

Day Two - Whangarei to Russell - 390 Km

Rallying so far away from home has a strange feel to it, the extra long build up and extended rest days before the off, necessary after nearly thirty hours suspended in the troposphere, leave one feeling a certain lethargy. There is only one antidote, bashing cars through the bush and backroads but with yesterday being a fairly gentle introduction to New Zealand's roads there was still a certain build-up of lactic acid, begging for legs to be stretched just that bit more.

Today provided just such an opportunity, with the day's activities beginning at 8am, early for a Sunday. But that meant the already less than populated roads had precious little local traffic on them and the drive to the first regularity of the day was a glorious, uninterrupted ascent into yet more dust drenched roads. Dust drenched eventually turned to rain drenched, as the first rains in sometime splashed down upon the parched land, the roads becoming a little greasier, something which no doubt increased the fun factor for those in rear-wheel drive machines. One of those pairings was Amin Hwaidak with navigator Jens Jarzombek, leading the field overnight in their Ford Mustang and, whilst a Bentley will always be my weapon of choice, I will admit that part of me looked on in envy at the prospect of attacking the terrain in one of the big American beasts.

Another twosome at the sharp end of the tack where Stephen and Collette Owens, leading the collection of vintage cars at the end of day one in their beautifully turned out Jaguar SS100. During the morning they could be seen toggled up in waterproof attire, with flat-caps pulled down tight against the precipitation, but as the midway point of the day approached and the coast beckoned the sunshine broke in a magnificent way. So much so, that the SS could be seen with its bonnet lifted and cooling down, as the field took luncheon just a stone's throw from 90-mile beach.

The contrast in weather would continue into the afternoon, and whilst sunbeams lit the way as the route traversed east across the northern tip of the country, the ground ahead dazzled back at us, displaying the evidence of recent rain showers. As we skimmed the coast, we crossed narrow bridges across estuaries of submerged forests, and enjoyed views out to the ocean and the golden beaches that are a hallmark of the north. A sharp deviation inland however saw the route climb up through rainforest on gravel roads that, after a dousing of sweet rain, now wore deep grooves as wounds from recent traffic, rather than kicking up the plumes of dust that we had been used to until this point.

As much as the sound of the internal combustion engine is sweet music to me, the opportunity to break from the driving, even in the midst of a regularity, and listen to the backing track of the rainforest was an opportunity too precious to miss. The birdsong and insect chatter, breaking through the vast flora will live with me for a long time to come, as will the smell of the recently watered vegetation that grows so large in these sub-tropical habitats. The symphony created by the forests inhabitants was only punctuated by the passing motorcars, the doppler din rising and falling as the machines passed, leaving behind the natural sounds once again. This planet really is a wondrous place.

No more time could be spent wandering beneath the boughs though, as there was a ferry to catch a fair few kilometres up the road and, after all, we have no time to stand and stare. The run to the boat was accompanied by another passing downpour, the heaviest seen so far, but if rain gives life to the rainforest then it is welcome. The clouds did abate for our final run along the coast though, to the seaside town of Russell and as we rest tonight and discuss the days results, all will be preparing for the journey back south that begins tomorrow morning and will last for nearly three weeks.

Until tomorrow, Syd Stelvio.