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## 2007 Classic Adelaide

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When I was asked if I'd like to enter my XJ-S in last year's Classic Adelaide Rally I had to think about it ...

Did I want to drive at high speed on closed roads using *both* sides of the white line? Did I want to be amongst a smorgasbord of new and historic fast cars in a carnival atmosphere? Did I want to put stickers all over my car and pretend to be a racing driver? Did I want to do all of this for free?



After a careful and thorough deliberation that lasted somewhere between two and three nanoseconds the polite version of my answer was an emphatic "yes, please!" (actual version unprintable).

Ask anyone not in 'the know' what the *Classic Adelaide* is and you'll no doubt be met with a blank stare. Those slightly better informed will tell you, with absolute authority, that it involves cars. Those still better informed will offer the suggestion that checkered flags and pots of money are in there somewhere. All true enough. If, like most of us, you are still not sure, here's my 'back of the envelope' attempt at a description.

Think of an off road World Rally Championship without the dirt roads. And instead of being run a hundred kilometers from the capital of Upper Volta, it's held in Adelaide. Indeed, each of the four days of touring and competition driving starts from and finishes at the front door of the Adelaide Hilton.

The other major difference is that instead of tarted-up four bangers from the major manufacturers of shopping carts, this event parades a range of classic and stunning creations from the likes of Porsche, Ferrari, Aston Martin, Bugatti and of course Jaguar. Starting to get the picture?

So how did I get to play in the big league? Well, the Jaguar Drivers Club of South Australia, hereafter known as my benefactor, makes available to the organizers a number of club cars each year that are used to take sponsors, as passengers, on a day's event. Four days, four sponsors. Your fearless correspondent was lucky enough to get the gig along with nine other club members. These comprised of E-Types, an XK 120 and 150, a Mk 2 and several XJ-S's.

In the Paddock on the first day I fully expected to be tapped on the shoulder by a security guard and asked what I thought I was doing there. I was certain that the event polo shirt and the ID tags around my neck and wrist weren't going to fool anyone. It took until day three before I was able to nonchalantly stroll amongst the other cars, nodding to other drivers and joking with officials.

I know it seems incongruous, but despite the suitably stickered car and debonair charm, I am not a racing driver. Which is why it was so surprising that those corporate sponsors chosen to be passengers, or navigators as we now seasoned veterans prefer to call them, showed almost no fear and had an implicit faith in our driving abilities. I wonder who had been lying to them? Anyway, I expect the silk scarf, driving goggles and penciled on moustache did the trick.

Each day started at the front of the Hilton by passing through the arched "START" platform, which was a meter or so off the ground and almost as wide as the track width of my car. If the daily compulsory breath test didn't get your heart pumping then the string bridge starting gate would. Made a great photo though.



From there it was a leisurely drive to the first Competitive Stage at Upper Hermitage. The Day Book lists the stage as being 7.7km long with an average speed of 132 kph. This, dear readers, is on a winding uphill track. Some of the competitors may have averaged those numbers but I was just happy to have kept my two tonne beast on the black stuff.

The day's 245 km course, which ran north east to the Barossa Valley and back, alternated between Touring and 45 km of Competitive Stages, with morning tea and lunch in there somewhere. The seventh and final stage of the day was the aptly named "Corkscrew". (Pause for dramatic effect)

With tyres howling like wolves on a full moon, we ran the gauntlet. It was such a twisty road that the lid of my water bottle undid itself then put itself back on. Left, right, left, straight for a bit then a cliff-hugging U-turn around an invisible corner. No pranged cars ahead so I might just make this bit. Right, right again, road goes left and tightens, left and tightens again, narrow bridge. Big blue thing on side of road. Must be reservoir. No time to look. Floorboard accelerator, brake hard, turn in, flat out again. I can hear a roar. From the exhaust or from me? Not sure. No time. Short straight, blue thing again, road goes right, left onto bridge, tight left and tightens. Throttle on, brake hard, danger rocks, narrow bridge, power on, hairpin right, hairpin left, hairpin right, hairpin left, flying finish. Recommence breathing.

That, dear readers, was the Corkscrew.

The second day took us on a 295 km run south via Willunga Hill, Myponga Dam, Victor Harbour and then back through Strathalbyn and Macclesfield, with the nine competitive stages totaling 65 kms.

My two favourite stages of the day were firstly Willunga Hill, because on previous outings I'd never had the bad sense to use the full width of the road and in doing so I felt well, naughty, but with a clear conscience. The other stage was Myponga.

This stage started on the spillway of the Myponga Dam. Two feet down into the water on the right, one hundred and fifty feet down into the parched valley on the left,. I fully expected to look out of my window to see a Lancaster dropping bouncing bombs along the lake's surface, but seeing as we're in a drought I suppose the organizers thought it would be bad form to blow up the dam. Pity.

Hard left off the dam wall, climbing U turn to the right and then up and along the spine of the hills. Revs quickly built to levels not previously experienced, limited only by the lack of straight road and personal fortitude; the latter usually arriving first. Despite this being a rally, there were maximum safety speed limits on the competitive stages that were enforced by laser guns and massive fines, so naturally we all limited ourselves to allowable maximum (or the pace of the car in front).

Technically still Spring, the countryside was lush and yet to fully brown up and the view down the coast was spectacular. I know this to be true from post race photographs, as the front window is the only one in use when flogging along a stage.

As the sun set, exotic cars lined both kerbs of Gouger Street like an opened zipper. Patrons overflowed onto the footpaths from the nearby restaurants while the girls did the same from their outfits. The rally street party was in full swing. Unlike other mardis-gras like parties, this one ended early as the cars had to be put to bed in the paddock at 9:30.

Nine stages spread out over 275 kms awaited us the next day. The route went through Kersbrook, north east of town all the way south to Strathalbyn. While the 11 kilometer stage through Basket Range looked like a tormented paper clip, the 13.5 kilometers of Gorge Road wriggled across the map like a skewered worm. 68 competitive kilometers in all, which once again ended back at the Hilton.

The last day. The car holding out and so is the driver. A 230 km run including 83 km of competition driving spread over eight stages. A big loop via Mount Lofty, Piccadilly and Echunga down to Strathalbyn once again. All the competitive stages were terrific but the 25 km long SS30 was special.

The Rally Day Book describes the Paris Creek stage best. "Paris Creek is legend. In order to maintain the average speed limitations (131.15 km/h) it now has 4 double and 2 single chicanes. The road surface is excellent, the corners are relatively easy to read and this stage is unquestionably one of the most exhilarating you will experience in a tarmac rally anywhere in the world."

In order to clam us down after such a 'petrol head' of a stage, the roughly 50 km run in to McLaren Vale was simple and quite cathartic. Dry scrubby paddocks gave way to the more manicured plots of the wine region as wave upon wave of vines, trellised with the precision of a Japanese stone garden rolled by.

After a hasty 4 o'clock lunch we toddled off to our last few stages. The Clarendon and Windy Point stages were quite familiar to me, and having the entire road to ourselves with no speed restraint added a new dimension to what is for me, usually a commuter drive.

We had been treated to Goldilocks weather for the entire event. Not too hot and not too cold. This was just as well really as my air conditioner had selected the previous week to pack up, and at such short notice I wasn't able to arrange for the proceeds of the sale of my children to pay the repair bill. Still, with the windows down we had felt more a part of the goings on.

Four fabulous days and nights seeing our own back yard from a different perspective. 1045 kms of which 261 were hard and fast motoring, the likes of which I'd never before experienced. Fast cars used how they were designed to be used, yet infrequently are.

So what's it like driving in a Classic Adelaide? I can honestly say it was the best fun I've had with my clothes on. I'd recommend it to anyone.

Rick Luff