

Out & About

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From Oxford to Oxford at 100 km/h and 20 knots

Kevin Chinnery, Sydney

FOR a British couple, a casual chat about travelling overseas has turned into a charity run on a grand scale: driving an icon of British and Indian motoring between two namesakes on different sides of the world.

Tim Nicholson, 36, and Joanne Bowl, 35, are now on the last leg of taking a 1954 Morris Oxford Mark II named *Florence* from Oxford in England where they were formerly students, to Oxford in New Zealand's South Island.

The purpose has been partly to celebrate the 50th anniversary of this Morris Oxford – in 1954 this “new look” 1.5-litre saloon was yours for £744.17s.6d – but mostly to raise money for the international Red Cross and Red Crescent organisations.

The route has taken *Florence* and its two drivers from Oxford to the London Eye, then France, Spain, Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, then via Safmarine to Mumbai, and once overland across India, with Regional Container Line from Chennai to Singapore.

P&O Nedlloyd then carried the car from Singapore to Fremantle.

After cruising over the Nullarbor at an easy 100 km/h – 60 mph on the old imperial speedo – the car was last week back in a P&O Nedlloyd container again for the sea lift from Sydney to Auckland for the final drive to Oxford, 50 km inland from Christchurch.

The trip, which has won the admiration of fellow eccentric British globetrotter Michael Palin, has been largely self-funded by Mr Nicholson and Ms Bowl.

However, sponsors have stepped up to provide services, such as Vodaphone with mobile communications, and of course Safmarine, RCL – which also threw in a cabin for the couple from Chennai to Singapore – and now P&O Nedlloyd.

Most of the support followed from speaking to local schools, Red Cross associations, business clubs like Rotary, and even the plush and prestigious Royal Bombay Yacht Club.



NOW FOR THE TASMAN: Tim Nicholson, 36, and Joanne Bowl pose with *Florence* before leaving Sydney for the voyage to Auckland.

“It was amazing how many people then stepped up to offer support”, Tim Nicholson said in Sydney last week.

Nowhere was the project an easier sell than in India, where the rugged Oxford remains in large-scale licensed production by Hindustan Motors as the Ambassador.

India was also where the trip had in spirit begun.

A daydream conversation about importing to the UK one of the Ambassadors which the pair had seen on an earlier trip to the sub-continent, became in a flash of inspiration for a plan to instead drive an original Oxford from the UK to India and then

New Zealand to celebrate the design's half-centenary.

Hindustan Motors was “very excited” by the visit, Mr Nicholson said, and it quickly offered technical support during the Indian leg of the trip.

“There is little to go wrong on the car. It is simple, has no electronics or air conditioning, and is easy to service”, he said.

Red tape at border

But if mechanics were one thing, border clearance bureaucracy was another matter entirely.

The crossing from Libya to Egypt

took many hours after an eagle-eyed official noted that the chassis number on the car and on some of the paperwork did not match up – eventually traced back to a clerical error when the car was originally sold to one Mr Jelley of Gomshall Post Office, England, in September 1954. The Libyan/Egyptian border was not a good place to make this discovery, Mr Nicholson noted.

Getting a containerised old model car into India took 30 signatures and a lot of work by the shipping line. Even though India has computerised cargo clearance systems, they still run in parallel with a hard copy ledger.

Congestion in the port of Mumbai was also a problem.

Having almost completed the trip, Mr Nicholson and Ms Bowl are now in talks with P&O Nedlloyd about shipping the car back to the UK. *Florence* “is part of the family now. We could not bear to just leave her behind”, Mr Nicholson said.

To find out more about the trip, check out the website www.oxford2oxford.co.uk.

Details are there on how to make a donation directly to the Red Cross in Australia or New Zealand in support of the epic drive's fund-raising purpose.

Endeavour heads for her berth in Sydney

THE REPLICA HMS *Endeavour* (right), built largely with Alan Bond's money for the 1988 Bicentennial, is effectively to be nationalised.

Federal arts minister David Kemp is negotiating to transfer ownership of the vessel from the not-for-profit HM Bark *Endeavour* Foundation to the commonwealth.

Dr Kemp's plan is to give the ship to the Australian National Maritime Museum in Sydney, where she will be berthed in Darling Harbour near other treasures such as the restored 1874 sailing

cargo ship *James Craig* and HM ships *Vampire* and *Onslow*.

The National Maritime Museum in Greenwich has named the vessel as the world's best maritime replica.

The *Australian* newspaper reported that the ship had lost income of \$200,000 accrued last year when festival organisers in Europe defaulted on payments.

Endeavour's master Chris Blake told the *Australian* that the best role for the ship remained as a travelling exhibit and

ambassador for Australia. He said that the vessel always attracted a lot of publicity wherever it called.

There had been a number of unsuccessful attempts to build an *Endeavour* replica before Bond Corporation stepped in with a \$9m sponsorship. Businessman John Singleton donated \$1m and the New South Wales and federal governments added \$2m between them.

The ship left Whitehaven in the UK and is due at the Panama Canal this weekend, with an estimated arrival in Sydney on April 18.



Guardian of heritage

MUCH credit for thwarting Defence Department plans to sell Cockatoo Island in Sydney Harbour in 19 goes to Mary Shelley Clark, who died in Sydney aged 75.

In retirement, Mrs Clark wrote a book on the harbour islands in 2000 and another in 2001 on the working harbours of New South Wales.

She led a successful campaign to stop the \$150m sale of the former hub of the Sydney maritime industry to developers and keep it in public ownership.

The island, with its docks and workshops from Australia's shipbuilding era and superb convict barracks, became a reserve.