

ADELAIDE TO DARWIN AND BACK IN 6 DAYS THE PERFECT CLUBBIE TRIP???

Wanting to escape the southern winter, even if only for a short period, SWMBO and I had decided to head to Darwin to catch up with friends and enjoy the sunshine and warm weather for a few days.

Plans fell apart when it appeared that 'Kestrel 7' had suffered a hostile takeover of operating systems by "Jack the Dancer", and that life would change while treatment was undertaken.

Scans, tests of every possible description, biopsy's and pokes and prods in places I didn't think you could poke or prod, failed to exclude the presence of 'Jack' so it was decided to take Kestrel 7 away from the stress source for a few days of 'priority realignment'.

To Kestrel 7, this of course, meant driving the car to Darwin and back in 6 days, 6100 km in total and 3050km of unlimited speed roads. In other words, the perfect clubbie challenge!

SWMBO chose to fly but to her credit, she understood the challenge and enjoyment to be had from six days of solitude in the car, and so the plan evolved to drive to Darwin and back, to enjoy the speed limit free NT roads and have the clubbie to use in the beautiful weather of Darwin in late July.

Car checked and prepped, I-Pod loaded with 8 hours of favourite music and fuelled with as much enthusiasm as it was with premium unleaded, and in bed early(ish) and ready for a 4.00am departure on Saturday 22 July.

Problem One surfaced at 1.30am when the phone rang, to advise Kestrel 7 that No. 1 son (who had been out with mates to celebrate

turning 18) was severely pissed and needed to be picked up.

Back home, and with Sadam bedded down where he could do no harm to self or home, very tired and a little peeved, at 3.00am, Kestrel 7 headed for Darwin. As I left a dark and sleeping 'Castle Doube' I made a note of the odometer reading, which showed 16,807km on the clock.



Let's go!

100km later at Port Wakefield, I was beginning to question my sanity as it was 3 degrees and not even my 'above snowline' rated parka, 'goretex' gloves and 'AusClubbies' beanie was sufficient to keep me warm.

A steady cruise at about 130kph saw me in Port Augusta for breakfast (God bless the Macca's bacon and egg McMuffin breakfast), slightly warmer, fuelled up and ready for the first real challenging part of the trip.

First issue was realising that while a 4.4 diff is fantastic for Mallala, it is not the best for cruising and about 4700rpm was the order of the day, but this first stage proved surprising as I averaged about 9 litres per 100km for this first leg.

Problem two appeared approaching Glendambo, which was to be my next fuel stop, when the sky caved in as I

ADELAIDE TO DARWIN AND BACK IN 6 DAYS THE PERFECT CLUBBIE TRIP???

hit the clutch to drop a gear and pass a truck and the clutch pedal went to the floor. In Glendambo to investigate and found the line from clutch master to slave cylinder had ruptured, (not sure if it was a rock hitting it or simply fractured by vibration of a solidly mounted engine), but the loan of an oxy from the local garage and a rough brazing job with much swearing as I attempted to refit a line that now shouldn't have fitted, and the problem was solved.



The SA/NT border

Unfortunately this had cost me two hours, and meant that I would now be travelling into the night hours to reach Alice Springs on the first night.

The rest of the trip to the Alice was event free, and I enjoyed the cruise nature of the trip, and as the weather was fine and clear, and the cold was not an issue as the day had warmed a little, and after my rough repair, the car was travelling well.

Shades of Barry Edson's trip to Perth, and Kym Nannes' circumnavigation of Oz came to mind as every stop brought out more people than it seemed, actually lived in the given town, and much explaining of the car and of the trip meant each further fuel stop, Coober Pedy, Marla and Erieldunda, saw me lose a little more time on each occasion.

Made Alice Springs by about 8.00pm, and at the motel, the owner

recognised it as a clubman (though she thought it was a 'PR?' something from Sydney), and again a small crowd soon surrounded the car. A good steak and a couple of XXXX Gold's and it was off for a well deserved and much needed sleep.

Part one of leg one was over, 1540km had been completed and Kestrel 7 was sniffing at the nostrils for the speed limit free part two of leg one.

Macca's again for breakfast Sunday morning (thank heaven only as God eats better than this), and again more questions from the (surprisingly) crowded restaurant(?), before heading to a carwash to high pressure the collection of wildlife that had used Kestrel 7 for target practice on the night before.



Just a few bugs

As the NT border to Alice Springs section had been in the dark, this was to be the first opportunity to try the speed limit free roads, and at about 11.00am I headed out of the Alice, and started the fast run to all points further north.

Third problem of the trip soon surfaced, as cruising at 170kph (6,000rpm) saw fuel consumption drop to 13.5 litres per 100km, which meant stopping every 200-230km for fuel. This was actually a bit of a two edged sword though, in that it added time to the trip, but also meant I was able to get out of the car and stretch

ADELAIDE TO DARWIN AND BACK IN 6 DAYS THE PERFECT CLUBBIE TRIP???

the legs. Again though, the attention it attracted, meant losing even more time.



Take a look – 6 lights on the shift light, 6800rpm in 5th, 170kph visible on speedo but no needle visible

The Territory is not all straight roads as many think, and the run up from the Alice was just superb, cruising on about 170kph and running up to 190-200kph to pass vehicles. The only thing is that the concentration levels are high and getting used to the closing distances because of speed differential is something of an acquired skill, but more than a few 4wd/caravan combinations saw Kestrel 7 pass them in very short order.

The next 1100km were covered in a little over 7¼ hours actual travelling time, however an additional 45 minutes (or thereabouts) in fuel/drink/food/ explain the trip-car stops, saw Kestrel 7 reaching Mataranka just as darkness fell.

Problem four became obvious during this part of the trip, as copious amounts of sun block did very little (note for return trip and hint to all taking long trips in sunny weather, is to use Zinc cream and use it liberally) and by Mataranka my existing nose had disappeared and I was starting on my second one – very sore indeed.

A dip in the springs cooled things down but as there was no accommodation at the springs (absolutely full of grey nomads and their 4wd/caravan combos), I had to move in to Mataranka for a bed for the night, and as this was only about 7km, I was happy to potter in at low speed. In reality this was essential as the windscreen was a mass of deceased wildlife and vision was a problem (read almost non-existent!).

Problem five then appeared, in the form of a small wallaby that appeared from stage right without warning. A big wrench on the wheel saw the unfortunate animal clip the right rear guard, thankfully without real damage to Kestrel 7, but with terminal damage to said Wallaby.

At the Mataranka Hotel for the night, a couple of icy cold Golds with three locals in the pub and the best “steak sandwich with the lot” in the world, and Kestrel 7 retired to sleep the sleep of the ‘right and the just’.

The next morning was a slow start, and checking over the car and getting ready for an easy run into Darwin, saw me on the road by about 10.00am. Again the roads from Mataranka to Katherine, and then onward were just a joy, 170kph plus most of the way and not a care in the world if the entire NT police force was patrolling!

Problem six surfaced on the section from Katherine to Adelaide River when after passing a road train and just easing back from 200kph, a slow moving, recalcitrant crow zigged while I zagged, and the slight “ping” I heard signalled another crow meeting his/her/it’s maker. Unfortunately the mongrel took my left hand mirror with him!!!

ADELAIDE TO DARWIN AND BACK IN 6 DAYS THE PERFECT CLUBBIE TRIP???

It may come as something of a surprise to those who have never been to the Territory, but this part of the world has a few of the very best clubbie roads imaginable, sweeping corners with elevation changes and no traffic, and no speed limits, but unfortunately still the ever present wildlife, so not all care is abandoned. Still great fun, out to Edith Falls (20 km each way) and 70km on the old road out from Pine Creek, just fantastic.



A rose between two thorns

In to Adelaide River for fuel and 'Barra and chips', and as I turned the car off at the Mobil for my final fuel stop before Darwin, those immortal words ran loud and clear across the forecourt.

"That's a f@#king Lotus Seven"!!!.

Kestrel 7 made the garage owners day, when after talking for a while and being told he had always wanted one (he certainly had a wealth of knowledge of all things clubman) I asked if he had ever driven one? He said he hadn't but one day he would, to which Kestrel 7 replied that that day had come! I then tossed him the keys and told him to take Kestrel 7 (unfairly referred to by certain Queenslanders at the Round-Up as the 'rent-a-clubbie' – there may be somebody who hasn't driven it but we can't work out who?) for a run.

About 10 minutes later (the longest 10 minutes in history) I saw the grin before anything else as he returned, and the excitement in his voice was a

dead give-away that he had 'given it a bit'. He could not believe the acceleration and handling of the car, but his words to his wife at the counter rang clear.

"That's it, we're f#@king getting one"!!!!

The Barra and chips were on the house, and as I was about to leave, a chap turned up to take photos and get details for entry on the Adelaide River tourism blog on the net. This has apparently been linked to ClubbiesSA.com for those interested.

Arrived in Darwin about 3.30pm, 3040km after leaving Adelaide and feeling absolutely stuffed. But I was totally exhilarated, warm, and with Kestrel 7 looking surprisingly untouched by the trip, was looking forward to the remainder of the week in Darwin.



SWBO

Had to pick up SWMBO from the airport later that afternoon, and so headed first to friends with whom we were staying to unload, and then to carwash to again high pressure the accumulated deceased wildlife and road grime off the car. After this, I stopped at the supermarket at Nightcliffe to collect some supplies.

Got a park three spaces from the door and went to do the shopping, but when I returned, to my shock and horror, someone had moved Kestrel 7 to the first space from the door. Closer examination suggested this was not Kestrel 7 after all, and as I

ADELAIDE TO DARWIN AND BACK IN 6 DAYS THE PERFECT CLUBBIE TRIP???

had not as yet consumed any further 'Golds', I thought I should investigate further, this strange phenomena of the self moving clubbie.

It turns out there is one clubbie in Darwin, it is red, and was parked two spaces from Kestrel 7.

It is a Locost (called a 'PBR 7'), was built by a chap in Woollongong, and is now owned by Mike Wileman, who is the port manager for Adsteam in Darwin. Mike described it as the perfect vehicle for the dry in Darwin, and after cards were exchanged and arrangements made to catch up later in the week for a drive and bench race, we headed off for a quick run to town and back. A great end to part two of leg one!!

Darwin was wonderful, with 30 degrees during the day, dropping down to about 24 overnight, and it is a town just made for a clubbie.



Kestrel 7 in the tropics

Over the next week the car attracted more attention than Pamela Anderson at a stag night, and everywhere we went or left it parked, a small crowd gathered within minutes.

We took the car everywhere, out to Litchfield Park (much better than "Kaka-don't") and even took it on the

dirt roads out to Rum Jungle Lake, to the amazement of all who noticed a clubbie parked in these bush locations, all without problem, and managed to get some good photos of the car in locations and on roads one doesn't normally associate with clubbies (I wonder how difficult a 4 wheel drive clubbie would be?).

One of the highlights of the week was the expression on the face of 76 year old Brother Ted, a Sacred Heart missionary, who also happens to be a mechanic, pilot and certified car nut, after taking the car for a run and being coaxed into sticking the boot in a bit. Just priceless!!

Also managed to get a new braided clutch made by Phil Kerr, the local brake and unusual requirements specialist in Darwin. Phil is a character, as he was a speedway outfit rider who was left a paraplegic after a racing accident.

Not one to let the grass grow under his feet, he started his own workshop, and got on with life, now employing about 6 guys and doing well. Phil gets about in a motorised wheelchair (with flames painted on the side???), but his daily driver is something else, an SS ute with a Harrop supercharger fitted, putting out 330kw at the rear wheels, doing sub-13 second ¼ miles and all on hand controls!

All too soon it was time to return to the southern winter, and so on Monday afternoon, once again loaded and fuelled, Kestrel 7 started south for the beginning of part one of leg two.

Only went as far as Katherine (a leisurely 320km in 2½ hours), where I stayed with Chris Dickson, a lecturer at Charles Darwin University, who is building a Locost and is also well advanced on the building (this should

ADELAIDE TO DARWIN AND BACK IN 6 DAYS THE PERFECT CLUBBIE TRIP???

read total re-engineering) of a Dutton kit car from England.

Early start on Tuesday heading for the Alice, and again cruising easily at 170kph. Just out of Tennant Creek, I passed a road train and a few nomads, pulling back in at about 170 or so, and there in front was an NT police 'candy' car (XR 6 Turbo) doing somewhat less than me.

Thought about the brake for two heartbeats and then flicked the indicator on and booted it to pass him at about 200kph. Eased back a little, and to my horror, he accelerated to sit not far off my rear end. Followed me the next ten km or so to Tennant Creek, then followed me when I pulled in for fuel, stopped behind me.

He came up to the car and said the best line I have ever heard from plod, "awesome little car, solid as a rock". Turned out it was a chance to give the Ford a blast and have a good look at the little red rocket that had just passed him, and was not even a mention of the actual speed at which I had just passed him.



Dirt road ahead

Into Alice exactly 7 hours and 40 minutes after leaving Katherine, including all stops and averaging 160kph for the trip. Just an amazing experience, and one Kestrel 7 handled without a whisper of objection or difficulty. Part one of leg two completed easily.

I found this part of the trip tiring though, with the concentration level required to maintain this level of speed for this length of time, and after checking Kestrel 7 over, and preparing it for the next day's run, I settled for a take-away and an early night.

Why the rush you ask? Unfortunately I was briefed for a trial at 9.30am on the Thursday and it is regarded as decidedly poor form to let your client get 'slotted' without even turning up to argue the matter!

Away early (Maccas again – does anyone really enjoy this rubbish), and the last part of the trip from the speed limit free sign to the border (314km) was dispatched in 1 hour 56 minutes, including a stop to put a 10 litre of fuel into the car, and an average speed of over 165kph.

Problem seven arose at this point, as having spent so long at high speeds, it is something of an anti-climax to come back to SA and have to potter along at 120 or so for the next 1200 km.

Made good time all the way though, until about 10 km past Pimba, having just pulled in from passing some nomads and a semi/B Double, and eased off the throttle, when the blinking lights of plod in the distance signalled another assault on Kestrel 7's wallet and demerit point stash.

Discussion as to unlikelihood of plod's parents having ever married proved fruitless in having him reconsider his position, and after about 15 minutes lost, Kestrel 7 headed for Port Augusta \$289 lighter and 3 points heavier.

Problem eight rose it's ugly head shortly after this, when as I moved position in the car coming out of the

ADELAIDE TO DARWIN AND BACK IN 6 DAYS THE PERFECT CLUBBIE TRIP???

Iron Stone Lagoon dip, and suddenly feeling my wallet was not in the pocket it should be. Stopped to find it but to no avail, and then realised I had put the wallet on the back of the car after having my licence returned to me, and had obviously driven off without it.

No cash, no cards and not enough fuel to get to Port Augusta if I went back to look for the wallet and couldn't locate it. Had enough to get back to Pimba, and thought if I couldn't locate it, I would try to work something out there.

God obviously smiles on clubbie drivers, or is it on devout 'Old Ignatians, as after about two hours of idling up and down the road, on high beam for twenty odd km back to spot where plod assaulted me, and then back to Iron Stone Lagoon and back again, my pious and deeply religious prayers (Jeezzus Fu#@king Chriiiiist) were answered and the wallet appeared on the side of the road, complete with all contents, and not even having been run over.

Unfortunately this lost much time and it was late, dark and dangerous (lots of kangaroos, sheep and black cattle on or near the road), as Kestrel 7 potted at 80kph the remaining 170km into Port Augusta. Silver lining to this cloud (aside from finding said wallet) was that at 80kph, Kestrel 7 managed 6 litres per hundred km.

Arrived back to 'Castle Doube' at 2.20am Thursday morning as I had left it, dark and quiet with all asleep, Kestrel 7 utterly exhausted, totally exhilarated, and marvelling over the fact that I had just gone to Darwin and back in 6 days (4 ½ days of actual travel time), and had done so with the ruptured clutch hydraulic line as the only mechanical issue.

The odometer showed 24,216, and Kestrel 7 had just done 7409km in 6 days (travelling time), had done over 3,000km at or above 160kph, had been driven on everything from freeway smooth double lanes to heavily corrugated red dust roads, and just about everything imaginable in between, all without so much as a shudder of complaint from the car, while bringing a bit of fun to an old stager of a driver and lots of other people along the way.



Rubber, dust and oil (and nearly dead AO32's)

Two questions then remain to be answered.

1. Was it worth it?

Absolutely!!!! The experience of a lifetime and one that could these days, only be done in a very few places in the world.

2. Would I do it again?

No! It is just too long and the run back from the border to Adelaide is just too slow to be enjoyable. The run up to the border is okay as there is some excitement at the prospect of the speed limit free roads, but not on the way back home. Then again, if I put the car on the train to and from Alice Springs

Cheers,
Paul Doube
AKA "Kestrel 7"