

◁ Trans Am, all that Homeland Security they put you through now, but Mum wanted to attend her big sister's 100th birthday party in St Louis. I decided I was being churlish so I shipped the car over and we did both. I soon lost interest in the rally: it was too slow, too dull. But we won our class then drove back by a more circuitous route, 18,000 miles in total. We met wolves, buffalo and lots of bears. We discovered that bears don't **** in the woods, they **** in the middle of the road.'

Then as now, Alastair drove his near-standard 1963 Rolls-Royce Silver Cloud III. It's not the sportiest car he owns, but it's certainly the farthest travelled: 'It's done a quarter of a million miles just on rallies – across Russia, China, Cambodia, Nepal, India, America. I bought it by accident, in 1993, after I did the Carrera Panamericana [a Mexican road race] in my Austin A35. That's another story... Anyway, the A35 was being serviced and I went to an auction in Florida, where I spotted this. It's been a great success, a laugh, especially when it beats Aston Martins up mountains, ha, ha, ha... Here comes Mum...'

Alastair's tender attentiveness to his mother seems quite at odds with his blunt persona. Ironically, it also suggests she is frailer than is actually the case. Aside from her need for a supportive arm, it's hard to believe that Dorothy turned 96 in January. After all, how many nonagenarians would even contemplate a long-distance road rally across Arctic wastes, or a developing country? Despite recovering from a touch of dysentery, she's as sharp as any competitor in the event, and one of the few who doesn't need spectacles to follow the road book.

Alastair checks that Mum is feeling OK, then glances over at the Burmese youngster hosing down the Rolls-Royce. 'I'd better give that chap a hand. He can't reach the middle of the roof.'

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Keenly perceptive, she's as forthright as her son, if rather more



PIT STOP Dorothy changing a wheel in Alaska on the 2012 Trans Am rally

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polite in her language; not that she finches at his. She grew up in Worksop and Sheffield, where her father designed brick linings for furnaces, and had many other interests besides, from cars and motorcycles to music and the natural world. 'My mother was American, and also very active. We all were. Coming from a large family – four brothers and three sisters – you had to be energetic to keep up. And being a redhead can make you pretty tough.'

It was her father who taught Dorothy to love maps. 'He was very cunning,' she says. 'We would go rambling and suddenly he'd say, "We're lost!" This absolutely paralysed me, so I started taking notice of our route. He also taught me never to sleep in the front seat of a car. If you're in the front, it's your duty to keep the driver awake.'

At 21, Dorothy married a Scottish Presbyterian vet, David Caldwell. Alastair, the youngest of three sons – 39 months between the oldest and Alistair – was born shortly before David joined the Army in 1943. Seven years later, disillusioned by post-war Britain, David accepted

a job offer in New Zealand, not least for the excellent trout fishing, and the Caldwells emigrated to a land of barefoot freedom for the children.

With family on three continents, international travel has been a constant ever since. 'But I've never been to Burma before,' says Dorothy. 'Of course I knew people who worked here, before the war. And I had a friend who spent time as a Japanese prisoner.'

David died in 1997 and Dorothy now lives in a retirement community in Hamilton, 80 miles south of Auckland. With typically black humour Alastair refers to it as The Death Camp, although it seems Dorothy has energetically taken over the running of the place. 'I've always enjoyed my life,' she says. 'Whatever was happening, even when it was bad, it was always interesting.'

Life has indeed been bad at times; her eldest child, Michael was 'extraordinarily affected' by meningitis at 26, and middle son Bill was killed in a motor-racing accident in 1966, at the age of 24. 'Alastair was Bill's mechanic, so he felt responsible. It was terrible, really unsettled him. He left for England the following year.'

But why is he so competitive?

'Badly brought up! Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha,' interjects Alastair. 'Actually I don't need to win. I just want to do better than I should. That's why I like driving unsuitable cars.'

'He's always been like that,' says Dorothy. 'I suppose he'll have to slow down at some point, but he's still very confident. If you keep on doing something, you can keep on doing it.'

And will she keep on doing it? 'If I can, why not? I've really enjoyed this rally. The people are very nice. The roads are very nice. And Burma is very interesting,' she says. 'I might come again.' ◆

The Road to Mandalay 2014 rally was won by Portuguese couple José and Maria Romão de Sousa. Alastair, Dorothy and the Rolls-Royce – combined age 217 years – finished 3rd in class and 7th overall. More information at hhclassicrollies.com and alastaircaldwell.com