

A Little Bit of Luck on Cup Day

By Leigh Johnson

There were two occasions on Melbourne Cup Day when I seriously wondered whether I'd made the right decision.

The first was when I woke up and realised that at dinner the previous night I'd given David Thomson \$10 (as had just about everyone on the Mt Gambier Border Weekend) to invest in a Melbourne Cup trifecta. A sweep would have been so simple but a gigantic win on the trifecta sounded so much sweeter. And David had been so very convincing.

The second time was a little later in the day at Carpenter Rocks about 35km south-west of Mt Gambier. It was the first day of the rock lobster season and boats were buzzing in and out as we sat there and took in the sea air, the sounds and smells.

As Helen and I were about to leave, Reg protested with a loud clunk under my right buttock that sounded awfully like a clutch rod giving up the ghost (especially as it was accompanied by a clutch pedal that went straight to the floor).

Upon inspection I figured I could get us going with a judicious application of some fencing or similar wire. After all, it was just a matter of connecting two bits so that they'd operate together rather than independently. I borrowed some wire from a passing fisherman but, unfortunately, either the wire was too soft or my twitching was not tight enough or both and the wire stretched as soon as I put my foot on the clutch.

I tried several times and swore more times than that but finally resigned myself to the fact that it wasn't going to happen. It was about then that I realised the bit that had broken off the end of the clutch operating rod would still be just a few metres away where it happened. In the heat of the moment I'd forgotten about that and had this feeling that the bit would have dropped off "somewhere".

So with both bits now in hand I proceeded to ring the RAA from the public phone box up the road. No mobile coverage here. How lucky was that – and the 'phone worked.

I said that it was fixable on the side of the road by a handyperson and didn't need to be towed anywhere. They were very helpful and said someone would be there in 45 minutes. So what happened 45 minutes later? A tow truck arrived. "We don't fix anything. We get you going if you've got a flat battery or a flat tyre or something but that's about all." How helpful, I thought. Things must have changed in the RAA operating procedures or their mission statement or core values or something.

I made an executive decision and sent the tow truck away. Using the tow truck would have meant going back to Mt Gambier and finding somewhere to get a little bit of welding done and the tow truck home base wouldn't be able to do it in their workshop until two days later. The likelihood of getting to Kingston, our intended destination on Melbourne Cup Day using that option was very, very slim.

While I'd been waiting for the RAA, a person emerged from the cafe in front of which we had stopped. I explained my predicament and said that all I needed was an angle grinder and a welder and I'd have it fixed in five minutes. He said "I've got an angle grinderand a welder. If I can help just ask for Tim."

So with Tim as my fall-back position I waited for the RAA thinking all the while that they must have brazing equipment or something similar in a breakdown van out in the country. But, alas, my expectations were unfulfilled.

Having sent the truck on its way I went to track down Tim who happened to be not part of the cafe but around the back with Stanke Ociana Seafoods - rock lobster people.

I found him behind a desk fiddling with a computer while just finishing his lunch and took him up on his very kind offer to assist.

When I returned with the bits, Tim was extracting a welder, angle grinder and associated necessities from the back of his van. It looked like a mobile mechanic had arrived. It turned out that he wasn't a desk man after all but the Maintenance Manager for the company. Another stroke of good fortune.

We tossed to see who would do the welding but I used a double-headed coin because I knew what my welding was like. I'm pretty good with an angle grinder; I can even slice through fingers quite easily but welding's another story altogether.

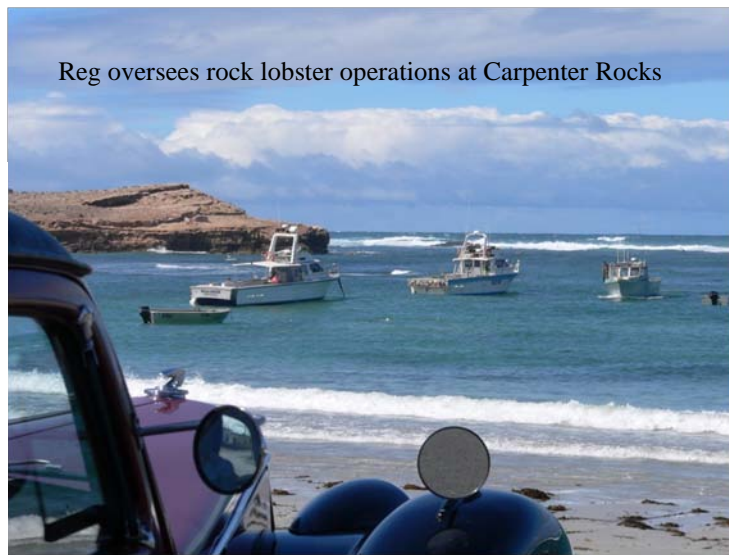
I was wrong about how long it would take to fix the rod. It wasn't 5 minutes but 5½ minutes.

Being in a very accessible spot, a few minutes later the rod was back in place on Reg the Riley, I'd left Tim with something with which he might buy a beer or three and we were off. Tim didn't want anything for his trouble but I just couldn't leave with only a thank you; it didn't seem enough.

It looked like our journey home from the Riley Border Gathering at Mt Gambier was back on schedule although morning tea had turned into lunch and there were now fewer stops to be had along the way.

The long weekend had started four days earlier when most of the 26 South Australians travelled down to Naracoorte, stayed there overnight and met up with more of the group from both SA and Victoria at Bool Lagoon on the Saturday for lunch. The Friday night was wet, very wet with the rain thundering down for what seemed to be hours. I had visions of our house back in Adelaide washing away but found out later on that Adelaide had missed out on the rain.

Reg oversees rock lobster operations at Carpenter Rocks



Bool Lagoon was beautiful; birds everywhere and water, lots of water but very, very breezy and approaching sub zero I think.

The weather was cool to cold with showers for the next couple of days but the company was warm and friendly; an opportunity to catch up with people we hadn't seen for a while and talk about things in common. 70 people were there for the weekend – our 26 and the rest from Victoria. There were three Roadsters, plenty of pre-wars and the usual roll-up of RM's including one Drophead.

On the Sunday we had a nice drive to down Nelson and a cruise on the Glenelg River for some. It's in Victoria but only just. On Monday we checked out the lake and then popped on down to Port MacDonnell. It was very reminiscent of Carmen's Long Bottom End Weekend last year with rugged limestone coastline and beautiful blue crashing seas. They don't call it The Limestone Coast for nothing. Dinner each night topped off each day's driving either at the historic Jens Hotel or the very swish Barn Steakhouse.

Well done to Margaret and Peter Leppard who carried the major load of organising such a good weekend. I think we should give them the job of organising the next National Rattle and they could probably do it in a couple of weeks instead of 10 people taking two years to do it.

Helen and I chose to take the slow road home via Carpenter Rocks, Tantanoola, Robe and Kingston which is why we were at Carpenter Rocks where this story all started.

And so, how did we finish on the day? We certainly backed a winner in Tim Rosenthal from Stanke Ociana Seafoods but definitely lost on David's Tantalising Trifecta. Overall we came out on top. Sometimes you can be lucky.

