

A National Humber Rally - Renmark SA – 29 March to 1 April 2002

Monday 25 March – Day One of our holidays:

Took the Mighty Mark IVB (MM4) to Ringwood to have the speedometer recalibrated. This involved disconnecting the speedometer, driving the car along a measured mile with a revolution counter on the end of the speedometer cable. From there, a very small ratio gearbox was constructed, which was then installed between the speedometer cable and gearbox, all of which makes the speedometer and odometer as accurate as they can be. The MM4 was then loaded to the gunwales in preparation for the trip to SA.

Tuesday 26 March – Coonawarra SA:

We left bleak, windswept Melbourne at 8:30 am, me in MM4 and Lotte in the Humber Civic (Honda). The plan was to leave the Humber Civic in the Castlemaine storage facility (Shed A) for collection on our return. We drove straight into a raging rainstorm a few minutes out of town. Water leaked in everywhere, and as I was on my own, some frantic mopping up with towels and chamois ensued. Fortunately, it didn't last long, and no long-term damage resulted. I will have to look at resealing the front and rear windscreen one day, along with the front air vent, side quarter windows, accelerator pedal etc.

Just for something different, we purchased a 2 bedroom home unit in Castlemaine on our way out. Hey, if we're going to be broke, we may as well do it properly! Long-term investment, short-term accommodation for Lotte's mum & dad while the houses are being built.

After installing the Civic and concluding the signing of contracts on the unit, we meandered our way to Coonawarra (SA) for our first overnight stop. MM4 didn't miss a beat. Many fine wines later, the day finally concluded.

Wednesday 27 March – Mannum SA:

The day began slowly. Could it have been the many fine wines the previous evening? Eventually, we progressed along the Dukes highway, through flat country, easy traveling, with not a lot of excuses to stop. Lunch was at Keith, pleasant enough, but seemed fairly isolated. We had been advised previously that Mannum was an attractive place to stay in preference to Murray Bridge. Given that we have no particular bias towards either, we chose Mannum, arriving approximately sundown. Fortune favoured the brave as we didn't have any accommodation booked, and there was only one motel in town. As it turned out, it had vacancies, was very comfortable, and had magnificent views over the river. Mannum is a very pretty town with lots of antique shops. As often happens, a local came up and mentioned that his father, uncle, grandparents etc had a Humber, and as far as he knew, one or two were still under some trees at his old property near Renmark somewhere. Further details were not forthcoming as he was going to restore them one day. MM4 ran superbly.

Thursday 28 March – Clare SA:

Another slow start to the day. We had to wait for the abovementioned antique attractions to open, and anyway, I needed coffee. As happens occasionally, the proprietor of one such establishment said that he knew of someone that knew someone that had a couple of old Humber stored in a shed somewhere. Names and details were exchanged for later research. It was alleged that one of the stored Humber had only 3000 miles on it. As yet, I haven't given up looking for it, but it may turn out to be one of those famous urban (rural) myths.

Working our way slowly towards Clare, we stumbled across more antique shops at Mount Pleasant. I managed to pick up an early Modern Motor with a picture of a Redex Rally Mark 4 on the front cover. Unfortunately, it was just an enticing cover, with no details of the vehicle inside. As an aside, I would appreciate any information on the Redex Rally Humber, including reports, specifications etc. I know that these were supposed to be standard, but the MM4 had "Redex" front springs fitted to it when I purchased it. I don't know of any other "options" that may have been fitted to the rally cars.

After a totally trouble free run, we arrived at Clare Thursday evening in time to unload everything, clean up, and go to a local establishment for an evening meal. The service was fantastic (we were the only patrons) the food fabulous. Lotte got adventurous and had wallaby shanks braised in red wine (delicious!), I was boring and had normal chicken stuff.

Good Friday 29 March – Rally Registration Day

We ventured along a “scenic tourist” road, a term that is used lightly. The country was exceptionally dry, and the road gravel and dusty. It did however wind along a ridge that offered views to the west forever. Part way along the track, out in the middle of nowhere, a Mark VI Hawk appeared out of a cloud of dust from the opposite direction. We stopped and chatted briefly, but unfortunately didn’t take any photographs. It could so easily have been a scene from 45 years ago.

Further along, we were passing a small vineyard, nestled in the hills and trees when a whistling noise interrupted our progress. I immediately stopped MM4, fearing some mechanical failure. Fortunately, the noise was still audible when MM4 was switched off. I still don’t know what the whistling noise was. It was either a vocal bird, or a very convincing bird alarm to keep the flying feathered friends (fiends?) off the vines.

We had lunch somewhere, and then participated in the “meet and greet” registration process. It was lovely to see familiar faces and chat to new ones. Rally packs were distributed and regalia purchased.

The evening meal of roast potatoes with all the trimmings was held in a local park, which was very pleasant, until a fairly brisk cool breeze sprung up. This did have one positive effect: the Humber Australia meeting was very efficient and effective. The cool certainly provided the necessary impetus to progress the administrative side of things along quickly.

Saturday 30 March – Display and Judging

Much car washing and polishing later, everyone assembled at a recreation oval, initially round the back under some trees, and then in a sunny location that was more visible to the passing public. At this point, Lotte and I separated, temporarily. I had been seconded to assist the judging, and Lotte kept the Victorian club profile up by selling regalia.

My Bit:

The standard of Humber presented was once again magnificent. The judging split into 3 categories: interior; exterior; and under the bonnet. Points out of ten were awarded for components of each category, dependent on condition and authenticity. All category sub totals were then combined to provide eventual winners.

I had the good fortune to be judging the exterior, and quite exhilarating it proved to be. One day, I will have a car worthy of entering a display, but not for quite some time. All in all, it took two of us 1½ hours to judge 23 vehicles.

Lotte’s Bit:

The front oval has a long gentle slope down to some large trees bordering the main road. After Ray had parked the car and set off to do the judging, I set up table and chairs in front of MM4, and was arranging the regalia items that I had brought to sell when I noticed that MM4 seemed to be closer than I remembered. I dropped the stuff I was holding, threw myself against the bonnet and yelled for help! Fortunately, the MM4 had only just started rolling very gently and had run over and jammed my sturdy plastic regalia tub under the wheel, so I was holding it – just! Arthur Ramsay (Tamworth NSW) hauled open the front door and pulled the handbrake on. Thank you Arthur! After my heart rate subsided a little, Gaston Saint (Vic) then carefully reversed MM4 so that I could free the regalia tub. Thank you Gaston! Honestly Ray, if you’re going to bump me off, you’re going to have to do better than that!!

Back to the Rally:

The Lady Mayoress kindly attended and gave a speech, selecting her favourite Humber based on fond memories of her younger days. The winner was the stately Mark II from Broken Hill. Ten vehicles were then selected for a drive around the local horseracing track for display during the local Easter meeting. As we weren't picked, we made our way back to the motel for a well-earned rest.

The evening meal was provided at the local sporting club, and proved highly popular. It had been a fairly warm day, and many thirsts were quenched. We slept well that night.

Sunday 31 March – Sightseeing:

45 fabulous Humbers formed a convoy to Burra, a local historic precinct. We met up with fellow Vic club members Phil and Kerry Johnson, who happened to be holidaying in town. This was a big bonus for us, as they had visited Burra several times before and knew the area well. It was quite a warm day, and the black MM4 attracts heat quite nicely, so it was much more comfortable to leave our car on display and be chauffeured around town in air-conditioned 4WD comfort. Burra turned out to be a very interesting place to visit, and by all accounts, one day was not enough to explore all places of interest. Our guides use Burra as a recuperation, relaxation and holiday retreat; such is the atmosphere of the place. Wonderful antique shops everywhere – Lotte was in seventh-heaven, and bought a vintage doll she had been wanting for some time.

The presentation dinner on Sunday night was once again a memorable affair. For the first time this rally, we were late. This was a blessing, as we had to sit at the remaining available places, and hence enjoyed chatting to fellow enthusiasts who we otherwise may not have. Tales tall and true were part of the evening's entertainment, along with the various speeches and award presentations. Congratulations to the Willimotts for taking out the Grand Prize. Keith had once again put in a mighty effort making the Sceptre highly presentable.

Monday 1 April – Picnic Farewell:

Everyone headed off to Riverton for tea and biscuits, farewells, promises of reunions, and a tour of Sholtz's historic homestead, blacksmith's shop, and wheelwright shop.

The road into Riverton crosses the main Adelaide to Broken Hill highway, with poor signage, obscured crossroads sign, and faint road markings. We were across the intersection before we realised that we should have turned right into the township, as did the two Humbers directly ahead of us. This is the only sad bit of the trip, fortunately resulting only in damaged metal and not damaged people. We slowed to make a u-turn to go back into town, when we heard behind us the sound all drivers dread – the sound of metal hitting metal and tyres squealing. Neil and Kathleen Hiho had an appalling crash with a red hire car, a Nissan Pulsar driven by a young couple on holiday from Great Britain.

Everyone walked away, thank goodness, but the cars were a wreck. The police and medics were there very quickly, as were other Humber drivers. The SA club members were magnificent – taking over the care of the drivers and passengers after they had been given the medical all clear. Special thanks to: Helen Szuty, Wendy Avery, David and Claudine Darwin. Wendy took the English couple under her wing; David and Claudine provided the Hiho's with a bed for the night and made arrangements to tow the Hiho's Humber into Adelaide. I know others were involved, who also deserve thanks for their help and support – Humber people are very nice people.

After morning tea and farewells, we headed off for more sightseeing. We were spending an extra night in Clare, as we had no desire to be heading home on a busy Easter Monday. We toured magnificent Martindale Hall, the building used as the school in "Picnic at Hanging Rock" just to get some decorating ideas for Linden Mansion! On to Mintaro, another Heritage listed town, then a quick tour of the Apple Winery at Burra, which we hadn't

had time for the previous day. The Cider Beer (11% alcohol!) was delicious; Lotte bought a couple of those and some Apple Wine (also 11% alcohol).

Tuesday 2 April – Mildura:

We left Clare with many fond memories, mostly of the relaxing enjoyable nature of the entire rally. We stopped at Morgan for a visit to an antique shop (shut), Waikerie for lunch, Renmark for afternoon coffee and Mildura for an overnight stay. Still the MM4 rolled along. It was however feeling the heat (33 degrees), although not as much as the occupants, but still causing some concern. It was now evident that some fumes were developing, and on the whole the trip wasn't all that pleasant.

Wednesday 3 April – Home!

Left Mildura quite early for us (9:30 am:~) and headed across the desert towards Bendigo. We stopped at Ouyen for morning coffee, Wycheproof for lunch, Charlton for afternoon coffee, and Castlemaine to swap vehicles. Once again we had managed to do all our driving in daylight. (I'm not that keen on driving a black Humber with small tail lights at night, particularly since I found out at Clare that my number plate light doesn't work. I must fix that one-day.) When we pulled up at Shed A, it became evident that MM4 now had an obvious oil leak, and will need some attention before the next rally. Still, it managed to carry us to and from the rally, about 1600 miles, without missing a beat. You can't ask for more than that.

Our rally concluded about 8:30 pm: Wednesday evening when I pulled up at Essendon.

Hi Lites:

Merv and Maree Sherlock arrived with their Humber making a curious knocking noise, this after a saga of electrical problems. First the electricians: Merv assures me he can now remove and replace a generator blindfolded, after having removed and replaced it a number of times, all in the quest to extinguish an infamous red light on the dash. An Auto Electrician had overhauled the generator before Merv set off on the big trip, but on arrival, still the red light glowed. The Humber "experts" once again gathered like moths to a flame. Opinions varied, but eventually consensus was that the voltage regulator was the problem. Now, it turns out that a particular unnamed Queensland member has a voltage regulator fitted to his Sceptre, for display purposes only, to appease the judges. This is because he has an alternator fitted and no longer needs the regulator. The "display only" regulator was installed, and lo and behold, the red light extinguished, and the amp meter did what amp meters are supposed to do. Thanks very much to Lawrie Bennett for your assistance with this one. Not content with finishing this saga, Merv came up with another one. "My Humber is making a strange knocking noise." The Humber "experts" once again gathered like moths to a flame. Some said bearings, others pistons, and the drive plate was mentioned. The oil pressure was good and constant, no endplay apparent, and the noise didn't appear to be getting worse. One NSW member suggested that this was a normal occurrence as the vehicle hadn't been driven much, and more so after an oil change. In the end, and given that no real alternative was available, nothing was done and Merv headed for home.

PS. Merv phoned me after returning safely to their humble abode. Congratulations to Steve Rowland (NSW) for excellent diagnosis. You get the "Humber Expert" award for the rally.

Not to be outdone, Gaston and Cheryl Saint also had their share of difficulties. Apparently Gaston has a penchant for leaving the battery jumper leads at home. Also, some spark plugs began to foul up. I hope you and your Humber make it home.

Our thoughts are with the HiHos, who unfortunately had to leave their Humber in SA for the time being.

Incidentally, the differential gear modifications were a mixed blessing. Having increased the ratio by about 20% (from 2.75:1 to 3.25:1) MM4 was much easier to drive. It just cruised at 60 to 65 mph mile after mile, hills or no

hills. On the other hand, it felt like fuel consumption increased by about 20%. I guess it just proves once again that you can't have your cake and eat it too.

I attempted to find the mythical 3000-mile Humber on the way home. No luck this time, but I haven't given up yet.

Rally Participants from Victoria:

Colin and Anne ANDERSON	1956 Hawk Mk VI
Alan and Margaret ARTHUR	1963 Sceptre Mk 1A
Chas and Margaret GRIMES	Modern
Neil and Kathleen HIHO	1964 Super Snipe Series IV
Ray and Lotte LINDEN	1956 Super Snipe Mk IVB
Ken and Noelene LOONE	1927 Roadster (plus a couple of pushbikes)
Steve and Helen MORTON	1967 Super Snipe Series VA
Kevin MULL and Lewis HULL	1964 Super Snipe Series IV
Gaston and Cheryl SAINT	1965 Super Snipe Series V
Merv and Marie SHERLOCK	1963 Super Snipe Series IV
Donald and Patricia SMITH	1963 Super Snipe Series IV
Keith and Margaret WILLIMOTT	1964 Sceptre
Vic WILSON	1970 Holden

VIC -	13 Cars
NSW -	13 Cars
QLD -	2 Cars
WA -	2 Cars
SA -	15 Cars

45 Cars in total, 95 Humans

'Till the next time,
Happy Humbering

Ray & Lotte