

Targa Tasmania 2015



Team 222: Andrew White / Ashley Yeld
1961 Volvo 122s

Leg Four: West Coast (Strahan - Hobart)

Today was the long run down the state from Strahan to Hobart, and included the thrilling 56km long Mt Arrowsmith stage. In years past, this leg was the last of the rally, and the mindset was to balance getting through to the end with the possibility of making up places with an eye on the podium. With good prospects of wet weather, the west coast leg often threw up surprising results in the final run to the flag. However, this year, there is another day after we get to Hobart to contend with and hence today's target was to continue to push hard and build as much of a margin around other competitors as possible. We'd closed out Leg Three holding 3rd place in Early Classic just over three minutes behind the Freestone's hot-rod Holden. In Outright we'd got as high as 12th, but started Leg Five in 14th some 33 seconds behind the Gennochio HDT Commodore.

With the cars held overnight in a secure but open yard, the first task of the day was to scrape off the frost and defog windows. A short (and low speed) trundle around the Strahan township served to warm up engines and gearboxes and diff's if not the crews before we headed up the hill for the Strahan stage. Despite the long climb and a desire to carry as little fuel (= weight) as possible, we set off with a nearly full tank to get us through the almost 100km's of competitive stages and long transports in between before we could meet up with our Service Crew for refuelling later in the morning. The tyres took a good kilometre of running hard on the twisty road to generate heat and get grip, and there were isolated patches of dampness to respond to. Such conditions spook many of our fellow competitors and we managed to catch and overtake a Torana XU-1 and a 240Z over the 33km stage. We dropped 42 seconds on the Ulrich's Jensen, but grabbed 2nd place for the stage ahead of the Freestone 'rod by three seconds.





Queenstown, the backdrop of cover page of this update, is a “100 bend” 6.5 kms blast up out of the township that suits us very well despite the hard climb – if in the wet. Last year we were 3rd fastest Outright up this stage only three seconds slower than the Miedecke Perana and two seconds quicker than eventual Classic outright winner Barry Faux in his turbo RX-7. Yet all dry we still placed 11th Outright, just one second slower than the Freestone’s Holden.

On then to Mt Arrowsmith, an event within the event. Rarely have we run the stage in dry conditions, but alas it looked like that would be the case today. Any dampness would be our secret weapon (well, perhaps not so secret as we tell nearly everyone about it, but its one of the few devices in our armoury) and so without that our big chance to break past the Freestones into 2nd place wasn’t on the table. Mind you last year, we headed in to the stage in 2nd and emerged on the top spot as the Ulrich’s Jensen fell off the road on of the last corners of the stage. With advisory warnings about low fog from the 9km to 22km marker, we charged off and found some patches of damp and slippery road. This boosted our confidence (yes, perverse as that is) and over the first 35 km’s in fog and poor light caught and passed three cars. We also passed by a handful of others either embedded into rock faces or resting inverted at the roadside, caught out by the slippery patches of road. At about the 45km mark, the Faux/Mihajlovic Mazda RX-7 caught and passed us, its flame throwing exhaust providing great entertainment as well as wayfinding in the foggy conditions. Their greater pace was noticeable on the straight bits (they won the Outright competition last year) but we hung on in a not too shabby way for the rest of the stage – this helped us take another 57 seconds on the Freestones.



Faux/Mihajlovic Mazda RX-7 on Mt Arrowsmith

The Tarraleah stage is a run from the head of a dam down to a hydro power station, and then back up the other side of the valley. We weren't so strong heading down the hill, but absolutely nailed it heading back up the other side. This achieved an equal 7th outright, our quickest yet on the event, just one second slower than the Freestones and equal to the Cook/Cooper 1973 Porsche 911 Carrera RS and also the McCauley/Etienne 1985 Porsche 911 Carrera.

The second to last stage for the day was Ellendale, a unique but pleasant experience for Ashley – on the two occasions he's run that stage, something close to disastrous had happened to the car mid stage; in 2005 it was the retaining wire for the Brantz sensors on the tail shaft coming undone, the unravelling wire making a sound like a chainsaw trying the cut through the floor of the car. Somewhat



unsettling as we raced up over blind crests at 140kmh. And then last year, it was the entire exhaust system breaking off at the 2km point, rendering in-car communications useless, the sound frightening small children, and the engine's gases being pumped into the cabin trying to asphyxiate the crew. We didn't back off then though as we had a top spot on the podium in our reach. This year all was quiet and seemed quick – the results table showed we “cleaned” the stage (no penalty time). Three other teams achieved the same result (the Jensen, the Freestone's Holden and the thundering Monaro 350 GTS). So no gain for us over them and similarly no gain for them over us.

Over then to what has been the last stage of the event for many years, Grasstree Hill. Important like all stages for times, but seemingly devoid of occasion as it has been in previous years given we've another four to contest on Saturday. They say practice makes perfect, and we got it pretty right, especially given the stage was a little shorter this year with only a kilometre of uphill and the rest of the stage charging down the far side of the hill favouring our power disadvantage. This too we “cleaned”, as did only two other crews: the Jensen and the Freestone's Holden. This meant we ended the day in a holding pattern on 3rd place in Early Classic, and 14th Outright. It's unlikely we'll improve either tomorrow, and the Outright placing we're pretty chuffed about given it's been achieved in all dry weather. But it's not over 'til the fat lady sings we'll be keeping the pressure on the Ulrichs and the Freestones right up to the wire tomorrow.

Servicing at the end of the Leg involved assessing tyre wear (all good), bleeding the brakes and torquing the head. We're fuelled up mentally and physically and looking forward to a drink or three tomorrow afternoon. There is some discussion about the legality of a few of the competitors who might be running engines larger than they declared. This would affect the Performance Index and therefore the placings in Early Classic – it's unknown whether the officials will investigate further, or perhaps impound only placegetters for further checks. Could be some added tension later Saturday afternoon.....