

Kurrajong, Christmas 2005.

Dear

What a crazy year its been ...even by our standards!

In August 2004 I went to Zurich on business for a couple of weeks. With the exception of a fortnight back home in September, that was it until the middle of January. Julie joined me in October and we were lucky to find a really nice apartment on Doldestrasse that looked out over the lake.



Not surprisingly everything had grown while we were away and the grass in some places was over the bonnet of the tractor.

Julie had project managed the building of the swimming pool and the shed, more of which later. We had also together built a 60 metre dry stone wall using cast blocks. This was finished in the 2 weeks in September with the last job moving something like 40 tons of topsoil.



In Switzerland we had a company BMW and used it to good effect to see a lot of country. We discovered lots of gnomes, but not sure where all the gold was hidden!

The highlight was a long weekend in

Salzburg and I was even able to find the school I had spent a summer at learning German. The photo is me at Hellbrunner Schloss at the end of the road where the school was.



They cover the statues in cloth to prevent the frost destroying them ... must work but looks really weird.

The Xmas markets are something else with people travelling for miles to see them. There's this incredible choice of Xmas decorations and other stocking fillers on sale in stalls.



One of the main squares was turned into an ice rink and we saw some amazing ice sculpture and had a ride around the old town all rugged up in a horse drawn open carriage.



Driving back through Germany we saw more frost than we had ever seen before ... it stood up like snow on the trees and the whole countryside was completely white.



We had a lovely Xmas in England with Chris & Wendy and enjoyed New Year back in Northumberland with Anthony & Jane before spending a few more days in Zurich.

Julie was hard at work on her first novel. It's called The Parcel and is a historical romance set mainly in Russia during the Civil War that followed WW1. There's lots of excitement and action and I think it's a really good read. Julie did a lot of the research in the Australian War Museum in Canberra and was astonished to be able to actually handle original war diaries from soldiers involved in the campaign. The first thing she learned was the history books of the period didn't agree with what happened on the ground.

The book is now finished and is entered in a competition for new writers held by the ABC. In addition to their TV and radio, the ABC is also now one of Australia's largest publishers, so we've all got out fingers crossed. The results are expected in February. The research for the sequel is beginning.

I had a lot more travel for work during the year. It was Singapore in February for the regional sales kick-off and then a couple of weeks in Washington DC, with the highlight being a visit to the new Smithsonian Museum at Dulles Airport.

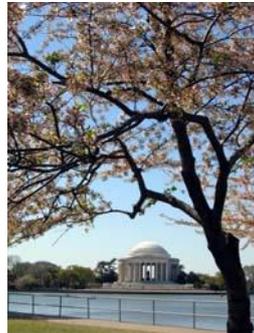




This contains the Space Shuttle as well as the Enola Gay, and the Blackbird spy plane that used to leak fuel on the ground. Wouldn't have wanted to be the first to start

the engines!

In April I was back in Zurich and the USA and was lucky enough to see the cherry blossom in the capital, which was really pretty.



In August it was back to Zurich and a few hectic days in Slough before getting back to Australia; the last couple of months have been relatively quiet with only one trip to Singapore for a week in October. Life seems to be starting to return to normal!

We went up to Bathurst to watch the practice on the Friday. Martyn Reeves joined us and stayed the night before at Kurrajong. It's a great time to go as there are no crowds and one can walk the whole way round the top of what has to be the world's most exciting circuit.

We were back up there again a fortnight ago to show the R34 GTR Skyline to a prospective purchaser. The trip proved worthwhile, as we've acquired an Audi A6 Quattro turbo diesel, which is a darn sight more comfortable and still seems to do the same journey times. So - you don't really need 450bhp to go to work!



Julie and I got away for a week in the Snowy Mountains where we stayed at the Crackenback Resort that is built out over a lake. We took the Pajero 4WD and were able to get off the beaten track and see a lot of spectacular country.



The week before we went to the inaugural A1 Grand Prix event at Eastern Creek and were perfectly placed to capture the monster crash of the Japanese entry. I

got the complete sequence from when Shimono lost control in Turn 1, each roll across the gravel trap, hitting the wall, the motor breaking off the chassis, and eventually coming to rest with bits of car still flying around. The photographs made the front pages of Auto Action and Motorsport News and were also picked up by a UK based agency.

We hosted the Golden Wedding party for good friends Malcolm & Babs Bates who were our neighbours in Lane Cove for more than 20 years. Julie did all the organising and with more than 60 guests the plan was to have it in the garden with the reserve plan being the shed. We woke on the Saturday morning to a forecast that promised showers in the afternoon and decided that we would have drinks on the patio and lunch in the shed.



It was a lucky decision as a storm hit half way though the drinks and we ran out of umbrellas ferrying people between the house and the shed. We had more than 20mm of rain in 15 minutes, just under an inch on the old scale. It didn't dampen anybody's spirits at all and the whole event was a great success with congratulatory letters being received by Malcolm and Babs from the Prime Minister, Governor General, NSW Governor, local MP etc. Very grand!

This was the storm that (hopefully) broke the drought. 10 days later we had 125mm (5") in 2 hours so we're looking out over green fields that almost look like England, and starting to half believe that the drought has at last broken. Certainly all our springs are flowing again and the dam is full for the first time since we have been here.

We're spending Xmas day with Pam & Gerry in Pittwater and will be camping out in the Boat House rather than driving home. Very sensible! NYE is being spent at the Zoo that has fabulous views over Sydney Harbour, so we'll have grandstand seats for the fireworks.

Have a great Christmas and prosperous 2006!