

New Zealand National Car Rally 2012

Christchurch, New Zealand, 14th-20th October 2012

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As the rally was based in Christchurch (on the South Island), 700 miles by road south of my home in Auckland (North Island), and would include a three-hour ferry passage and take at least two days, it was more economic to send the car on ahead and follow it later by air.

On Friday 5th October the Imp was duly handed over to Tranzrail for collection a week later. To my surprise they rang me on the morning of Monday the 8th to say it had arrived safely and were quite happy to store it for me. Thus on the following Friday I took an 80-minute flight and arrived in Christchurch to be met by fellow club member Bob Tudehope. With a slight detour to his home he showed me two beautifully restored Imps standing in his garage. One was to be sold and the other red version looked vastly better than new when it left the factory. Bob is a perfectionist and it really shows in his restorations. If Linwood had done half as well we would have had many more Imp today!

I collected my Sport and went in search of my pre-booked accommodation, which I easily found using my Navman. Later that day I took a brief tour of the city, it was very depressing. The central area is still cordoned off as demolition continues after the earthquakes. Over 80% of the area will disappear once the remaining unsafe buildings are demolished. The roading has been ruined. The road to Sumner Beach has a 30kph speed limit, not that it is needed – any faster risks ripping the suspension to pieces. Shipping containers were placed alongside rock faces to retain falling rocks as the earth continues to move. Houses that were built on low-lying areas have had the foundations broken and moved. I saw one that had a six-inch crack through the concrete floor which had moved the outer walls, but not broken the windows. Some areas are deserted, much like a scene from Neville Shute's book (and subsequent film), *On the Beach*. New

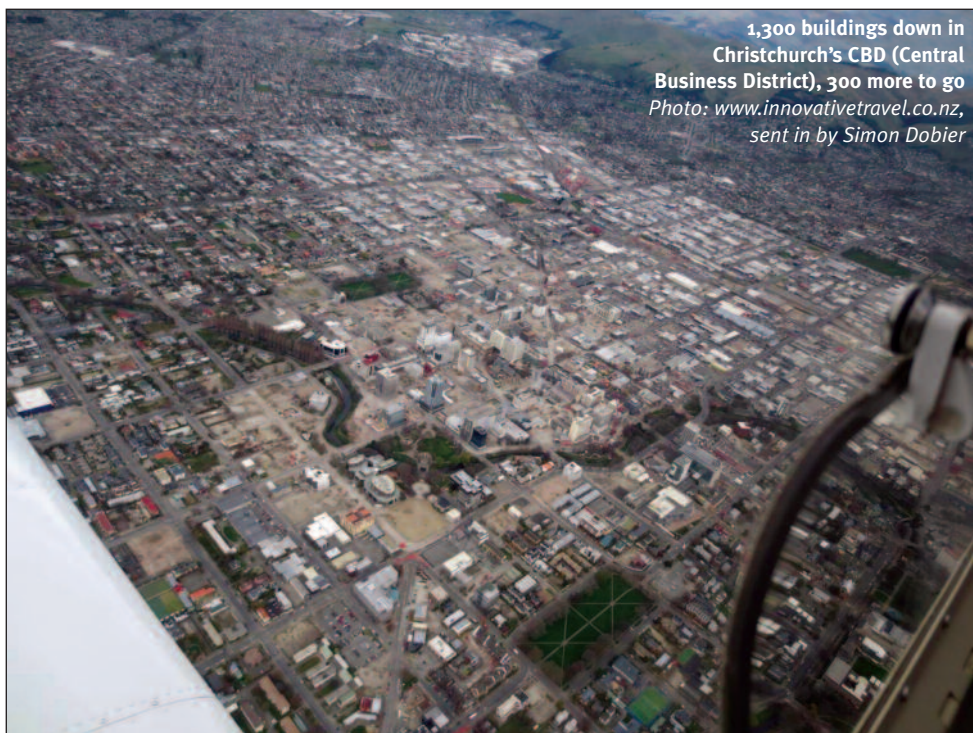


houses, old houses, the 'quake took no account of fame or fortune.

On the Saturday the weather was wet but I managed to visit the largest three-day outdoor swap-meet in NZ at MacLean's Island. It took over five hours to walk/paddle around and I did pick up couple of

The aftermath of the earthquake on a timber-framed house in Heathcote Valley. Note the damage to the roof and doors yet the windows are unbroken

Photo: Brian Baylis



**1,300 buildings down in
Christchurch's CBD (Central
Business District), 300 more to go**
*Photo: www.innovativetravel.co.nz,
sent in by Simon Dobier*

items of use. Sunday was check-in day at rally headquarters and the rain had stopped; as it happens it stopped until the following Monday week. I took a further tour towards Lyttelton to see what had happened there: unrecognisable.

Our first excursion was to Geraldine, a town some 160km south for the lunch stop. The route took us inland and off the main road so traffic was light. I did not pass – nor was passed – by anything for over ten minutes. It was really nice to drive on straight, flat roads with the snow-tipped Southern Alps in the distance. Our return journey was a little more direct via Ashburton where we were able to visit a local airport museum. For a small town it had a remarkable display and in fact was the birthplace of aviation in the South Island. The \$10 entry fee was well worthwhile.



**Traffic conditions on the run to
Geraldine on the first day**
Photo: Brian Baylis

Our next trip was in the opposite direction north to Mt Lyford, inland from coastal Kaikoura. Again a convoluted route took us inland to Oxford for a tea break, and refuel. Small town NZ takes a great interest in group rallies and I had several people comment on my car and the others – all appreciated the fact we would stop and talk. Having turned off the main road at Waipara the road began a steady climb into the Kaikoura Ranges that run parallel to the coast. Some of us had a police escort as the area is a great place for speeding. I am sure Mr Plod did not appreciate being hemmed in by two classics in front and two behind all travelling just within the limit, all of which could exceed the 100 kph by a factor of two. Due to the sheer distance (190km) I did not arrive until after 2 p.m. but thankfully lunch was still available.

Possibly the most interesting, and certainly exciting, part of the day was to be given free reign on Ruapuna race track. I was fortunate enough to follow an Aston Martin DB5 (immortalised by James Bond) around for at least one lap. Memories of 20 years ago at Manfeild came back when our Rosemary showed me what an Imp could do. I think I got it mostly right; I didn't miss the corners or burn any rubber and the brakes were barely warm after eight laps of a tight circuit. But I did hit valve bounce at 6,500 rpm in the lower three gears! Thank you Rosemary for the lessons, they did sink in! We were also treated to a great display from Simon Dobier in his Ginetta G15. That car could really shift and he showed up a lot of much more powerful cars in less experienced hands. While the Aussie V8s could take off on the straight bits the Imps could – and did – outpace them on the bends. That was a great day out.

Our last major excursion was to Akaroa, a small town located in a sheltered harbour over a range of hills 80km from the city. The initial section took us past some of the devastated areas



Peter Crawford's early
two-headlight Sunbeam Imp
Sport on the grid at Ruapuna Raceway
Photo: Brian Baylis

towards Dyers Pass Road that climbed over the hills towards Lyttleton, and then ran across a range of low hills before descending to flats of Little River. Beyond there the road began to climb and on this section there was a requirement to record letters attached to posts and construct as many car and models names as possible. Once the hill section started it was second and third gear all the way to the top at 480 metres where, at Hill Top, a great view of the harbour and destination could be found. Rather than use the direct route our instructions took us along the ridge of hills where the road had little in the way of Armco barriers but plenty of sharp turns and steep inclines. For those not driving it was a great scenic ride though the drivers had to concentrate on the road ahead. The final descent into the town was just a little over three miles in second gear down a ridge. Brake failure would mean a total loss in seconds. Even with engine braking the drums were rather warm, but I have had them smoking before so it was still within safe limits. We all parked in the local domain and found somewhere to eat. Our return trip was more leisurely along the main route but still included the climb up to the summit lookout.

On a non-touring day we were treated to a visit to the John Stewart Car Collection. Included in the displayed vehicles was yet another Tudhope restoration (see photo). Several people commented to me about it as it really stood out from the rest. On the Friday evening the prizegiving was held and we had a great time. Roy Hughes sends his apologies to Alain Barbou and Paul Vinel; Roy has since found out that Paris is further from Gisborne than London, so you should have won the trophy for furthest travelled in 2010. If we have another rally you will have to come again to collect the prize!

By arrangement with the local custom car club we held a grass gymkhana in their grounds with great success, much ado and plenty of fun. One chap with a replica Jaguar SSK had a great time attempting to dig his way to South America with plenty of turf flying in all directions. The outstanding driver was a young lady of 25 driving her father's 2001 Jaguar XJC equipped with traction-control and all the bells and whistles. She drove around the cones as if it was a Sunday afternoon wander with no drama, no noise, but what a time – 21 seconds. No one could top that, even her father couldn't better 26 seconds. Oops! Dad will have to do better than that. At this show a man came up to me and said he had seen my Imp a couple of days earlier when he arrived

Bob Tudehope's beautifully restored NZ Sunbeam Imp on show at the John Stewart Car Museum. All of Bob's restos – and he has restored at least six Imps – are to this standard. What chance would the Mini have had if all Imps were as good as this one!

Photo: Brian Baylis





Simon Dobier's superb Ginetta G15, Ruapuna. Simon really showed the visitors how to drive quickly!
Photo: Brian Baylis

by air from Sydney. I had been watching the aircraft movements from a point near the runway turnoff and he saw the car. Is a Lincoln Green metallic Imp that obvious?

Monday 22nd was a public holiday so I had to spend an extra day before I could hand

the car back to Tranzrail for its return

to Auckland. In the week I travelled over 1,800 km (1,100 miles) with nothing other than fuel put in the car. Granted it did seize the water pump on the Tuesday prior to departing Auckland, but as I had a spare it was easily replaced. My engineer repaired the old pump for NZ\$90 and I took that in my bag on the outward flight.

Three hours after boarding the flight in Christchurch I was home after a very enjoyable time. I collected my Sport on Friday afternoon in Auckland, safe and sound.

Next weekend I will be competing for the Rosemary Smith trophy run by the Sunbeam Car Club NZ, a little closer to home beginning in Cambridge.



Brian's Sport behind an American Auburn Boattail Speedster at the start of one of the runs. The Auburn makes the Imp look small – or does the Imp make the Auburn look big?
Photo: Brian Baylis