

Day Eight - Taupo to Whakapapa - 404 Km

Lake Taupo has a volume of water equivalent to 59 km³, it is a vast amount of liquid that runs in from the rivers and hillsides that surround it. The grass around the lake at the minute though is more representative of desert than lush oasis, bleached as it is from a lack of rainfall and the blistering sun of the southern hemisphere summer. Rain is required, and as the rally began its 8th day early this morning, the drought that has affected New Zealand this year was about to receive a brief respite, as the rains arrived and doused our band of travellers as they traversed the perimeter of the lake during this morning's concentration run.

Another 400 km plus day awaited, and I am sure that for the drivers of open top machinery in particular, the prospect of prolonged precipitation was not a welcome one. Thankfully, despite the early soaking, the rains abated and the run through more rainforest roads and farmland took place under a dramatic sky, with white, wispy clouds that seemed to dance through the atmosphere, a cumulous cabaret, quite a show for anyone who chanced to look towards the heavens.

The roads carried the rally through some of the most remote regions yet, with barely a sniff of oncoming traffic. The kilometres of empty tarmac often ran side by side with rusty, seemingly abandoned railroad, the blacktop criss-crossing with the track and then running parallel over rivers and waterways, the oxidised uprights of the railway bridges relics of another time.

Every so often the isolation was punctuated by dishevelled hamlets, worn frontages indicative of a more prosperous period when perhaps the railway had functioned. Long forgotten dwellings and businesses boarded up against the world, as these railhead towns feel the steel mills rust. There was a certain sorrow in it, but also a tragic beauty as in places nature reclaimed discarded shells of a former life.

The roads, largely used by logging companies these days, were also reclaimed, by the rally cars, if only for a brief time as the caravan passed through. What roads too, more tarmac today than on previous regularities, tarmac that flowed through the natural contours of this land as well as any of those driven since the beginning of the New Zealand Classic. Dirt roads were also present as well of course, slightly stickier today and coating the cars with a layer of mud rather than powder, as the recent rain colluded with the dust to produce a brown paste atop the gravel.

It made for excellent motoring as we enjoyed a loop out from Taumarunui, all the way out past the Mount Damper Falls and back again through the Whanganui National Park. There was also a short detour to Whangamomona as well, along the Forgotten World Highway. It should be noted that Whangamomona, or the Republic of Whangamomona to give it its full title, did in fact declare a somewhat fictitious independence from the rest of the country in 1989, even electing presidents. Some of the more noteworthy of which were Billy Gumboot the Goat, Sir Murt "Murtle the Turtle" Kennard and Tai the Poodle. There's perhaps hope for Boris yet...

After lunch Regularity three of three was completed and the run to the rest stop for the evening, at Whakapapa in the Tongariro National Park, began. The hotel is overlooked by many a Volcano, but the residents will have to wait for the morrow to catch sight of them, as the rain returned with a vengeance during the final part of the day. Less than ideal conditions for rallying, but a welcome respite for the locals desperately wishing for rain after such an extended dry spell.

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