

Targa Tasmania 2010 – A Wrap.

First Podium for Skelta Team.

Following what can only be described as the most challenging motorsport event in their experience, Skelta crew Ray Vandersee and Cameron Reeves notched up an outstanding second outright in this year's grueling Targa Tasmania. After 2200km of anything from torrential downpours to beautiful sunny days, Vandersee was quick to praise the efforts of the whole crew and supporters for achieving such a great result. "We would not have been anywhere without the help of each and every one." said Vandersee.



"I'd particularly like to acknowledge the support of Spitwater Australia, Kumho Tyres and Petro Fuels for their assistance in getting the team to Tasmania and providing the necessary equipment to get the job done. And of course the ongoing support of Vanderfield Pty Ltd, Skelta's parent company is greatly appreciated." expressed a grateful Vandersee.

"Car preparation was exemplary. For that I must thank Tim Powell and his offsider Richard Toms. The work of the other workshop crew of Justin, Jimmy and Paul was also faultless. Finally the 'during event' support of Service Tactician Ian Daniel & Frank Gallagher meant that the two car team were kept in the event from start to finish."

Ray takes up the story.....

The Car

After last years aborted attempt to run the new Skelta G-Force S/c, this was to be my first real chance to show the capabilities of this model in a full-on tarmac rally. Sure, we have had some outright success in lesser hillclimbs and sprint type events, but no long distance endurance tarmac events to get our teeth into.

The G-Force S/c uses the Danish Rotrex supercharger to provide relatively low boost to the Honda F20C that we use in the Skelta.

Unlike turbo boost, the Rotrex provides lag-free instant throttle response. In fact you just drive the car like it has a naturally aspirated engine, just a lot faster!

As in the past we use WRC style MCA 4-way adjustable shock absorbers, manufactured by Murray Coote, to provide optimum body and wheel control. Targa can be very rough in places at 200kph and good shocks are a must.



Two things were new this year. Firstly I was running with new (to me) co-driver Cameron Reeves. Cameron came highly recommended, having been in the event quite a number of times but never with the same driver twice. To add a little pressure, Cameron advised that he was going for his Platinum Trophy this year. To his credit, Cameron admitted that he was more interested in pushing for an outright place than playing it conservative to ensure he got his 'plate'. Cameron & I flew to Tasmania the week before the event to do our 'recce'. We worked hard to optimise the notes and his dedication and focus in this area was greatly appreciated.

Secondly, we were running a Spec. A (for aero) factory option on the cars. This option provided an improvement in aerodynamic downforce by adding a front splitter lip extension plus a 'Brawn style' double diffuser at the rear. To cope with increased g-forces, the sump was baffled and a breather oil recovery system added. Otherwise, in all respects, the car was the same as last year.

The Event

Much discussion about the weather took place prior to the start. This year the organisers allowed six tyres for each car. The catch was that 2wd drive cars above 1100kg could fit their two extra tyres at the end of day 3. All 4WDs and the lighter 2WDs (including us) could fit them only at the end of day four. In prior years all cars were only allowed four tyres for the whole event and, as it turned out, this new rule would disadvantage the Skelta. Wet weather was forecast initially for much of the event. But as we came closer to scrutineering day, the forecast began to look less threatening with predominantly dry days ahead – apparently! We took the conservative decision to go with medium compounds all round – a dry setup, and kept our fingers crossed that the weather would be kind to us.



Tuesday – Prologue day dawned bright, sunny and warm. What is all this talk about wet weather? We didn't wish to be seeded right at the back of the field (fastest goes last) so we hoped for a time about tenth quickest. The blast around the streets of Georgetown was brisk & clean and felt about right. The published time confirmed that we had run 10th quickest so we were happy with that. But the fact that shocked us, and most of the other competitors, was the time set by the quickest, Jason & John White in the Lamborghini Gallardo Super Trofeo Strada (to give it its full name). Thirteen seconds quicker than us over the five km town stage and almost six seconds quicker than the next fastest car had every competitor doing a double-take. How fast will this car be when we get to the Targa stages proper?

Wednesday – The sky was threatening as we made our way to Launceston's Silverdome, rally HQ for the next three days. Gale force winds were forecast and they were certainly picking up as we headed for Lillydale, stage one. The rains also started before we made it to the start. Very kindly, the organisers make the base times achievable for the first three stages so as to give everyone the opportunity to find their groove. We cruised through the first and I commented to Cameron as we headed for number two that at least we have got further than I managed last year already. At Kayena, stage two, we were told of a bad crash and the stage was downgraded to touring. Fortunately the crew of the Evo against the broken power pole were ok although the driver suffered a broken leg. By stage three, the wind had attained its predicted gale force status and there was a long line-up at the start. Of course the wind was blowing the rain horizontally straight in through my window so I erected one of the fold-up umbrellas only to have it immediately destroyed by a fierce gust. I then used my jacket to try to keep some of the driving rain out of the cockpit. As we lined up for our start and the coat was put away, there was an immediate torrential downpour. I have to say that driving that stage in those conditions was absolutely treacherous. We struggled to the end of what is supposed to be an easy stage and thought we had lost 30seconds through aquaplaning and zero visibility. As it turned out, the base time was 30 seconds more than we had thought so we just cleaned it thankfully. On to stage four Moriarty and our cold tyres struggled to get grip out of the slow greasy corners so our time was fairly average. However as the afternoon unfolded the conditions improved slightly and we were able to set some competitive times, always trailing that ballistic 4WD Lambo though. Towards the end of the day we received the news that Skelta No2 had gone off on the Sheffield stage and damaged its rear suspension. With a little too much rear brake bias, Marcus & Gerard locked up coming into a tricky greasy hairpin and went off into the embankment. At the end of the first day, Cameron & I were pleasantly surprised to find ourselves in 5th outright. I felt we had succumbed to the better grip of the hundreds of 4WD rally cars in the event and honestly expected to be placed about 20th. The news gave my battered confidence a lift.

Thursday – Day two was the type of day we would have liked for the whole event. Even in ideal weather, the Sideling, first stage of the Eastern Loop is more suited to 4WD cars than the Skelta. We did a respectable time though then moved on to the next stage where we took our first fastest stage time

beating the Lambo by two seconds. Cameron was ecstatic as this was his first ever stage win in Targa. We then went on to win two more stages and feature well in the rest to lose only 10 seconds to that flying spaceship for the entire day. This moved us to third at day's end. I prayed for more days like this.

Friday – Another loop to the north and west rewarded us with a dry morning. After lunch the weather again turned nasty with dramatic effect. Mt Rowland, a 26.4km stage which uses much of the famous Cethana stage in reverse brought about an early end for several crews who crashed on oil or fuel spilled on the road over around six kilometers of the stage. We had been warned at the start but several cars went off and a car that stopped to assist another was rammed by the Glennie RX8, ultimately blocking the road. This caused the downgrading of the stage for all modern vehicles. Unfortunately, Marcus & Gerard in Skelta No2 were also caught out by the oil and crashed damaging the rear bodywork & diffuser. Undeterred they continued on however the differential which had apparently been damaged in the day one shunt, succumbed and the car needed to be brought back to service in the truck. A couple of fastest stage times saw us finish the day in 2nd outright, exactly one minute behind Whites. Then came Tony Quinn in last year's winning Nissan GTR, trailing us by 27 seconds.



Saturday – Day four & the Targa circus moves to Strahan on the west coast at the end of this day. Wet weather was forecast & I was dreading the loss of grip from which we were suffering, compared to the 4WDs. The first stage, Mole Ck was not too bad but Cethana, my favourite stage, was diabolically slippery and we could not get heat into the tyres sufficient to get reasonable grip in the cold & wet conditions. We dropped a massive 35 seconds to the Lambo on this stage and I thought we would also be overtaken by the 4WD Nissans of Quinn & Jones. Amazingly though, every stage after this was a little drier and the normally damp west coast provided some of the driest roads of the event – for this day at least. As a result we were able to power-on, winning four of the six remaining stages and only missing the other two by mere seconds. The big loss to the Whites on Cethana though meant that we finish the day 1min 09 seconds overall behind them despite winning more stages. Our lead on Quinn was now 2.16 with a further 27 seconds back to Jones.

As we parked the car for service, I noticed an irregularity in the idle and, following a check of compression, Tim decided to make a precautionary engine change.

Sunday – The final run back to Hobart was looking rather bleak in the early hours of Sunday. Rain forecast and the weather radar showed showers passing through. Encouragingly, there were no showers to the west. The Strahan stage starts off very tight and is only a couple of kms out of town. This means it is difficult to get heat into the stone cold tyres and wheelspin in the lower gears out of the slow corners will hamper our progress. Our original tyres were still very good with plenty of tread. Rather than risk starting this stage on 'green' tyres, I elected to keep the same tyres on the car. As (bad) luck would have it, a heavy shower fell as we were lined up for the stage. While the early morning sun came out again almost immediately, it had no effect on drying the road & all it did was blind us out of some of the tight corners.



As expected, our pace was dramatically compromised and we lost 48 seconds on this stage alone. Queenstown was even worse for us. For such a short stage, we lost far too much time to the leaders as we tried in vein to get traction out of the 99 hairpins, even driving them in third gear and STILL getting wheelspin. I couldn't wait to get to Mt Arrowsmith where I was confident we could be competitive. This year the stage was lengthened to a massive 56km but it was all wet. Fortunately the beginning of

the stage has some very long and fast corners and the considerable downforce we can generate at speed, is great for working some heat into the tyres.

Ultimately we were second on the stage, missing the win by two seconds. But more importantly, we took back 1 min 25 seconds from the Lambo's crew who were probably driving conservatively for a finish.

With about a minute gap to first place and a safe minute and a half back to third, there was no point in pushing too hard on the remaining couple of short stages. We kept our fingers crossed that the car would behave the last few kilometers to the Gala Finish at Wrest Point Casino and cruised on in to the welcoming crowd, happy service crew and all the wellwishers.

I would be remiss if I did not make mention of the superb job performed in very difficult conditions by my first-time (for Targa) co-driver Cameron Reeves. Throughout the event he never made a wrong call, giving me the confidence to be able to push to the absolute limit. He was totally diligent in making sure that we met all our deadlines and check-in times and conscientiously went over each day's notes to ensure a mistake free run. Thanks Cameron!

How does it feel to finish on the Podium of Targa Tasmania in a car of your own design & construction? Pretty satisfying I would have to say. Obviously I would love to finish one place better but second in this company is not to be sneezed at. The car performed well in all conditions, even though we were disadvantaged in the wet a little. Performance & handling is awesome, allowing us to win those ten stages. At 61 years of age, I'd like to get some support from a couple more younger Skelta drivers so that I can start to ease off a little – on second thoughts, I take that back. The real thrill is knowing that no one else has been able to get over that piece of road quicker than you have.

Until next year.....

Ray Vandersee