

Day Ten - Palmerston North to Wellington - 333 Km

Nine days on the road, 3215 km covered and countless roads explored and just like that, our adventure around New Zealand's North Island is complete. Save for boarding the ferry tomorrow lunchtime, the New Zealand Classic has made it to Wellington, the nations capital. After a good night's sleep and lazy morning, the ferry will depart for its crossing of the Cook Strait and the next stage of our journey will begin.

Before all of that though, there was still half a day rallying to get involved with on the journey from Palmerston North. It's amazing what can be squeezed into a morning if you really want to manage it, with the route planners shoe-horning in three regularities before the final time control of the day. 'Shoe horn' is probably a poor choice of words, because as with every other kilometre travelled on this trip, today's itinerary was a carefully thought out and wonderfully flowing piece of transit.

Yesterdays evening sun had sadly been replaced with cloud for our morning's entertainment, but whilst the skies above were a flat shade of grey, the competition was exciting and in places taxing. Many were caught out by a tricky approach to the first timing point of the morning, with Bill Holroyd and daughter Olivia were one of the first to fall foul of the organisers test, but were undoubtedly not the last to approach the timing point from the wrong side of the triangle. Anyone down wind of the action would easily be able to spot those who had been fooled by the section, as they pedalled their motor cars furiously on the next part of the regularity to make up time, all in a day for seasoned rally veterans.

The rainforests that had been such a feature of the early days of this trip were replaced by pine trees, as we travelled through many large plantations, as well as of course the pre-requisite farmland complete with thousands of sheep. Another hallmark of the island that remained in place were the gravel roads, that have provided us all with trickery and treachery throughout the past week and half, but that have also placed immeasurable smiles on all faces. After the spurious rainfall of previous days had dampened the land, there was a return to the giant dust plumes in many places throughout this morning's route, a factor no doubt enjoyed by the photographers and film makers on the trip.

The final time control of the day, and indeed the North Island, was within the superb surroundings of the Tiohana Estate, a vineyard of highest regard within the hallowed Marlborough wine producing region. A luxurious lunch was laid on, a just reward for the kilometres of tough rallying roads completed so far. It was a chance to reflect on all that has been enjoyed and encountered so far, the roads, the gravel, the long days in the saddle as well as, of course, the tremendous backdrops that have accompanied our travelling caravan on its voyage so far. If the South Island ticks even half of the boxes that have been crossed off up north, it will be a very special second half of the trip indeed. Those with some insider knowledge however have suggested that it will be all of the north and then some, an exhilarating prospect at which I can barely contain myself.

Wish you were here,

Syd Stelvio.