

Days of Wine and POSES

{ a vineyard, car photography and patience... }

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I am not a particularly patient person. While I have been known to pursue pedantry on the odd occasion, this should not be confused with perseverance. Having pointed out an obscure – and possibly irrelevant – detail requiring attention, I am more than happy to leave the time-consuming work to others.

Fortunately, The Universe, in its infinite wisdom, has seen to it that I have not become a brain surgeon, bomb disposal expert or wildlife photographer. While, initially, I would no doubt find each of these noble professions extremely

interesting, once I had the general concepts figured out, I would likely become a bit bored and distracted.

Cut the red wire or blue wire? Errr... you take the camera and sort it out nurse - I'll be in the pub.

Perversely though, The Universe has decided that someone possessing such little innate patience as I should own and maintain a classic car and raise a teenage boy. And eventually teach the teenage boy how to drive the classic car. Obviously a twisted sense of humour comes with infinite wisdom.



Mind you, figuring out the general concepts involved with classic cars and teenagers does seem to be near impossible, so perhaps it's the continual challenge that intrigues. In both cases many of the concepts involved actually seem to be counter-intuitive. For example, you can lavish years of love, effort and money on both, only to see them still sit there and refuse to start in the morning!

Vinification – the process of making wine – is something else that demands time and patience. First, you have to find a nice piece of land that resembles Tuscany in Italy or Bordeaux in France. Then, you need to acquire grape vines with a decent provenance and plant them out, considering things such as row length, wind direction, drainage, wind direction and the Pope's birthday. For the next few years, while you are waiting for them to produce a decent crop, you while away your time building vineyard infrastructure such as roads, dams, buildings and cellars.

When eventually, after drought and storms, you do manage to get enough fruit off the vines, you need to round up some

nubile maidens from the local village and get them to jump all over your grapes for a few days to extract the juice.

Next, you chuck that lot (grape juice, that is, not the village maidens) into big wooden barrels and stare at it for a year or so, hoping some sort of magic is happening inside. If your luck holds, you will eventually decant something approaching wine into a few hundred empty bottles – which you have to put away again for a while.

This, at least, gives you time to come up with a clever name for your wine and design a pretty label for the bottles. Apparently, the average Australian wine punter is more likely to base their purchase on the label design rather than the bottle contents, so this is really the most important part of the whole process.

Finally, after all this you are ready to ask a few friends around for a quiet Sunday barbeque and crack a few bottles - assuming of course that the stuff hasn't actually turned into vinegar.



Good, grief! Who has time for all that, really? Much easier, it would seem to just walk into the local bottleshop and pick up a case or two.

However, while I have neither the time nor patience for vinification, I do quite like the concept of vineyards themselves. Lots of sunshine, fresh air and pleasant surrounds, typically with a cafe or cellar from which one can obtain light refreshment. Very pleasant indeed.

So, when our Club President, Mark Jackson, phoned me one evening enquiring if my Spider would be available for a photoshoot at the Sirromet Winery, just south-east of Brisbane, I was more than happy to volunteer.

As it transpired, the editor of *The Road Ahead*, the RACQ's members' magazine, was planning a special cover for the June-July edition to promote the annual RACQ Motorfest. Alfa Romeo, being the featured marque at the event in honour in honour of the company's 100th Anniversary, was the obvious choice for a cover picture, so they contacted Mark seeking a suitably photogenic classic Alfa to participate.

No problem, I thought. A quick trip out to the winery, a couple of Polaroids of the car in front of the vines and job done.

Mark gave me the contact details for Linda, the RACQ marketing person organising the shoot and I gave her a call the next day.

Linda was actually in Bundaberg on RACQ business, doing whatever it is that marketing people do when they aren't in the pub or having six-hour lunches, however she gave me a quick overview of her vision for the cover. She and the photographer had already scouted the location and picked out the spot in the vineyard where the shoot was to take place. Professional

models had been booked to artistically drape themselves over the car, the makeup artist had been arranged and various props had been organised.

Models, makeup, props?

Hmm, I started wondering whether I might have to join Actors Equity before I would be allowed on the set. Maybe I would have a stunt double to position the Spider on the right spot? Perhaps they would be flying in *The Stig* for the job?

Unfortunately, it seemed that the RACQ budget wouldn't quite stretch that far, but Linda had nevertheless arranged everything with the precision of a military campaign. The window of opportunity for the shoot centred on a couple of days in mid-May, so a date

was agreed based on my availability. I then received my detailed instructions.

I was to arrive at the winery around 2pm in the afternoon. After the models had been made up, the car carefully positioned and the

photographer set up, some trial shots would be taken to check angles and composition. With everything in place we would at last be ready for the "perfect" light at around 5pm and we could begin taking photos for real!

It was probably about this time that the couple of brain cells I still have functioning in my aging cranium finally realised that it was not, in fact, going to be a case of a few happy-snaps with a box brownie.

Accordingly, I started making my own plans and preparations for the operation. The weekend before the shoot, the Spider was carefully washed and polished. The brightwork was buffed and the interior given the *Armour All* treatment. The headlight covers were removed and polished and the tyres dressed. My 1971 Alfa Spider Veloce, *Janey*, was now ready for her big day in front of the camera.

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Being a Brisbane northsider, I then carefully planned the route I would take to traverse the lawless, uncivilised badlands south of the river to get to the winery at Mt Cotton. I took the precaution of programming the destination into my satnav so I could concentrate fully on keeping a sharp lookout for bushrangers and other unsavoury types along the way.

The only variable now left was the weather. The month of May had been displaying some rather unseasonal weather, with a spate of sudden afternoon storms more reminiscent of our typical Queensland tropical summers.

This, I suspect, was a direct result of the recent Climate Change Summit in Copenhagen, which actually increased global warming significantly. In fact, more harm had been done to the environment from the hot air generated by the politicians at that summit than cutting down seven Brazilian rainforests and giving everyone in China a 1975 two-stroke Trabant powered by rancid yak-fat.

With so many other things to coordinate however, all we could do is cross our fingers and hope that we would get just one sunny, dry afternoon – our afternoon.

The two days leading up to the photoshoot benefited from near perfect weather and the morning of D-Day itself dawned cool and fine. By late morning, ignoring the pessimistic bureau forecast (possibility of an afternoon storm) we collectively gave our planned attempt the thumbs-up and the “op” was on. Tally ho, chaps!

At about 1pm, after my ritual oil/water/tyre pressure checks I fired up the Spider and headed off into mid-week traffic. My trip along the Gateway Motorway and across the newly-named *Sir Leo Hielscher Bridge* was uneventful and the satnav was soon guiding me through the Shire of Redlands to the bucolic surrounds of Mt Cotton.

Being early afternoon on a Wednesday, Sirromet turned out to be near deserted, apart from a handful of tourists and a small busload of schoolgirls on a field trip from a private college, sitting in the cafe sipping cappuccinos. Things have obviously changed from my days at school; back then the best outing we could have hoped for was a quick trip to the noisy, smelly Golden Circle cannery at Northgate, where, if we were lucky, we might get to taste a thimbleful of persimmon juice from the rejects vat.

I parked the Spider under some shady trees in the carpark and wandered around for a bit until I found Linda and her entourage in Sirromet’s restaurant, *Lurleens*. The restaurant was closed until the evening service but it provided the necessary space and facilities for the models to be made-up and try on various items of clothing.



Above: The winery restaurant foyer became an impromptu makeup room – by the time I arrived, this had already been in progress for an hour!

Presently, the photographer, Peter Mylonas, arrived with his two assistants in tow. After introductions, we cooled out heels in the restaurant, going over the plans for the shoot and discussing the latest forecast from the weather bureau.

The “talent” (as we in the “biz” call the models) had never worked together before, so Peter’s trained eye was sizing them up and deciding how best he would get two perfect strangers to look like a loving couple out for a picnic in their Italian sports car.

With makeup and hair finally complete, the next order of business was the clothing. The first outfit considered for our dark-haired female model was black – black pants, black top, black jacket, black boots and black hat. I’m sure the fashionista in the room thought it all very stylish, but the photographer vetoed it immediately, saying that in the resulting shot she would look like a black stick with a white face.

Eventually, it was decided our girl would be kitted out in black pants, red top and red hat, while our boy would go with navy trousers, pale blue shirt and moccasins. *Molto alla moda*, apparently.

Some items of clothing had been borrowed from up-market boutiques and had to be returned in perfect condition with the labels still intact, so they needed to be treated with

great care. This resulted in the talent moving around a bit like stilted Thunderbirds puppets, so it was fortunate that we weren’t shooting a movie.

With clothing, makeup and hair sorted, the ten of us climbed into an assortment of vehicles and travelled in convoy down into the vineyard proper.

The precise location chosen for the shoot was off to one side of a bitumen access road, on a slight incline, with the rows of vines immediately behind and gently rolling hills making up the distant background.

I spent a few minutes manoeuvring the car onto the precise spot Peter required while the rest of the crew busied themselves setting up a shelter and some chairs. Peter then erected a portable platform on which his camera tripod could be positioned and climbed up to check his planned angles and framing.

The surrounding grass had been recently mown and Peter decided the clumps of clippings would make the photo untidy, so he instructed his two assistants to get busy with rakes. The two lads spent the next fifteen minutes clearing away grass clippings

Below: Peter the photographer (in red shirt) discussing “motivation” with the talent prior to the first shots, while the rest of the group looks on with barely restrained excitement.





Above: In between shots, the makeup lady provided portable shade for our human statues so perspiration wouldn't ruin their makeup. If only the sunshine had lasted...

either side of the area, while various props were laid out beside the car to simulate a picnic lunch.

There was some debate as to whether the bottle of wine in the picnic basket should be opened and the models shown with glasses in their hands. In the end, it was decided that some RACQ readers might construe this as the motoring organisation promoting drinking and driving, so our happy couple would remain wine-free, with the bottle left firmly capped.

Peter conferred with Barbara, one of the magazine production team, to find out what she had planned for the cover layout. Unlike normal photos, a cover shot has to be composed to allow for printed elements like the masthead and other overlaid text. The final shot had to have sufficient clear areas of foreground and background where readable text could be placed.

The talent was now positioned on the picnic rug in front of the car and the makeup artist fussed about them, making adjustments to hair, lipstick and clothing while Peter checked composition and light levels.

While all this was happening, I took the opportunity to break out a bottle of spray detailing and tire shine to check my car's makeup as well, cleaning off any dust that had accumulated on the trip down.

It was still an hour or more until the lighting conditions were going to be ideal for the final shot, but we were all warily eying the dark clouds that were slowly but surely building in the western sky. Peter and Linda decided that we would take some "safety shots" just in case the weather closed in at the appointed time.

Peter climbed onto his platform again and attached his camera to the tripod and set up the shot. One of his assistants held up a reflective sheet to direct some light into the shadows and the models struck a pose. Click! The first shot was in the can.

What followed for the next twenty minutes or so was pretty much more of the same, but with the models in various positions and poses, the picnic blanket moved around, food in and out of the basket, jackets and scarves on, off or thrown casually over the back seat of the Spider.

Initially, our boy and girl were looking more like distant cousins than a couple joined at the hip, so Peter spent much of this time trying to get them to relax in each other's company and actually look like they were out together for a romantic picnic in a secluded country spot.

Eventually - despite being watched by a small crowd, having the sun reflected in their eyes and being distracted by a couple of small kangaroos hopping through the vineyards to munch the vines - the models began to look much more natural and Peter began to get some shots that pleased him.



Above: First shot in the can - Peter checking the result in the viewfinder screen of his digital camera.

With a dozen photos posed and taken, Peter was confident that he had enough shots to come up with a decent cover picture if the predicted rain eventuated.

One of the RACQ crew had gone off to find some refreshments and returned with tea and coffee for everyone as well as a packet of Tim Tams. We stood around munching chocolate biscuits and trying not to look towards the west where we knew the clouds were inexorably building.


Linda was still hopeful that the weather would hold out long enough for us to get the perfect shot with the late afternoon light washing over the vines to create a diffuse golden glow.

It was, however, not to be. Within fifteen minutes, the sun was swallowed up by black clouds and the first spots of rain came down. I raised the Spider's top, while the RACQ team dismantled and packed away their tent. Our group beat a hasty retreat to the winery cafe, just as the skies opened and a torrential downpour started.

A check of the weather bureau radar website on a mobile phone, confirmed that the storm cell would probably take an hour of more to pass over our location, so we reluctantly accepted the inevitable and called it a day.

My bleak eighty minute trip home through peak-hour traffic could not have contrasted more with my pleasant journey down just five hours earlier. The pelting rain made visibility almost nil and the noise on the canvas roof drowned out my satnav's voice. Bugger this showbiz lark.

A month after the shoot, the RACQ magazine arrived in my letterbox and I finally got to see the result of our collective efforts.

Hmmm, is that a kangaroo I can see in the distant background? 

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