



**BNT Mason
Motorsport**

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The 2008 Dunlop New Zealand Targa will go down in Richard and my memory as one of the most fun, exciting and adrenaline packed weeks of our lives. As you can tell, we had an absolute ball!!! The roads were fantastic; fast mixed with tight and technical mixed with flat out. The competition was hot and we were stoked to come out on top, gaining valuable tarmac experience and further enforcing our passion for the sport.

TARGA PRE EVENT

Richard has always been keen on doing Targa. This has been right back since the late, long time family friend and the then Dunlop general manager, Greg Ryan voiced his passion for the event to Richard. The words 'you have to do this event' and the enthusiasm that Greg showed for it echoed in Richard's mind as he set about with current Dunlop Motorsport Manager Aisair Corbett in making the dream a reality in 2008. We sat down with event owner Peter Martin a couple of weeks before Targa, and Richard walked away telling me, we just have to do this event! How lucky he is to have an equally passionate wife! So Spud got pulled out of our workshop and the task was set to prepare a car capable of being at the top, in an event and surface fairly foreign to our team... we love a challenge! With many phone calls to Murray Coote about suspension and set up, and Dwight Scott managing to squeeze in a fresh engine in-between other commitments (lucky he doesn't need much sleep), we were hopeful we had a package that would get us through the week or effectively 2 Rally New Zealand's put together.

TARGA DIFFERENCE

Targa was to be a new challenge for us, not just because of the surface (tarmac) but also the fact it is a long event (5 days of racing). The longest event Richard and I had done previous was Rally NZ (3 days). It was going to take a tactical approach and careful thinking to get the car to the end, tyre management, car preparation and pacing ourselves were all to be major factors. Some of the other new challenges we were to face in this rally included no stage notes, this meant for the majority of the time I didn't speak and Richard had to read the road to work out what was coming up! I only had information on cautions and intersections. It wasn't uncommon for me to just sit and enjoy myself for 10km at a go and Richard wouldn't hear a peep out of me (although we often did talk about various unrelated things anyway!). One of my different jobs on this rally was unusual... I had to slow him down! In Targa our maximum speeds are 200kph, at the point of hitting that Richard has to hold it at that speed. We have GPS to ensure we don't speed and this is coupled with random radar guns positioned through stages (you see a smiley face board on the next straight to say they've been checking you). Targa also has sections, usually 500m long, where the maximum speed is 50kph.

There were also NO early mornings! Well not for us anyway, Targa starts cars in reverse so we got a sleep in every day. The cars also have only 30second gaps, much different to the 1 or 2mins we're used to. It meant it was not unusual to pass one or two cars per stage.

But one of the biggest differences in Targa was the relaxed atmosphere. Everyone involved, from the competitors to the marshals, police and service crew were very friendly. It didn't seem to matter if someone was having a bad day, they still had a smile on their face. The whole Targa atmosphere was a pleasure to be part of.



PROLOGUE

Richard and I spent the first day at prologue with eyes wide open, trying hard to adapt to the new rules and regulations. We quickly found out there is one big rule to targa— don't worry! With apprehension we approached the prologue, an awesome super special type stage, run around car parks in Manukau. It was twisty, it was tight and it was a great way to bring the spectacle to the people. Richard was very happy to be able to take previous 2 times NZRC champion and sponsor, BNT's Greg Horne for a ride. We were also happy to set some great times in prologue, winning the first of the 2 runs and getting 3rd= in the second. But the test wasn't in the prologue and the race was going to begin the next day and take on 5 days of racing, over 753 competitive kilometers and 1435 touring kilometers.

The competition was always going to be stiff. There was 2 x previous Targa winners Joe McAndrew/Sue O'Neill, as well as Clark Proctor/Tony Callaghan, Paul Manuell/Glenn Middleton/Warwick Martin, Tony Quin/Keith Wenn, Gavin Riches/Steve Wilcock as well as 128 or so other fast and seriously cool cars.

TARGA DAY 1

Day one dawned fine. Today we were to travel from Manukau to New Plymouth, it happened to have the longest stage of the rally (stage 3) and had the most competitive kilometers too (193km). We expected today to be a bit of a baptism of fire and had planned to have a learning day. After careful thought we decided to ease into the tarmac, aiming to be around 1 minute off the leaders at the end of the day.

However, (a good however) we were pleasantly surprised to win the first stage! Probably the main reason being that it had a large section covered in loose gravel, which Richard felt at home on. What an awesome feeling it was to be leading Targa (yes, ok we did have 737.52km and the best part of 5 days to go though). We got 3rd in stage 2 and moved on to stage 3. Little did we know that stage 3 was going to be a huge turning point of the rally! It was 53.32km long and Richard attacked it. We felt like we'd done a great time, when we got to the end the cars were backed up at the finish (with 30sec gaps it can get hectic at times). Joe pulled up next to us and we exchanged stopwatch times - he got us by 7seconds which we were quite happy with. By the time we got up to control they couldn't give us any times, and unfortunately the results on the internet were way out, saying Joe did a time several minutes faster than his stopwatch said and also that we had gone faster but it was out of proportion to Joe. We both had our stopwatch times to go off so we knew where the real results were at, judging by the published times Joe would have had to have caught us in the stage—that wasn't the case. After talking with Joe and team we put in an inquiry over our time and spent the next 5 days working with Joe, other competitors, in-car camera team and CRO's to get the times set straight and fair. We eventually found out, it was due to the helicopter hovering above the finish that the times got all mucked up.

So we set off for the rest of the day and event, using everyone's stopwatch times for that stage and judging results by that. The rest of the day was more great fun skids and we thoroughly enjoyed the roads the region had to offer.

We ended the day 2nd and 14seconds behind Joe in first. We also had 1min 34seconds buffer back to third. A positive start to the long week ahead. Today was an eye opener for me, I suddenly realized how FAST tarmac is! The speeds are so much higher than gravel, as is the grip and braking. My body was sore all over from the G-forces and maybe a little from using my 'passenger brakes'!

TARGA DAY 2

Day 2 was quite an interesting day. We set good times on the first two stages of the day, including the fast 'jumps' stage. We then headed out to one of the most interesting places and one of the hardest names to say in New Zealand—the republic of Whangamomona (how many of you just tried to say that!?). It was an awesome stage, fast and furious start with twisty and technical finish. Once there, we paid our \$3 and received our 'republic of Whangamomona passports', entitling us to be citizens. After a long service there and a really good lunch, we headed back, doing the same stage but in reverse. This direction was even better, because the twisty stuff was at the start and so the tyres weren't overheated and you could attack it more, opening out to a fast finish. It was on this stage I had one of the most memorable moments of the event; I was calling out to Richard all the corner speed signs I could see, I called one '65km' signed corner to him and looking down at my Coralba to see we were actually taking it at 160km!

Unfortunately for Joe and Sue they punctured in this stage and so had to drive the last little bit with no rear tyre (everyone is limited to 6 tyres for the event). This eventuated in us leading the event by 1min 42sec from Joe. Although we were adamant not to forget, there was still 3 more days and 435.92km of competitive stages to go (almost two full normal rallies for us).

TARGA DAY 3

Day 3 took us from New Plymouth down to Wanganui. Unfortunately the first stage was cancelled due to an altercation with a power pole. Come stage 16 we were going quite good, until.... The famous 'cop corner'. It claimed another car, this time it wasn't due to an accident. Our gearbox jammed in 3rd gear. With 9km to go, it was all we had. The fastest we could go was 110kph but we still lost 1 1/2mins to the rally leader. We were gutted but knew, it was a long event and anything could happen. Spud and Hamish put a standard gearbox in at the next service which was meant to be 25min long (however it was shortened due to running late). With Spud the only one that had done a fast gearbox change before, we were up against it. We were very happy when Chris from another crew came to our aid and got stuck in, as well as lots of other people throwing tools and exhausts and gearbox's around to lend a hand when possible. All in all, the box was changed in about 30min and we were away. However, (bad one this time), due to shortening the service we JUST missed the next stage start (we watched tail end Charlie driving off the start line). We were gutted to have to drive behind the police car through this stage and took the maximum time... losing a whopping 5min and 2seconds to the leader (it also looked like an awesome stage). Unfortunately we also came across Paul Manuell and Warwick Martin's accident, we sincerely wish them a speedy recovery.

So down but not out, Richard and I approached the next stage with fresh enthusiasm to climb back up that leader board and try hard to get that top spot. We won this stage and drove back to the finish in Wanganui for the night, giving us a chance to refocus, regroup and come up with a game plan for the next 2 days of competition. The bad luck for the day didn't end there though, the local school kids were cleaning the car as part of the compulsory car wash and accidentally set off our onboard fire extinguisher system. You can't stop the system once its begun, so we sat there looking as it emptied itself, it not only coated us inside the car with the liquid, but also under the bonnet and all through the seats etc.... Yuck. Luckily, we had a spare extinguisher in the truck from one of our other cars that we were able to put in to keep going. That challenge overcome, the boys, including Richard, worked until midnight to fix the gearbox so we were able to put the dogbox back in, to give us the best chance and gaining back some time.

TARGA DAY 4

With a trying day 3 behind us, we set off on a new day, with a new mission. Today was quite long—180km to be exact. It ran from Wanganui, via Tui Brewery (we were breath tested!), Martinborough and then finishing for the night in Wellington.

Stage one was Saddle Road, a road I was meant to have done the opposite direction a month or so ago in the Day-breaker rally (however we broke down beforehand!). A little bit of knowledge of this road turned out to be a little bit of a hindrance, we roughly knew there is a tight corner at the bottom of the hill so it actually caused us to be slower, expecting it. It was quite funny how that worked, but we did manage to just win the stage. It wasn't until stage 21, the second longest of the rally 43.18km long that that rally turned another direction. Joe and Sue went off the road about 1km from the finish, Dukes of Hazard style they jumped a fence and finished about 100metres out in a paddock. Richard saw the lock up marks go off the road and as always, made a point of looking to make sure there was no one in need of help over the bank. He anxiously told me he saw them way down in the paddock which caused a moment of panic as it seemed similar to Emma's big accident in Whangarei last year. Luckily, Joe and Sue were out of the car and the car looked fine. One of the biggest parts in motorsport is looking out for all those competitors around you, accidents put things like competition in proportion. They managed to find a gate and got out of the stage without even losing much time (just over 2min). They did however, have to take another tyre because they destroyed two in the accident (this equaled a 1 minute penalty). We were joined by one of our regular service crew members, Nick, just before the Tui Brewery Service (good timing nick!?)

Richard got his teeth stuck into stage 25 not far out of Masterton (turning it on for the local crowd!). We then toured past our farm, and while doing so made sure our cattle had enough grass... its ok, its Targa! We had great fun through the shortest stage of the rally at 5.26km. We flew through it and it was amazing to do that many kilometers in only 2min 10seconds! We got back to Martinborough and the boys prepared the car (we were joined now by Dani, Jess, Stu, Jemma and Corina), getting it ready for the 5th and final day of a so far, exciting and adventurous event. Richard and I then drove back over the Rimutaka's to the car park in Wellington. We slept on a boat at the Mana Marina for the night, it also happened to be an incredibly windy night, with gusts up to 120kph! Although having had an intense week, the gentle rock of the boat and the masts clunking close by didn't seem to matter!

5TH AND FINAL DAY

Come Saturday morning, Richard and I woke up refreshed. We had entered the event for some fun and had exceeded our own expectations by being only 79seconds behind the leader. We had known the whole week that rain was forecast for today. It was however a little daunting. Richard doesn't have wet tarmac experience and the tread was low on our tyres—although Dunlop weren't worried. We had chosen a good middle ground compound for wet roads, and apart from standing water, the compound is more important than tread. Alistair Corbett and his Dunlop team had done a great job of managing our tyres during the event and we started the day with confidence in the rubber we had on.

So the question that was on Richard and my mind on Saturday morning, approaching stage one was 'what do we do'. With excitement, we decided we'd give it a crack to win. The kilometers weren't high—95.7km, which meant we had to take out .825sec/km on the leaders. It wasn't going to be easy but nothing worth doing is and it's not in either of our natures not to give it a good try.



DAY 5 CONTINUED...

We exceeded the target sec/km in stage one which gave us fresh enthusiasm that the result may be possible. We knew stage 29, the infamous Akatarawa's was going to decide whether we could get that top spot or not—due to it being the only long stage of the day (21km) and the fact apparently it was going to be the Motu of Tarmac which would suit our nimble Subaru. We really enjoyed the stage and were stoked to win it by 29seconds! It meant, in the first two stages we had managed to halve our margin and now were just 40seconds behind. I love close racing like this, it's one of the reason we compete in motorsport, to feel that rush and be faced with the pressure and challenges.

Paekakariki hill was next, we were warned there would be wind gusts of 120kph greeting us on sheer drop corners. However it wasn't an issue and we got through the stage unscathed. But then... the rain came down. It didn't come down lightly either! Richard and I were to face our next challenge, to quickly learn how to drive in the rain on bald tyres. The repeat through Paekakariki hill wasn't great, we dropped 11seconds to Joe and Sue. I've never felt anything like it before driving on the roads. It was scary! It felt like driving on pure oil, no matter how slow you went there was nothing there.

Moonshine was up next, at 10.54km long, we'd been told it was another tarmac Motu. Twisty and technical it was, with narrow roads it was another one suited to our nimble car. Roads still wet, Richard set about learning this new art of wet tarmac, he learnt to chuck the car around and I think drove more sideways than what he does on gravel. We took 23seconds back off Joe and once again, made the top place on the podium more achievable. It was very exciting chasing!

After a brief service at Maidstone park, we recalculated our position. We were currently 27seconds off first, with 29.63km to achieve it in. That distance was quickly narrowed down to only 24.36km as the final stage—Shelly Bay was cancelled due to the sea blowing over the road! A repeat of Moonshine was up next, Richard was starting to love the wet tarmac, the tyres were gripping the road pretty well and as long as you were aggressive and kept your wits about you, you could still drive quite fast. We were overwhelmed to grab the whole 27seconds exactly in the Moonshine stage.

So get this.... Going in to the final stage of the rally (only 13.82km in length) we had completed the best part of 5 days and 700km of special stages, in a time of 5 hours 57min and 17seconds. That was dead even with Joe and Sue. We were still going off our stopwatch times on Stage 3, as unfortunately the organizers had yet to change that time officially—although, as constantly commented throughout the week, we and others knew where the real times were at.

So, pumped up and ready to rock we approached Makara with no apprehension, but confidence in ourselves and our car. It was a great drive and with the rain still falling, such an exciting way to finish the rally! Words can't explain how incredible it was to win the stage and finish 23seconds ahead. It was a shame that they didn't have the results sorted when we arrived back at Taranaki Wharf, but that damn stage 3 time was finally corrected soon afterwards.

This result is hard to put into words, it feels so good! It felt comparable to winning a championship, and not just because we won, but because of the whole atmosphere and spirit surrounding the event—it encompassed so much and had many trials and trepidations throughout. It was truly awesome fun and once finished, we felt like we'd just had a holiday.

TARGA WRAP UP

We had an absolute ball!! I highly recommend Targa to anyone that wants to have some stress free skids in great social company, coupled with adventure and excitement. It's also an event that gives something back to the communities (with compulsory donation passage controls & car washes). It rejuvenated my passion for the sport, although it was on a different surface than usual, it posed so much excitement and so many different challenges. One of the things that made it even better was I got to spend the whole experience with my best friend through all the ups and downs (mostly up's!).

Will we be back? Time will tell. It will go down as one of my most favourite events I've competed in and I know Richard feels the same! Dwight at ScottSpeed says if we gave him more warning for next year, he could get us another 100hp, who wouldn't want that? For now Richard and I will be winding down, spending time with the family and hopefully taking a holiday over the summer. Mind you, we might sneak the odd hillclimb in here and there to still get our fix :)

THANKS

Where do I start? Huge thanks to Dunlop, especially Alistair Corbett for starting the ball rolling and making it all happen. Thanks Greg and BNT for continued support. Thanks Spud, Hamish, Tom and Alison for tripping around the country to service the car and keeping Richard and me going. Thanks Nick and Gemma for helping us out on the weekend. Thanks Stu and Corina for meeting up with us at Martinborough service. Thanks Mum and Dad for also coming along to help out, and a special thanks to our gorgeous girls Dani and Jess—our good luck charms! Thanks Chris and Dwight for keeping us up to date with results. Thanks to Dwight for also giving us a great engine! Thanks Murray Coote, for support and knowledge re suspension and car set up. Thanks to Peter and Vikki Martin, as well as everyone at Targa, for running a thoroughly enjoyable event. Many thanks to all the timing crews and marshals out there, you guys did a great job! Thanks to all the competitors, especially those around us, it was great fun socializing and competing with you all and meeting new friends along the way.

QUICK TARMAC (TARGA?) CAR FOR SALE

Newly built by BNT Mason Motorsport for targa/tarmac rallies. Only used once in gravel trim but selling in tarmac spec as originally intended. Using the same set up and type of suspension that we've just won Targa with. Clean white colour, blue-printed engine by ScottSpeed, Motec ECU, MCA tarmac suspension, chrome molly cage, large diameter Brembo brakes with 2 piece discs and new pads etc etc. Wicked car in almost brand new condition, well under cost at \$45,000. Phone Richard 027 244 1401.



www.targa.co.nz

www.richardmason.co.nz

CONTACTS

Richard: 027 244 1401

Sara: 027 224 9785

richard_and_sara@xtra.co.nz

TV COVERAGE

It will be on TV ones motorsport show, on a Sunday in a couple of weeks time. As well as replayed on sky. We'll let you know when we know when :)

