, Audrey's only other issue was a need for greasing of the kingpins – at Goulburn, Moruya and Albury. On arrival at the motel in Goulburn, the steering resembled a Mack BDouble with no power steering and two flat front tyres – will have to look into that. But she really is a delightful little car, with the option of having the hood fully closed, half way or fully open – we used the last two options as much as possible.

The next day, Wednesday 27 March we motored on, lunching at the spectacular Mayfield Gardens, near Oberon. Then through some challenging Blue Mountains roads to our two night stay at Leura. Thursday saw us leave the cars behind and train and ferry to Tooronga Park Zoo in Sydney, where we spent the night under canvas with, I am told, various animals bellowing in the small hours. I say I am told, because one is conscious of little after the hearing aids are removed for the night.

We were well wined and dined at the zoo and the next morning were shown the waking inhabitants before the public were admitted. A highlight for me was feeding lettuce to a giraffe (Alvis people behaving strangely?). We were told that giraffe have no upper teeth, but a very hard palate, which enables them to break up food. I was thus able to feed a lettuce leaf to him/her and come away with my hand intact.

Onwards to Cowra for two days, via the most interesting Lithgow Small Arms Factory, the Mt.Panorama Circuit at Bathurst, (where Audrey tried, unsuccessfully, to turn me into a Peter Brock) and Abercrombie House and the owner's fascinating history of the property, accompanied on violin by David Webster. At Cowra we visited the magnificent Japanese Gardens and the site of the mass breakout of Japanese POWs in August 1942, not to escape, we learnt, but to attempt suicide as atonement for being captured. 231 Japanese and 4 Australians died – a reflection on the horrors of war.

Then to Canberra, where the Tour spent 3 days enjoying the city sights while I changed T- shirts, but not cars, and joined the Armstrong Siddeley Tour and friend Michael Cansdale from England on a 4 day trip to Tumut, via Moruya, Eden and Cooma, where the 2 Clubs came together for a pub dinner. The next morning we visited a broom factory in Tumut (yes, a broom factory, run by 2 chaps who hand-made millet brooms, with some help from a couple of very old machines – they have to import the millet from Mexico – can't get the labour here to grow and harvest it). That night saw the Tour's dress up night, with many interesting variations on an Art Deco theme.

Tumut to Albury was a relatively easy 145 miles. But first we spent an amazing couple of hours at a piano factory on the outskirts of Tumut – a broom factory and a piano factory in Tumut? How did Noeline McKinnon find these gems? And not just any piano works – they had, last year, produced an instrument with some 10 extra keys. We were treated to a recital by 2 concert pianists who were performing in Canberra – an amazing end to what was a superb Tour.

Thank you so much to Alan and Noeline McKinnon, Dale and Maritta Parsell and Mark Weller – these events don't just happen and the careful research and planning by those people was amply rewarded by the truly excellent experience that we enjoyed.

Richard Tonkin (and Audrey).

Noeline McKinnon comments on one of her observations on the Down Under Centenary Rally

We made a very interesting visit to the Small Arms Factory at Lithgow. This is an absolute "hidden gem" which the locals have and are fighting to save as it has played a very important part in our history. As usual they do not receive any government support even though they have an extremely extensive gun collection. However, apart from this the whole site is still intact as just as it was when the lights were turned out in the sixties. They had diversified into doing all sorts of other work, even making the first Sunbeam Mixmaster, but as with most things in Australia, could not compete with overseas. It must be saved. I didn't get any photos of the guns but below is some of the equipment just as it was. Also the original washroom for females complete with its stainless steel trough and pink tiles. The original factory whistle takes pride of place.

Ed note: some of Noeline's Photos are included in the report.