

Mid-Winter Christmas Run – Saturday 12 July 2014

For most of us Kiwis – the concept of Christmas in the middle of winter is just that – a concept! So when one gets an invitation to join in with Winter Celebrations by the Manawatu MG Club, one takes into account:

- ❖ Visions of:
 - Traditional Christmas cards
 - Dashing through the snow
 - Warm winter clothes
 - Roast Turkey, Christmas crackers
 - Celebrations with family and friends on a dark cold night
 - Indoor games and fun
- ❖ A necessary component – the MG, not a one horse open sleigh!

So having identified the vision and the componentry, one ensured that the MG was prepared – check: oil, water, petrol, and check wardrobe – warm clothes and best shoes (after all, the invitation said: ‘dancing’?). It was the ideal opportunity to wear my latest purchase – a real fur jacket – aged about 50-60 years, bought from a second hand shop. A most suitable accessory when driving the MG albeit with the top up in the middle of winter.

With heartfelt thanks to Lynette and Pat Widdup for their great planning and organisation, about 12 cars met at the Property Brokers Car Park at 2.45pm in Palmerston North for the first stage of our trip out to the Herb Farm. The dashing through the snow concept did not come to life, but some of us wended our way through cold wintry rain on our way out to Grove Road. It was lovely meeting up with friends from previous trips, and most interesting to hear Lynn Kirkland speak of her vision and the history of the Herb Farm.

Our next stage of the run took us dashing between snowy showers through Ashhurst then up over the Saddle Road into a quickly darkening evening, gaining glimpses of gigantic ghostly wind turbines waving arrogantly to us as we wended way to the Te Apiti Windfarm at the top of the Tararuas. As we reached the windfarm site, many discovered evidence we were definitely not in a one horse open sleigh as the low lying MG’s scraped and graunched their bottoms over a viscous speed hump installed in the parking area. It was here that we were treated to the spooky swooshing sound of these tall turbines, ethereal in the heavily clouded cold windy dimming night. Been there many times but the existence of these massive structures still continue to amaze me. Then just before we set off for our next stop, the sun broke through between the low threatening cloud and the horizon, sending golden red rays across the sky, turning the turbines into burnished auburn apparitions.

Back on the road, we all journeyed our way down the Saddle Road, over the Balance Bridge and Old Gorge Road, heading for the Makomako Road at the eastern foot of the Tararua Ranges. Our planned destination was Pahiatua and the Black Stump Café where Christmas celebrations and a very hospitable Restaurateur awaited.

As with every well organised winter evening of social interaction; friendship, laughter, drinks and would you believe? A game of Beetle pursued! I figured some days later, I hadn't played beetle for at least 50 years! When I spoke to my daughter and granddaughter of it, their eyes glazed over with scepticism. But it was, the Beetle games I mean, truly fun.

The Christmas dinner including Roast Turkey, Roast Lamb, Roast Beef and a wonderful selection of roasted and steamed veges, was truly sumptuous. This course was followed by a classic Kiwi Christmas dessert of pavlova, trifle, fresh fruit salad, cream and ice cream. I would not like to have met any speed humps or unexpected rough roading on the way home. Such a meal, beautiful as it was, and one which encouraged second helpings would certainly have had a detrimental effect on the payload of an already low-sitting MG!

John Callesen, a former All Black and his wife were guests of honour at the dinner and John provided us with a fascinating resume of his life, growing up in rural Manawatu, his All Black experiences and facing the need to diversify on his family farm. His apparent ability to recognise and take opportunities, his ongoing interest in vintage vehicles and classic cars and travel proved to be the perfect after dinner speech.

Yet again, a very successful MG event, I was unable to attend Sunday's breakfast at Lynette and Pat's place followed by a visit to John Callesen's man shed, but have no doubt it would have been a morning of good food, friendship and fossicking among motoring collections. Thank you again Lynette and Pat.....

...Sunday morning saw several Manawatu members and Wellington visitors gather at the home of Pat and Lynette for a delicious breakfast and then followed a most enjoyable visit to the rural home of our guest speaker John Callesen and his wife Judy.

John's terrific restoration work and collection of vintage cars absorbed the men and Judy took the ladies on a special 'girls' tour that was a real treat for them. This couple have much to share of their amazing life and we felt rather privileged to spend time with them.