



MERRY CHRISTMAS FROM KURRAJONG

Jeremy's retirement at the end of June was the big news of 2007. With more time on our hands we're planning a three month trip to Europe in 2008 and a chance to catch up with everybody then.

The year started off with the usual bang with New Year in the Southern Highlands. We made up a party of a dozen at the historic Milton Park. Good food, good company and a great start to the year. Same again planned for this year.

Around here the countryside was pretty dry. We were in the seventh year of a 'once in a 100 years' drought. We'd never seen the ground so dry and there was no grass at all growing round the trees. They had literally sucked the last of the moisture out of the ground. We have a line of century old stone pines at the top of the ridge above our house, and we have lost five of them to disease. The only upside was the tractor and slasher stayed in the shed with no grass to mow.

Jeremy's Work

Jeremy departed for Vietnam in February for the Orange sales kickoff meeting in Hanoi where he was speaking. The country remains pretty third world, but the people were all charming and did not seem to bear any grudge for the horrors of the war. The architecture was French colonial and the traffic was much more chaotic than Paris with no apparent road rules. Amazingly everybody seemed to miss everybody else. The pic shows Jeremy masquerading as a lychee salesman.



Yet another re-organisation in the company opened up the opportunity to take a generous financial package and retire from the insanity of the IT industry!

Julie's Book

'The Sergeant & the Firebird' is in the 'final final final' edit after a positive review by Jessica, Julie's editor and a few months break from writing when we were travelling.

Julie has also taken a committee position responsible for publicity for the local Hawkesbury writers group. The group meets monthly and is part of a national organisation, the Fellowship of Australian Writers.

Godson Craig Arnel's Wedding

Couldn't believe they arranged it for the same day as the Australian GP. At least it was walking distance from the track! A wonderful occasion!



Trip to Perth across the Nullarbor

In August we did a motorhome relocation from Sydney to Perth. Basically the motorhome rental companies need to move their fleets around the country to cater for bookings and offer them free for people who can fit in with their schedule.

As we thought we needed a caravan to properly explore Australia, but were a little unsure of what 'caravan-dwellers' and parks would be like, this provided a low cost way of finding out.

We picked up 'Bertha' in Sydney, drove home and loaded up some provisions, and got as far as Narromine on the first night. It's one of the best gliding centres in the country and was a training airfield in WW2.

Next day we were in Broken Hill which is also known as Silver City. Home to famous Australian artist, Pro Hart, we visited the gallery which celebrates his life's work. It's really impressive, as are the sculptures on the plot across the road. We both loved the place and will go back and spend more time there. The town has great architecture and the surrounding desert landscape has a great light and rich red earth.

We then made our way to Smoky Bay on the Eyre Peninsula.



The place was completely unspoilt with the main trade being oyster farming. We sat down by the beach with a dozen fresh oysters, a knife to open them, and a good bottle of chilled Chardonnay. Heaven! By far the best oysters we'd ever tasted – and worth going back for a week just to enjoy them. The water was so clear you could walk out on the jetty and look down at huge crabs in the seagrass.



We'd always imagined the Nullarbor to be sandy desert as its name is derived from the Latin 'No Trees' Only one part of it is a treeless plain but it's still covered with grasses and other low growing shrubs. The road follows the escarpment for miles and miles before plunging down to what must have been the old sea floor.

Esperance and Albany on the south coast of WA were both delightful. We saw a school of dolphins just off the beach at Esperance, and stayed at Middleton Beach at Albany where there was an incredible array of shells.



We dropped the motorhome off in Perth and stayed at the Sorrento Beach resort for a couple of days before flying back to Sydney.

Every time we stopped on the side of the road for a cuppa – after all we did have the kitchen with us! – we'd take photos of the wildflowers, which are just phenomenal. Over 300 photos later, they make a great collection.



The Off-road Caravan

With the baby boomers retiring en masse, the caravan industry in this country is working overtime. We'd decided we needed an off-road van that could handle the unmade roads in this country and would allow us to get into the National Parks.



They're hard to come by and we were quoted November 2008 delivery by two suppliers. Luckily we found a near new van in Queensland and had a nice trip up the New England Highway to pick it up. We wandered back down the NSW coast moving from beach to beach and just enjoying ourselves.



Back home we've made some small improvements including adding solar panels to the roof which will allow us to free camp in the National Parks.

The Lotus Elise

We'd acquired a Lotus Elise in 2006; it was a high mileage car with a known problem with the Rover engine and a perfect starting point for our intended project. The car has been completely re-engineered with a Honda Type-R motor, similar to the one in Julie's S2000, as well as significantly upgraded suspension. A baffled sump and lightweight flywheel together with a set of semi-slick Yokohama tyres improved the on-track performance, and the old driver had no trouble remembering his way around the circuit for the first time in seven years. Lap times were OK too!



In November we headed off to Bright in the Victorian Alps for an 'Aussie Elise's' weekend. After a year of drought this should have been a weekend of perfect weather in the high country – but nothing could be further from the truth, as it poured all weekend (and has hardly stopped since!). After an organised beer appreciation on Friday evening in the local micro-brewery we had a run up to Mt Hotham the next morning and were literally in cloud all the way with close to zero visibility.



We came home via friends on the NSW-Victorian border and other friends at a place called Stockinbingal in the mid south-west of the state who run a 3,000 acre sheep and wheat property. They had just turned this year's wheat crop into hay due to the drought, and many farmers 50km west of them looked unlikely to survive the summer. Hopefully the recent rains will turn this round.

We came home via Bathurst. The Lotus worked faultlessly and clocked up over 2,000km during the week away.

We organised the club's Christmas party and concours in December, assembling the cars at the village here in Kurrajong and sending them on an observation run to a function centre in the Blue Mountains. We'd originally booked the place for 40 and ended up with 120 for the catered lunch – definitely a record. We got volunteered to organise it again next year.

Europe 2008

We spend a couple of nights in Tokyo before getting into Paris on April 1st where we will stay for a few days with friends before picking up a hire car and travelling down to Italy. The plan is to stay in apartments and villas and try to see a lot of the country, before getting back to Monaco in mid May where we are staying with friends. We'll miss the F1 GP but will be there for the GP Historique which is really special and much more interesting than the current cars.

We're then on a plane to St. Petersburg from Nice where we are booked into a boutique hotel and have organised a personal guide and driver.

We arrive in London on 25th May and fly out again on 26th June ... so we're really hoping to catch up with everybody as well as having some time to get up to Scotland for a few days.

Love

Jeremy & Julie

PS

There are quite a few photos online at:

<http://atraustralia.spaces.live.com/>

