

CLASSIC OUTBACK SERVICE

Service crews - last to leave and first to arrive. Come along for the ride on the 2014 Classic Outback Trial

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How would you like a couple of weeks off work driving around the countryside? A different town each night, new scenery each day and new people with similar interests to meet. With a bit of luck, maybe someone will contribute towards fuel and accommodation too. Sound Okay? Great. Bring your sunscreen.

And your tool chest. And the ute, the tarpaulins, a welder, a spare gearbox and differential for my rally car and this big box of spare parts. What? Sounds like you'll need a trailer to carry all that? Great idea, we'll have enough

room for the spare engine. I like how this is going. See you in Parkes on Thursday!

Did I mention there will be some spanner work morning, noon and night? If it's raining at 2 am you'll still be lifting the new gearbox up into place in the Motel car park? Did I mention that you'll have to be at particular service rendezvous points at exactly the right time, ready to diagnose and repair any car problem in very limited time? And did I mention that even if the car isn't broken, that just means it's about to, so what say you help me go over the car from stem to stern each evening. Oh, and we'll give it a clean too inside and out and underneath - it'll need it.

And can you bring us some sandwiches?





Without question the most spontaneous and loudest applause at the presentation night in Renmark was reserved for the Service crews on the 2014 Classic Outback Trial. It was the chance for the competitors to publicly thank their mates for keeping them in the event over the last week. In many cases one or more of the service crew were involved in preparing the car beforehand too. Even those competitors that did not have a service crew benefitted from the presence of this selfless and masochistic bunch. If there was a bracket to weld up or a nut and bolt to be borrowed, any one of the crews on the COT would be there giving a hand. A few even regularly carried fuel for other teams.

While it's true that the camaraderie between the competitors was commendable, the same certainly existed between the service crews on the road. You get that when you share a common experience. In this case, following each other's dust for hundreds of kilometers to be at a service point for just a few minutes. Then a few hundred kilometers more to the next. Get there, get ready to fix anything and fast, and wait. And wait. And pack up and do it all again. And there's no trophy for any of that.

Of course the service crews themselves are having their own rally. Not in the Dakar Rally sense of it, but still demanding. They have to navigate all the transport sections of the event and that's not always on the smoothest of roads. They have to conserve their vehicles, often towing a trailer, yet still push on to meet their team in time to perform whatever miracles are required. Service crews did break down but every time, one or more service crews pulled over to help get them going.

Part of the miracle they perform is in diagnosing problems, assessing the implications and quickly deciding on the appropriate fix, given the constraint of time. Often at the service rendezvous point there was no service time allowed so any time lost on a repair would cost the competitor points. 'The battery is nearly flat. Is there time to change the failing alternator now or do we throw the fully charged spare battery in and change it at the 10 minutes service break after the next two competitors?' Diagnosis in a second and a judgment call. If you're servicing for a team in contention for an outright or class win, the skill and experience of the service crew can get you over the line.



Ashton/Niixon pull in for a 10 minute service late on day 5. Andrew Paice doing the refuel



The Mitsubishi Galant service crew lend a hand to weld up a broken shock absorber mount on the lead Datsun 1600 of Andrew and David Travis



Tracy and Rachel - service for Andy Crane and Dave Anderson had their own troubles - a broken trailer leaf spring between Cobar and Ivanhoe.



At Nymagee, a service stop on the way to Cobar: Service in front of the old Butchery for Rayner's and Swan's. The bar of the Metropolitan Hotel - Publican Darren Taylor's daughter Rebel is your host. Dolly Betts, President of the Nymagee CWA. Ralf and Magnus from Sweden, servicing for Ian and Val Swan (Volvo) the Rayners and Warren Briggs/Matt DeVaus (1965 Mustang.)

Another similarity to the competitors is the diversity of the backgrounds and experience of the service crews. It's common enough to find that a service crew comprises the wives or girlfriends of the competitors, like Tracey and Rachel chasing Andy Crane/Dave Anderson in the service van towing a trailer purchased during the Red Centre to Gold Coast Trial in 2008. Sometimes the family is supplemented by a fellow car club member or two, as in the case of John Cooper/Ross Warner where their wives were joined by Vince and Kay Harlow from the N.S.W. Classic Rally club. Then there

was the Sawyer brothers who had their sister Jenny and Father Geoffrey on duty (pictured on next page). Geoffrey was a competitor in the 2012 event. The service crew for the Thompson/Hind Celica went unnamed on their competitor information sheet, simply described as "Hopeless but helpful." Helpful indeed. Of the 3 Celica's entered, only the Thompson/Hind entry finished, a fine 14th outright too.

At the other end of the spectrum were the service crew for eventual winners Andrew and David Travis,

none other than Rodney Jones and Tony Barrie. Regular podium finishers Steve Ashton/Ro Nixon had another legend along in the form of John Gray whose service crew work can be traced back to the 1970's with Australian Championship wins with Greg Carr, to the 1979 Repco, to Paris-Dakar rallies for Bruce Garland and more.

Not content with the talents of Peter Washington and R-Tech's Tony Robinson, Australian Safari winner Ian Swan and wife Val invited Ralf Christensson and Magnus Widen from Sweden to service their Volvo,





the RS2600 Ford Capri of David and Sarah Rayner and the brutal '65 Ford Mustang of Warren Briggs/Matt DeVaus. Despite being from Sweden, it was not the Volvo but with the Mustang where their real expertise lay. Rumour has it they'll be back in 2016, but as competitors. Robert and Starr Mifsud also had an international flavour to their service crew when Marc Azzopardi flew in from San Francisco especially to join Danny Castro and David Mifsud to service their Datsun Bluebird.

Other teams had the luxury of 'brand experts' in their service crew – people that have been building and servicing a particular marque for 40+ years. Once

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such crew was Tony Jordan/Richard Davidson in their Triumph 2.5. They had Trevor Seaman and Graham Kilby who have been involved in rallying Triumph's since the 1970's. Another was Gerry Bashford/Ray Daniels in their Ford Escort Mexico with the Escort 'guru' Angelo Curic.

Whatever the experience and ability levels of the service crews, each was on a par with dedication and selfless effort. True mateship and friendship. They also added quite a bit of colour and noise to the evening meals it must be said, when they weren't lying under their cars in the gravel car park that is. 🇺🇸

