

Day 23 - Lake Tekapo to Christchurch - 313 Km

It's a dangerous business stepping out of your front door. You step onto the road, and if you don't keep your feet, there is no knowing where you might be swept off to. For the entrants of the New Zealand Classic, who departed Auckland 23 days ago, the final destination of Christchurch was a known factor, but it was the in-between that would really count and that, it would transpire, would be a most unexpected journey...

7000 kilometres have passed under tyre tread since the first car left the sanitised world to embark upon this adventure. The road has been a constant, passing beneath us at varying speed but always there, waving goodbye to us at night and waiting steadfastly in the morning. Where it has taken us though has been a continuous surprise, charting a course for us around the incredible country of New Zealand, covering the length and breadth of its two magnificent islands.

We have seen mountains, lowlands, moorlands, wetlands and more great rivers and giant lakes than many could hope to see in a lifetime. The dramatic coastlines have left us in awe and the spectacular power of the sea has inspired us. Each one of us has encountered the same landscapes, but our experiences of them will all have been vastly different, the content of the journey, you see, is a personal thing. How it touches us all, how it enriches our souls, will have been different for each one of us, but the last three weeks of adventure will have left an indelible mark upon us all.

Let us not forget the competition, the regularities and tests that have confounded navigators and excited drivers have been a tremendous mix of remote backroads and wonderful race circuits, taking us to places many of the countries own inhabitants will never see. The stage rally roads that have been conquered by our humble group of competitors will also not quickly be forgotten, various World Championship and National rally stages have hosted our modest event, including the mighty Motu Road.

At the end of it all, the 911 Targa of Filip Engelen and Ann Gillis has topped the scoresheets and emerged triumphant, winning by a large margin in the end. But that lead was only gained in the last few days of competition, when one mistake undid the hard charging Sharif Hwaidak and Yevhen Harashchenko, demanding the maximum out of their own white 911. Other positions were being lost and gained all the way until the final time control today, with no easy finish for anyone. The regularities this morning, especially the first with its ever so steep inclines and swift descents, have demanded maximum concentration from all, there was to be no coast in.

It's not all about the newer 911's of course, and amongst the vintage cars Martin and Olivia Hunt, in their mighty Bentley won by 8 minutes. The 4 ½ litre behemoth has been thrown around the roads of New Zealand, delighting anyone who happened to catch a glimpse of it marauding through the countryside.

The road goes ever on and on, and despite us reaching the rally finish this afternoon, somewhere out there the road continues, awaiting our embarkation on another adventure. For now, though, there are stories to be told and memories shared, in an evening of reminiscence and celebration between old friends. The smiles at the finish told the whole story, there are those that will pick up trophies this evening of course, but this was a rallying adventure in which we all shared and all achieved. To take part in something this special, to be fortunate enough to enjoy all that we have has been a privilege indeed. Wherever onward journeys take us next, I can't wait until we meet again, on another unexpected journey.

Syd Stelvio.