

AS WE PULLED AWAY FROM THE START OF THE TOTAL OIL CROSS RALLY two weeks ago, I guess I could have been excused for feeling a little apprehensive.

After all, David Bond had not competed for almost a year, and had not driven the Lancer with its new suspension and engine, on dirt at all!

But I wasn't at all apprehensive despite the fact that we were as sideways as the rest of them around the delightful dirt circuit at Amaroo.

Still, I must admit to some fear as we went down the Hillclimb which I consider to be one of the most frightening experiences of the event.

But we made it, and in a perfectly respectable time at that!

We intended to take it reasonably gently as the first night and especially on the short daylight stages.

On the second of those we got our first puncture and it became apparent that with the normal radial Yokohama winter-treads (i.e., not reinforced sidewalls) we were running, care would have to be exercised over rocks. We learnt, and only had two more punctures.

At the Boord refuel we discovered our first minor problem — a blocked fuel line from our extra tank.

With a 110 km section to follow we took a chance which paid off.

We didn't have time to fix it but we made it — just!

Actually, the thought of doing 110 km in one section was a worry — a new experience for both David and myself. But it was like a train, save for two spins!

We passed two cars on the road and countless others stopped.

Having started the section 25th, we had arrived 14th and were pretty satisfied.

Towards the end of the first night the first bout of tiredness hit us both.

Such is the problem when the driver has to prepare the car himself. Despite lots of help from Coltspeed the week prior to the event, David really only had one decent night's sleep.

I was not much better off having been finalising a University project right up to the Friday when I flew to Sydney.

Still, we came in 14th which is just where we wanted to be. Things were not to remain so rosey though.

Early on the second afternoon we bent a stub axle and then the timing drifted and the good old reliable Lancer wouldn't go.

The latter cost us about 30 minutes whilst changing the strut at the mealbreak took ten minutes more than we had spare.

Forty points and about ten positions on the road that we could ill afford.

In a way, these problems added to the enjoyment of the rest of the night.

David really had the bit between his teeth and passed five cars on the road on the first 150 km section!

That is really some effort in the light dusty conditions, reeling each car in, in turn.

We didn't get the next car which was New Zealander, Blair Robson.

We chased him, getting glimpses of him now and then, for no less than 50 km.

Towards the end of the second night we clobbered a log with a rear wheel and bent the spring.

A good time to do it as the service crew did an incredible rebuild of the back end during the one hour service period.

David and I only got about 4 to 5 hours sleep before the third night so tiredness proved to be the biggest problem that night too.

We were very slow on one section, while on another I virtually stopped navigating as we overshot intersections, stopped at T-junctions etc.

It was really quite bad. Not the most enjoyable night of the Cross.

Amazingly, with the problems of those two Divisions, we had held our relative positions, and due to drop-outs, had moved up to tenth.

We were only 20 points behind Ian Hill who was leading the privateers, so there was no letting up.

He suffered about 8 punctures so we had to hope he would have some more!

But it was too risky we decided as we did an almighty spin fairly early on the last night.

Trouble was, our starter motor wasn't engaging and we had stalled with the back of the car about to fall off the edge of the world.

We had no choice but to wave down Janson, who we knew was next, and to ask for a push!

Then came the 215 km section which I reckoned was great.

It was real pioneering stuff in places, across paddocks and so fourth.

And relative to the rest of the event it wasn't rough. (By Victorian standards it was still incredibly rough).

RICHARDS WAFFLING

We maintained a good consistent pace as we did all that last night.

So there we were at the finish, too exhausted to feel really exhilarated.

We had come in eighth due to the misfortunes of Fury and Kallstrom.

We didn't catch Hill of course, but then he didn't stop with electrical problems for half an hour.

It really is an amazing event when you think about it though. It's like a whole season of rallying in one event. Despite the fact that you have problems, it is so long that you can work your way back up.

For the non professional, the Southern Cross is a bit like a whole season's rallying in a single event.

As far as David and I are concerned, if the budget were to allow for only one event a year (as it does at the moment!) that event would be the 'Cross.

And really that's pretty stupid as the going is so rough.

Only when you are driving somebody else's car can you afford to travel at the pace of the factory drivers.

We weren't hanging around, but even at our pace we were losing a minute every ten kilometres to drivers like Cowan!

We wore out sixteen tyres, and all up, the Cross cost between three and four thousand dollars for us!

We were grateful for the help given to us by Clark Chrysler in Melbourne, but three thousand dollars is still a lot of money!

Inspect

by Ian Richards

So after one night the score was Fury 17, Cowan 19, Makinen 21, Kallstrom 24, Clark 30 and Ferguson 34.

It seems the Escorts were taking it gently on the first night, being their first time and all that!

They reportedly lowered the cars and put on their racing rubber for Night 2!

Surprisingly quick on the daylight sections on Sunday was young Walfridsson in the "crooked" 710, scoring best time on each of the sections.

Fury punctured on one, and this left him and Cowan equal at the meal break.

Still, the Escorts were now equalling the leaders, but not gaining.

During this extremely long night that ran as far north as Woolgoolga, Fury and Cowan ran a hammer and tongs battle

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