

Day Six - Gisborne to Taupo - 420 Km

I couldn't tell you today's total distance, north of 400 clicks certainly, it was probably the longest day of the rally so far, at least it certainly felt like it. The trip meter turned over and over, its consistency reassuring as the miles mounted up. We awoke this morning as the first people anywhere in the world to see the new day's sun stretch wispy fingers out across the land, but as we headed up into the hills the skyline was dominated by big grey clouds; they wouldn't last.

Some of the competitors may have felt that they had fallen under their own personal cloud, as they were held up for a significant amount of time on the first regularity by sheep farmers herding their livestock across the road, around 1000 at a time. The photographers who had chanced upon it surely felt like they had hit the jackpot, images that tell stories are always winners. Eventually the horse-mounted shepherds had finished their business and the road was clear once again and the rally could continue.

Not to be outdone by their woolly counterparts, the cows were next to get in on the act, this time blocking the entire main road, though for those caught up in this little interlude it was at least on a link section and not whilst the clock was running. This is the hazards of rallying through largely rural areas, and one can do nothing but sit it out, to stare as long as sheep and cows indeed...

The farmers blockades soon dissipated, as did the clouds leaving all of us bathed in the hot southern hemisphere sun for the remainder of the afternoon. The route took us through the rainforests adjacent to the magnificent Lake Waikaremoana, lit up a stunning ultramarine in the blazing sunshine had it not been for our relative altitude to the lake I'm sure many of the touring caravan of cars may have opted for a dip in its cooling waters. Our convoy travelled in position order today, those running at the head of the field with the reward of finishing the last day's rallying before the first rest day before everyone else. Filip Engelen and Ann Gillis led the charge, in their 911 Targa, surely a fine choice of vehicle for a drive in the sun. It made for an interesting spread of vehicles throughout the field, all except for the posse of Mercedes-Benz mounts, stuck together mid pack.

The day finished in the scorching hot asphalt of the Bruce McLaren Motorsport Park, for a pair of tests around the circuit at speeds far exceeding those encountered on the controlled regularities. It is always exciting to be let loose on a proper race track, as opposed to a kart circuit or indeed a car-park and it seemed that the excitement went to the heads of one or two competitors leaving them a little giddy and somewhat confused about left and right. I sense several queries being submitted to the stewards this evening, after some dubious positioning of cones may have contributed to the downfall of some, although special marks must go to Matthias and Thomas Bittner, who seemingly wished to get their monies worth and then some by driving every inch of the circuit.

A rest day awaits our explorers tomorrow, and I am sure for all it is much needed. A chance to rest from the road and the constant motion and an opportunity for Doc. Seamus to replenish his stock of travel sickness pills that had been hungrily hoovered up by the navigators after their Motu experience yesterday. I too will take a break from the quill and ink, and reprise my recollections of life on the road two days hence,

Until then,

Syd Stelvio.