

## Another 1800 Metro miles

On top of Brisbane to Wadonga and back again, plus Brisbane to Melbourne via Sydney and return by the coast route, the Minimetro has made another venture into the unknown with Brisbane to Hay. As per the previous trips, planning and packing was left to the last minute. A nasty habit which is going to bite me hard one day. I've had the car for almost eight years and it's been seven years and five months since the first round trip to Wadonga. Unlike the past, vehicle maintenance wasn't up to date and there was a lot more that should have been done before we left.

I'd thought the car had been full to the brim in the past. However this time even more was squeezed in; driver and two passengers, their kit for 7 days away, sleeping gear, tools and parts including a hydro pump, two displacers and a new steering rack. Wait there's more, with food and drink for a day or so. There was little more than breathing space left for the occupants. The rear passenger was enclosed on two sides by luggage packed to the roof. Any vision through the rear window was by luck. A carton of Pepsi and sundry luggage had to be discarded in Brisbane just so the tailgate could be closed.

Premium unleaded in Brisbane was at 160.9 cents/litre. For the first time this was the dearest part of the trip. Rural centres had either cheaper or equally priced petrol. Top grade unleaded wasn't always on offer and in some cases it made no difference. Although I didn't encounter any engine pinging, fuel quality did appear to effect economy. The tank wasn't run to empty but range was estimated at 240 miles minimum. Cruising at 55 MPH or just below returned the best economy. This probably converts to a 50 MPH average speed. Pushing 60 MPH certainly increased fuel usage. The Metro isn't presently running at its best with 80000 miles and 30 years on the clock. Just over one pint of oil was used on the trip down and just under a pint on the trip back. A lot of this was used by the under car rust proofing system. Average fuel economy over the 1815 miles was 36.6 MPG. An acceptable rate but capable of improvement. I was desperate for new tyres before we left but 135s (correct for the 1.0 HLE) are unobtainable in Australia. Much hair pulling located 155/70/12s, thus a compromise of economy for ride.

As usual the route to Hay was inland by the Newell Highway. Essentially head west south west from Brisbane for 220 miles and then south through central NSW stopping a little short of Victoria. Climbing Cunningham's gap represented one of the first hurdles, though I haven't even made it this far in the past without incident. Initial progress on this trip was good until just short of Goondiwindi. At which point the car spluttered and backfired to a halt. Nothing was apparent and the car restarted, so we continued on. A few miles later and just short of the border, the symptom repeated

itself and the car limped in to the BP petrol station. Acting on a hunch, an inspection of the fuel filter (not one year old) found it to be blocked. My choice to locate the filter under the car meant everything had to be unpacked to find the jack, handle and tools. Nevertheless everyone was relieved to find such a simple fault. Repairs were made, the Metro refuelled and we continued on. Oddly enough the Metro's second owner (and importer) used to live in Goondiwindi. Some readers might need to start Googling place names at this point to get a better of idea of where this adventure's taken us.

Day 1; Brisbane to Gilgandra

Day 2; Gilgandra to Hay

Day 3-5; Hay

Day 6; Hay to Dubbo

Day 7; Dubbo to Brisbane

Throughout the trip I managed to recall most of the incidents which had occurred on previous trips to Hay; broken windscreens, frozen carburettors, exploding differentials, frozen batteries, head gaskets, slipping clutches, wildlife... Eighteen years had passed since the last Hay expedition.

The Unipart (anti-freeze) ice scraper has been sitting in the glove box for as long as I've had the car. In Gilgandra on the second morning, I got to use it for the first time. Ice on the windscreen managed to cling on all the way to Dubbo. For the entire trip the second passenger was given the two-third seat for some comfort. This left a difficult choice in where to locate the tool box, either too far to the left or too far rewards. Left was chosen and the car ended up with a distinct list once fully loaded. After unloading in Hay, a slight lean remained. Part of the tools were redistributed for the return trip and a more even, if slightly down in the rear look. Apart from the load, Hydragas coped well for a consistently good ride over some poor roads.

Both passengers made favourable comments on the ride and engine response under load. I'll never take so much baggage again for a long trip. Space within the Metro isn't adequate and handling is affected. Not that the Metro couldn't cope but two people with personal gear, plus tools and parts will have to be the new limit. Finding Mini parts or support within Australia is hard enough, let alone Metro. Therefore a certain amount of space and weight will always have to be sacrificed to compensate. Some bored Policemen gave the Metro a long look while stuck in traffic outside Moree. As we discussed later, most of us were thinking the same thing. If I was pulled over; two Policemen looking for defects vs. four mechanics, one a Queensland Transport Inspector, two approved for vehicle modifications and one with a current Safety Certificate licence. After running the Queensland plates they lost interest in the Metro and soon found a speeder (and local) further down the road.

Playing silly buggers while crossing the Hay Plains resulted in a blown clutch

slave cylinder and dislodged internal push rod. Temporary repairs got the car to Hay. Stopping again just outside of Hay for photos, I managed to brush up against some Flora which thoroughly disagreed with me. The journey to the caravan park and a boiling hot shower seemed to take forever so I cranked the Metro's heater up to maximum and tried to burn the pain out. Surprisingly this worked but what looked like mosquito bites stayed for another week. This turned out to be a wise choice as the check-in procedures at the caravan park took well over twenty minutes. I wouldn't describe the Metro's heater as brilliant but it kept the front of the car toasty throughout the trip. To the point where we'd have to strip off in the cold, before starting any stage. Otherwise there wasn't room to remove clothing once moving.

Having foreseen the clutch occurrence I had parts and tools onboard to fix the problem. This allowed the car to be repaired at a leisurely pace the next day. The last time the clutch was apart, the internal pushrod was the only new part I didn't have and the old one was well worn. The campsite owner didn't say anything when he came to fix the heater in the accommodation. However one of my companions pointed out that vehicle repairs weren't permitted under the camp guidelines. For me, Hay was always about the trip there and back. What happens along the way just adds spice. My original intent was to replace the steering rack before we left Brisbane. This rapidly evolved to tossing the rack and other parts in the car for replacement in Hay. The best laid plans of Mice and Mark, with the trip over it is still waiting to be fitted.

Hay itself was little changed. Of note was that the former BMC Dealership was now closed and up for sale. The premises had been a petrol station and workshop for many years after ceasing to be a Leyland Australia outlet. Eighteen years ago I'd started my collection of service tools with what was left of their equipment.

Hay the event had changed little save for fewer Minis and Mokes. In past years the usual derivatives such as Morris 1100s were typically present. This year there was nothing except the Metro, which as to be expected was ignored by most participants. I did manage to meet an owner of one of the original Leyland Australia evaluation Metros. By utter coincidence it happens to be another 1.0 HLE. Binis made a presence but only one entered the Motorkhana. It would seem that Hay's days are numbered. Although new generations had been introduced to the event, the decline in entrants and lack of replacement with Binis has really cast the die. For me this really brought missed opportunities to the fore. Back in the early 1990s, negotiations with the Hay Committee had drawn the formal conclusion that; Hay wasn't the Mini Nationals but would always remain as Hay. This gave the opportunity for a true Mini Nationals to be created. An opportunity that was squandered by the Mini clubs and has resulted in the 'everyone for themselves' mess we still have today. This no doubt explains the ordinary turn out for the Saturday parade and car display. One notable experience was missing

from the 2011 event. In past years you would always bump into someone from a southern club who would bleat about how long and hard their trip was. They would invariably question the listener where they were from and the Queensland response would leave them dumbfounded. This otherwise minor point probably typifies why Hay will never be the Mini Nationals. The normal Hay (event) problems were present as per every other trip; food, souvenirs, organisation. The revelation I finally had was that you need to delete 'Nationals' from all Hay references. Once you lower the bar to just a motorkhana in the middle of nowhere, everything suddenly becomes acceptable.

Entering in the Motorkhana was tempting but I was more interested in getting the car back to Brisbane. Somewhat to my relief the activity was staged in a dustbowl and dragged on into early evening, so I was content not to have entered. Some of our party headed off early the next day on the return trip, so as to visit Dubbo Zoo. I was rather hoping that this might be on par with Longleat. As I was sure the Baboons would have enjoyed the Prius. Much to the general disappointment, both Prius and occupants survived.

Despite the poor economy, the Metro safely crossed the Hay plains with over ¼ of a tank to spare. Unlike a previous trip in my first Moke which barely had two litres left. Having driven by on so many past trips, we finally detoured to the big dish (radio telescope) just north of Forbes. Then continuing to Dubbo and regrouping with the Prius and Winnebago. Another thirteen hours on the road the following day took us from Dubbo to home, such is the joys of groups.

The mix match of vehicles on this trip helped protract fuel and toilet stops. In the past Minis were generally fuelling at the same, predictable, time and range. Throughout the trip I managed to keep pace with the only Mini that went (only one passenger, less tools and parts). The Metro could catch up to and pass other cars comfortably whenever required. Two blocked fuel filters, one unexplained stoppage which cleared itself just before the car could roll to a halt and the clutch linkage were the only disasters. For a thirty year old car I'm still happy. Especially when you compare this to the Minis that didn't even attempt the run. Exiting the car in a hurry resulted in a broken wiper switch. Otherwise, some damaged interior trim and tortured rear suspension. The car was serviced prior to departure including a thorough injection of grease wherever possible. This was repeated upon return to Brisbane.

The capabilities of a Mini or its variants should never be underestimated. It is however a pity that so many people are unwilling to even try. If I ever go to Hay again, it will be in a Mini or variant, I'd be too embarrassed to turn up in anything else.

