

# Rally Round Haka Classic Rally

October 31 - November 25, 2016

When Steve received a phone call asking if he'd be interested in becoming the official photographer for a group of classic cars visiting New Zealand for a 26-day tour of New Zealand, it was an offer he couldn't refuse



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1. Rudi and Helga Friedrich get dusty in their 1966 Mercedes-Benz 230SL
2. In its element – Tracey Morris and Hayden Burvill's Escort Mexico
3. Gerd Buhler tackles a dusty pass in his BMW coupé
4. Walter and Birgit Knunz's 1955 Mercedes-Benz 220a
5. Annette Abaci's 1931 Invicta S-Type

UK-based Rally Round organises rallies and driving adventures across the globe for vintage and classic cars. In previous years, they've run events in South East Asia, South America, Burma, Bhutan and, of course, across Europe.

Their 26-day Haka Classic Rally brought a wide variety of cars to New Zealand, the oldest a 1926 Bentley 3-litre and the newest a 1990 Mercedes-Benz 560 SEC. Among the other interesting models was a Chrysler 75, an Invicta S-Type, an Alvis Speed 4.3 SA, a BMW 327/28 Sport-Coupé, a Bristol 401, a Porsche 911, a Ford Escort Mexico and a huge Cadillac De Ville that required lots of skill by driver John Horton on the winding 5,354km rally route stretching from Auckland to Christchurch.

The owners of all these awe-inspiring machines were generally wealthy individuals from Europe, the USA and Australia, including doctors, lawyers, bankers and building entrepreneurs. For example,



John and Ginny Horton's Cadillac DeVille on the Forgotten Highway

German rally enthusiast Andreas Pohl is on the Forbes billionaires list, and brought several members of his family over for the event, together with their friends, the Lembergs and the Peils. They drove a small fleet of Mercedes-Benz cars.

Andreas's daughter, Nathalie, is also successful in her own right through her swimming abilities – she swam the English Channel earlier this year and the Straits of Gibraltar prior to that, and is now planning an attempt at swimming Cook Strait in 2018.

A competitor that many Kiwis may recognize was Alastair Caldwell, who was brought up in New Zealand. Alistair was the manager of the McLaren F1 team back in the days when James Hunt and Nelson Piquet were racing for McLaren in the 1970s. These days, he owns a storage company in England and spends most of his time rallying one of his many cars around the world, including a Porsche 968 that he used in a Turkey-to-Dubai rally only two weeks prior to arriving in New Zealand. Other cars are a Mercedes 280SL and a Porsche 912 that will be driven in Japan early next year, and a Ford Escort Mexico. The Escort was actually loaned to his friend, Hayden Burville, for driving in this rally and was the same one that Alastair drove to a first in class finish on the 2010 NZ Silver Fern Rally. He also owns a Ferrari 250 GTO replica that was restored in New Zealand and will be used in next year's rally through Cuba.

His mode of transport on this event was a 1963 Rolls-Royce Silver Cloud III navigated by his mother, Dorothy Caldwell, a perky 98-year old resident of Hamilton, who was recently inducted into the Guinness Book of Records as the world's oldest rally navigator. She had previously navigated for Alastair in five other rally events, having previously paired up to compete in the Trans America rally twice, and The Road to Mandalay, a rally through Burma in 2014.

## RALLY START

We were welcomed at the Langham Hotel in Auckland with a dinner

and a haka performed by boys from Mt Albert Grammar. The following day the rally started with a regularity trial through Cleveland. Regularity sections are a way of allowing safe competition to take place at legal speeds without the need for closed road sections.

Competitors are given an average speed that they must run to, over an unspecified distance of several kilometres on interesting back roads, and are penalised for every second they're late or early at the final timing point. The rally also included competitive sessions at race circuits, the first of them at Hampton Downs, where crews had to set the fastest time over four laps and were penalised according to the gap behind the fastest car in their category.

On day two, gremlins started creeping into various cars, keeping the official rally mechanics working late into the night to sort out issues ranging from engine timing woes to a broken starter motor. Rally Round has fully-equipped mechanic trucks following every rally, ensuring nobody is left behind. These trucks carry essential workshop tools from spanners to welding equipment and a range of useful spare parts. Among the more unusual items they carry are tennis balls that can be used to pack sagging springs. Head mechanic Charlie McGowan says he never leaves home without them and, on this event, they saved the



Rural obstructions

day for the Cadillac.

By the end of the first week, all 20 cars had endured the 'easy' North Island stages of the rally and enjoyed a rest day in Wellington before departing on the ferry the following morning to start the next leg of the journey in the South Island.

As timing would have it, we were at just the right place to watch the Guy Fawkes display on Wellington Harbour.

Up to this point, we'd driven 1361km, contested seven regularity stages, visited three race tracks — Hampton Downs, Taupō and Manfield — as well as taken time out for sightseeing excursions to Hobbiton, Southward Museum, the Buried Village in Rotorua and to the Republic of Whangamomona, where we had our passports stamped and enjoyed fantastic burgers for lunch before continuing along the Forgotten World Highway.

Experienced German couple Gerd and Birgit Buhler were leading the vintage class and the overall rally classification in their extremely rare 1938 BMW 327/28 Sport Coupé, one of only 89 produced. The original owner was well-known German racing driver and winner of the 1930 Mille Miglia, Huschke Von Hanstein. Von Hanstein owned the car from new before it went into storage during World War 2 and was later



Alastair and Dorothy Caldwell in their Rolls-Royce



Erich and Alice Hoop's 1926 Bentley

requisitioned by the German Allied forces. The Buhlers have owned it since 2012 and heavily modified it to suit long distance rallying events all over the globe, including Rally Round's 2014 Road to Mandalay rally in Myanmar, which they nearly won.

Hard on their heels was the Australian crew of Justin Gan and cobbler David Hart in a 1969 Porsche 911T. Gan purchased this Targa-prepared Porsche only recently and the Haka Classic was his first proper outing in the car. He has competed in eight special-stage rallies in Australia, but this was the first time he had competed in a regularity rally, while for navigator David, this was his first rally of any kind.

## TO THE SOUTH

The South Island leg started off with a drive (and regularity tests) around Queen Charlotte Drive, before we made our way to Blenheim for the night. While in Blenheim, we stopped by Peter Jackson's Omaka Aviation Heritage Centre. This was of great interest to all, especially British crew Adrian and Barbara Shooter in their 1952 Bristol 401, as a very rare Bristol cargo-plane was on display near the museum entrance. They were promptly directed onto the field to park up alongside the winged variant for a photo-shoot.

The following day, one might say the 'rally' started in earnest, with several regularity sections over tricky gravel roads through the Awatere Valley. Many of the older cars did well here as all of them were properly rally prepared with sump shields; two of the more modern cars weren't and experienced sump damage – so there was more work for the Rally Round mechanics as we arrived in Hanmer Springs for our overnight stop and a rest day with a whale-watching trip to Kaikoura.

Only two days later the earthquake occurred but, fortunately, by then



Justin Gan and David Hart in their 1969 Porsche 911T

the rally had driven on through Arthur's Pass and some exciting gravel roads to Nelson. On this leg, there were several regularity stages and with hot competition at the front, everyone was trying their hardest. This is when the leading BMW 327/28 slipped into a ditch on a wet forest road, handing the lead to the Porsche 911.

After two nights in Nelson, the rally was on the road again, this time down the West Coast en route to Arrowtown and the luxurious Millbrook Resort. With the calibre of entrants that Rally Round attracts, the hotels they use are generally five star-rated. Meal-times were a great time to hear all sorts of stories. I was amazed to hear that many entrants owned more than a handful of cars including several prize-winning machines, among them a one-off Porsche 930 Turbo Cabriolet built for the 1987 Frankfurt Motor Show, and a genuine prototype Ferrari.

Cars of particular interest on the rally included the low-slung 1931 Invicta S-Type of international car consultant, Annette Abaci. There were only 75 of this model ever built, of which approximately 68 still exist. Considered one of the greatest of pre-war sports cars, it had been on Annette's wish list for many years, when finally she came across one for sale in the UK. Only recently rebuilt, it completed the rally without a hitch apart from a brief breakdown due to fuel vapourisation.

Adrian and Barbara Shooter's 1952 Bristol 401 was another of the many interesting cars on the tour. Manufactured by the Bristol Aeroplane Company that diversified into motor vehicles when their aircraft were no longer in demand after the war, it was a development of the Bristol 400. Using plans acquired from the bombed BMW factory after WWII, the 400 was based on the BMW's pre-war 326, 327 and 328, so the Shooters' car actually shared a lot with the 1938 BMW driven on the rally by Gerd Buhler.

Barbara bought the "seductively beautiful" 401 on impulse in 2014 and it was restored by Rally Round mechanic Charlie McGowan at his workshop in England.

## TO THE FINISH

The final leg of the journey had us travelling to Te Anau, where we split into two groups for rest-day trips to either Milford Sound or Doubtful Sound. The following day the rally reached Invercargill where we (myself included, in a Toyota RAV4) enjoyed several laps of the Teretonga circuit. As expected, the Porsche of Gan and Hart once again came out on top here. Two other highlights of the day were visits to E Hayes & Sons hardware store where Burt Munro's Indian Scout is displayed, and



1. The author (left) with the world's oldest navigator and Alistair Caldwell
2. The New Zealand contingent that undertook marshalling duties on the tour
3. Overall and Classic winners – Justin Gan and David Hart
4. Tour entrants at Rotorua's Buried Village

the fantastic Bill Richardson's Transport World, which had everyone talking about it that evening around dinner.

The rally moved onto Dunedin for another rest day/sightseeing day/car repair day, via further regularity stages on the Catlins Coast. From here the rally tackled the spectacular Danseys Pass and we were fortunate to have track time on yet another world class facility, Highlands Park. Once we had completed our two laps behind the pace car, some of the entrants decided it would be a good idea to get a fast-lap in a Radical-U Drive or the Porsche GT3.

The next stop was Lake Tekapo and a series of twisty gravel back roads, ideal for regularity tests, many of which were soon to be utilised in the Silver Fern Rally.

Our month-long adventure finished off in Christchurch, where a gala awards dinner was held at The George Hotel. The leaders for most of the event and finally overall rally winners were Justin Gan and novice



navigator David Hart in the Porsche 911T, while Gerd and Birgit Buhler were vintage (pre-war) category winners in the BMW 327/28, some consolation for losing the overall lead in the earlier stages.

US Cadillac crew John and Ginny Horton won the 'Spirit of the Rally' Award for their unflinching good humour, and Dorothy Caldwell was presented with a special award recognising her achievement – she and Alastair actually finished seventh overall.

Competition aside, the event was really about the fun of taking part with like-minded enthusiasts from across the globe, and the chance to explore a country that everyone agreed was amazingly beautiful.

There are still many more great roads in New Zealand that the event didn't have time to cover, so hopefully we'll see Rally Round on our shores again soon.

In the meantime, for details of their future rallying adventures in Europe, Asia, Africa and South America, go to: [rallyround.co.uk](http://rallyround.co.uk)



Zulu mechanic's truck following the tour cars



Barbara Shooter, 1952 Bristol 401 and winged Bristol



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