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BEACon February 2023

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The First and Last Overlands

Over the last few years BEACon has published some articles on great adventure travel expeditions – the 1931 Citroen expedition from Beirut to Peking, the first round Australia drive in 1925 (also by a Citroen) and our own club members Chris and Jenelle Brangwin and two friends driving a pair of VW Kombis from Mumbai to London in 2001. These articles have proved to be very popular – I think we all like to follow people who set out to surmount many obstacles to achieve their objective, and if that involves wild, exotic and little seen countryside, then so much the better. Now currently on TV there is a documentary series on the re-creation of one of the great pioneering drives of the 1950s, dubbed the First Overland. This article will take a look at both the original and the re-creation. As we often do, we'll let Mr Wiki kick the ball off.

'The 1955-56 **Oxford and Cambridge Far Eastern Expedition** was a publicity effort by Land Rover in support of the 1956 Land Rover Series I Station Wagons. The station wagons were very different from the previous Tickford model, being built with bolt-together aluminium panels. The journey was undertaken by six Oxford & Cambridge university students from London to Singapore.

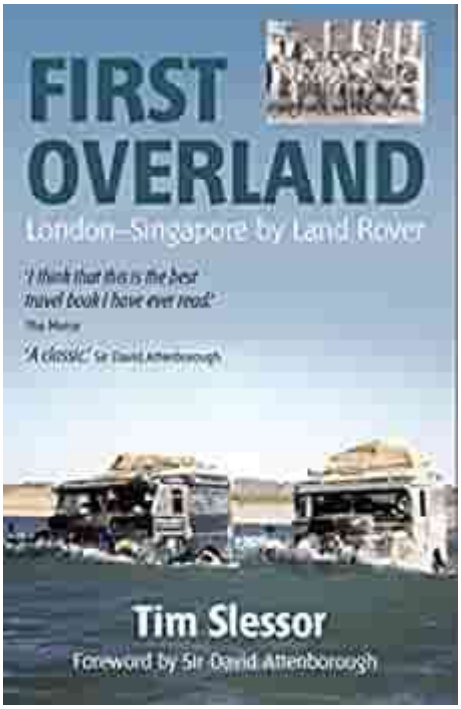
All members were from either Oxford University or Cambridge University, and all had just finished their degrees when they set out on the expedition, with the exception of Nigel Newbery, who had one year left, and was the only Oxford student. The expedition members and their roles on the expedition were as follows:

- Antony "B.B." Barrington Brown - Cameraman
- Adrian Cowell - Business Manager
- Patrick Murphy - Navigator and Chef
- Nigel Newbery - Quartermaster and Mechanic
- Henry Nott - Chief Engineer
- Tim Slessor - Scribe and Assistant Cameraman

After setting off from Hyde Park in London, on 1 September 1955, the expedition was flown over to the European continent and from there continued through France, Monaco, Germany, Austria, Yugoslavia, Greece, Turkey, Syria, Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, Nepal, Burma, Thailand, Malaya and Singapore.

Arriving on 6 March 1956, the journey took six months and six days, over 18,000 miles.'

First Overland: London-Singapore by Land Rover is the 1957 book recounting the expedition by Tim Slessor, originally published by *The Companion Book Club* under the title *First Overland: The Story of the Oxford and Cambridge Far Eastern Expedition*. The 2005 50th anniversary edition, published by Signal Books Ltd, also contains a foreword by Sir David Attenborough, who is listed as co-author. The book is the main source of information about the expedition and its fullest account, as the footage and subsequent programmes made with it only cover a small portion of what the six students did and experienced on their long journey.



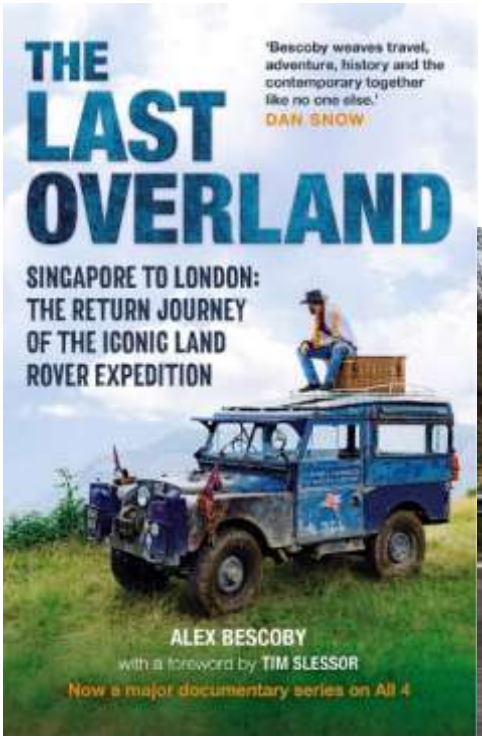
The following is from Google Books review of the book 'First Overland'.

'Why Not? After all, no-one had ever done it before. It would be one of the longest of all overland journeys – half way round the world, from the English Channel to Singapore. They knew that several expeditions had already tried it. Some had got as far as the deserts of Persia; a few had even reached the plains of India.

But no one had managed to go on from there: over the jungle clad mountains of Assam and across northern Burma to Thailand and Malaya. Over the last 3,000 miles it seemed there were 'just too many rivers and too few roads'. But no-one really knew … In fact, their problems began much earlier than that. As mere undergraduates, they had no money, no cars, nothing. But with a cool audacity, which was to become characteristic, they set to work – wheedling and cajoling. First, they coaxed the BBC to come up with some film for a possible TV series (approved by Sir David Attenborough no less – Ed.). They then gently persuaded the manufacturers to lend them two factory-fresh Land Rovers (one named 'Oxford' and the other 'Cambridge' – Ed.). A publisher was even sweet-talked into giving them an advance on a book. By the time they were ready to go, their sponsors (more than 80 of them) ranged from whiskey distillers to the makers of collapsible buckets. In late 1955, they set off. Seven months and 12,000 miles later, two very weary Land Rovers, escorted by police outriders, rolled into Singapore – to flash bulbs and champagne. Now, fifty years on, their book, 'First Overland', is republished – with a foreword by Sir David Attenborough. After all, it was he who gave them that film.

The Last Overland

At the age of 87, Tim Slessor and historian and filmmaker Alex Bescoby in one of the original Land Rovers, "Oxford", planned re-creating the first London to Singapore trip by doing it in reverse. Unfortunately Tim Slessor was taken ill on the day they were due to leave Singapore, 25 August 2019, and was not able to participate, but his grandson, Nat George, stepped in and took his place, arriving in London 111 days later on 14 December 2019. Tim Bescoby wrote a book on the subject, "Last Overland" and a Channel 4 documentary was also produced.



Following is a review of that documentary by John Mangan in The Sydney Morning Herald:

Originally published in 1957 and still in print six decades later, *First Overland: London to Singapore by Land Rover* is, in the world of Land Rover nuts, pretty much the Bible, says English historian and filmmaker Alex Bescoby.
The book was written by Tim Slessor, one of a group of enthusiastic British university students from Oxford and Cambridge who were the first to drive from London to the furthest point in mainland Asia, Singapore. Apart from the sheer scale of the drive – about 15,000 kilometres– it involved navigating a 450 kilometre gap from Assam in north-east India to northern Myanmar that had only a track built 10 years earlier for fighting the Japanese in World War II.

A chap at the BBC, David Attenborough, gave them a movie camera and they made three short films from the footage they shot.

Over half a century later Bescoby was mulling over what to make his next documentary film about, and *First Overland* kept coming up. Bescoby had been living in Myanmar and learnt about the wartime road through to India which had almost vanished.
Back in the UK, attending a 70th anniversary celebration for the Land Rover, he came across one of the vehicles – called "Oxford" as it was painted in the university's characteristic blue – that had actually made the trip out to Singapore in 1955.

"I met Adam Bennett, the guy who restored the car," says Bescoby. "I said to Adam, could I borrow it for a film. He said, you can borrow it, but only if you recreate the entire *First Overland*. He called my bluff and said we've got to go and meet Tim (Slessor).

"I thought I would go and meet him – he was still alive, in his late 80s – just to get his blessing to do it. Lo and behold, after one conversation I'd signed up to take him with me. I'd describe it as a series of escalating dares. It's been the most extraordinary adventure of my life."

So the plan for *The Last Overland* was hatched: Bescoby, Slessor and a support crew would fly out to Singapore and make a film of driving Oxford the Land Rover back to England following the original route as much as possible. With Syria and Iran now out of bounds they'd have to take a more northerly path through Central Asia.

Bescoby comes from a family of Land Rover enthusiasts but he had never shared his father and grandfather's passion. "I'm a history nerd," he says. "That was my thing. With the journey, the car for me was a literal vehicle to study the past. Before my first encounter with Oxford I was barely able to change a tyre. But very shortly into the expedition I realised what an incredible piece of machinery it was and is.

“Sixty-five years after it came off the production line it’s still capable of driving into the most dangerous, difficult roads on earth. I developed so much respect for the incredible simplicity of it.

In an early scene we see Slessor tutoring Bescoby in the art of the driving the vehicle, having to explain double de-clutching, the old-school method for changing gears. “Are you listening Jeremy Clarkson? *This* is motoring!” the octogenarian hoots.
Proper motoring in vintage cars comes at a price. Thanks to primitive ventilation and suspension, and holes in the roof, Bescoby says the car’s occupants are always acutely conscious of the conditions outside.

“If it’s raining outside, it’s raining inside, if it’s hot outside, it’s hot inside, if the road is bumpy, it’s bumpy in the car. It’s loud, it stinks of fuel, you’re probably getting a bit high on the petrol fumes while you’re driving and it also has a habit of breaking down everywhere.

“The thing that I get now about why people love driving vintage cars, particularly from that era, is it is impossible not to be present whilst driving a 1955 Land Rover. It’s so easy now in our comfortable modern cars, we have music, podcasts, audiobooks (you can get an audiobook of Bescoby’s account of *The Last Overland*), anything to distract us, as we cruise-control our way to our destination.

“But when you’re on the journey of a lifetime like this you want to be taking in every minute. You’re going through incredible places, cultures, environments, many of which I’ll never go back to, and the beauty of Oxford is that for all the distance, the noise and lack of power steering and lack of proper brakes and lack of syncromesh gearbox, you’re there, you’re absolutely there.”

The original expedition depended on paper maps, sometimes decades out of date, had to carefully plan fuel consumption because there weren't petrol stations every 80 kilometres like there are now, and was unable to communicate with home for weeks at a time. The car was at

the time cutting-edge technology, so in many places they passed through there were no mechanics who would be able to help them.

In contrast, the modern crew enjoyed all the benefits of the telecommunication age. For example, Bescoby says, he would videocall his mum from the back of the car. (They also had Land Rover clubs in most countries escorting them through and two Land Rover support vehicles - Ed.).

Still, physical challenges remained. For one thing, their vintage four-wheel-drive didn't go any faster than it did when it was new. "If anything, Oxford was going a little bit slower," Bescoby says. "When you're in Tibet and it's below zero at night, you're going up 5500 metres with altitude sickness, in a 1955 Land Rover, that is brutal. I think that's when we earned our stripes as true Overlanders, not just retracing someone else's journey!"

The Last Overland: Singapore to London can be seen on SBS On Demand.

CLUB CALENDAR – February and March 2023

- **Runs start at 10 am from the Botanical Gardens Car Park on the corner of Old South Road and Kangaloon Road, unless otherwise noted.**
- **Please Note: all PDF files and links are available on the club's Events Web Page**

FEBRUARY 2023

Wednesday 8 February |
• Meet | 10am, Southern Highlands Botanic Gardens car park,
1 Old South Road Bowral – at the roundabout Cnr Kangaloon and Eridge Park Roads
•Venue | Bundanoon |
• Further details soon
• Organiser| Owen Sinden| m| 0412687135

Wednesday 22 February
• Meet | 10am, Southern Highlands Botanic Gardens car park,
1 Old South Road Bowral – at the roundabout Cnr Kangaloon and Eridge Park Roads
• Venue | Appin Hotel | 84 Appin Road, Appin
• Run sheet Appin run
•Organiser | Geoff Wood| m| 0408026422
Contact | Ross Pollock | m | 0412 734 825,
e | events@beac.org.au

Tasmania Tour

•The duration of this trip for the purpose of the HVS is Saturday 25th February to Sunday 12th March,2023
•Download Tasmania run sheet Tasmania tour
•Organiser| Fred Edney |m| 0400040088

MARCH 2023

Wednesday 8 March
• Meet | 10am, Southern Highlands Botanic Gardens car park,
1 Old South Road Bowral – at the roundabout Cnr Kangaloon and Eridge Park Roads
Contact | Ross Pollock | m | 0412 734 825,
e | events@beac.org.au

Triumph Centenary Celebration 17-19th March, 2023
•Venue| Bathurst
•Download flyer 100 year flyer

Wednesday 22 March
• Meet | 10am, Southern Highlands Botanic Gardens car park,
1 Old South Road Bowral – at the roundabout Cnr Kangaloon and Eridge Park Roads
Contact | Ross Pollock | m | 0412 734 825,
e | events@beac.org.au

Lamborghini Delivery in Myanmar

Tom Currie's son Andrew sent us this interesting photo of a Lamborghini Huracan being delivered to its new owner in Myanmar. The contrast between the car and its surroundings and delivery vehicle is stark.

Tom's acerbic comment on the situation was 'Somebody asked, "Where would the Lamborghini be serviced?" My answer…..Don't bother about having it serviced. Just run it 'til it stops then buy a new one. After all, the Drug Barons have plenty to spend.'

Tools

Glenn Atkinson referred me to the following entry by Liz Martin on the Stories from the Road Museum Facebook page:-

'I ripped this off but I bet most of you know what I'm talking about.....

TOOLS EXPLAINED

DRILL PRESS :
A tall upright machine useful for suddenly snatching flat metal bar stock out of your hands so that it smacks you in the chest and flings your beer across the room, denting the freshly-painted project which you had carefully set in the corner where nothing could get to it.
WIRE WHEEL :
Cleans paint off bolts and then throws them somewhere under the workbench with the speed of light. Also removes fingerprints and hard-earned calluses from fingers in about the time it takes you to say, 'Oh sh*t'
ANGLE GRINDER :
A portable cutting tool used to make studs too short.
PLIERS :
Used to round off bolt heads. Sometimes used in the creation of blood-blisters.
BELT SANDER :
An electric sanding tool commonly used to convert minor touch-up jobs into major refinishing jobs.
HACKSAW :
One of a family of cutting tools built on the Ouija board principle... It transforms human energy into a crooked, unpredictable motion, and the more you attempt to influence its course, the more dismal your future becomes.
MOLE-GRIPS :
Generally used after pliers to completely round off bolt heads. If nothing else is available, they can also be used to transfer intense welding heat to the palm of your hand.
OXY-ACETYLENE TORCH :
Used almost entirely for setting on fire various flammable objects in your shop. Also handy for igniting the grease inside the wheel hub out of which you want to remove a bearing race.
TABLE SAW :
A large stationary power tool commonly used to launch wood projectiles for testing wall integrity.
HYDRAULIC FLOOR JACK :
Used for lowering an automobile to the ground after you have installed your new brake shoes, trapping the jack handle firmly under the bumper.
BAND SAW :
A large stationary power saw primarily used by most shops to cut good aluminum sheet into smaller pieces that more easily fit into the trash can after you cut on the inside of the line instead of the outside edge.
TWO-TON ENGINE HOIST :
A tool for testing the maximum tensile strength of everything you forgot to disconnect.
PHILLIPS SCREWDRIVER :
Normally used to stab the vacuum seals under lids or for opening old-style paper-and-tin oil cans and splashing oil on your shirt; but can also be used, as the name implies, to strip out Phillips screw heads.
STRAIGHT SCREWDRIVER :
A tool for opening paint cans. Sometimes used to convert common slotted screws into non-removable screws and butchering your palms.

PRY BAR :
A tool used to crumple the metal surrounding that clip or bracket you needed to remove in order to replace a 50p part.
HOSE CUTTER :
A tool used to make hoses too short.
HAMMER :
Originally employed as a weapon of war, the hammer nowadays is used as a kind of divining rod to locate the most expensive parts adjacent the object we are trying to hit.
STANLEY KNIFE :
Used to open and slice through the contents of cardboard cartons delivered to your front door; works particularly well on contents such as seats, vinyl records, liquids in plastic bottles, collector magazines, refund checks, and rubber or plastic parts. Especially useful for slicing work clothes, but only while in use.
ADJUSTABLE SPANNER:
aka "Another hammer", aka "the Swedish Nut Lathe", aka "Crescent Wrench". Commonly used as a one size fits all wrench, usually results in rounding off nut heads before the use of pliers. Will randomly adjust size between bolts, resulting in busted knuckles, curse words, and multiple threats to any inanimate objects within the immediate vicinity.
BASTARD TOOL :
Any handy tool that you grab and throw across the garage while yelling 'Bastard' at the top of your lungs. It is also, most often, the next tool that you will need.’

Phil Hill

I first took notice of car racing (F1 and sports racing cars) in the early '60s, courtesy of my older cousin. Most of my favourite F1 cars and sports racers are from that era – the Cooper T53 'lowline' in which Jack Brabham won the 1960 World Championship and the Ferrari 'shark nose' which Phil Hill drove to the championship in 1961.

Jack Brabham - Belgique 1960

Ferrari 156 'shark nose' of Phil Hill at Monaco.

(My all-time favourite F1 car is the Lancia Ferrari D50 in which Fangio won the 1956 championship).

Lancia Ferrari D50 1956, Fangio driving.

My favourite sports racer is the 1959 Ferrari 250TR, which Phil Hill and Olivier Gendebien drove to such great effect.

When it comes to the subject of favourite drivers, choosing becomes difficult indeed. Every era had its great drivers, right up to the present day. But of course favourite driver(s) is very much a personal thing, with many factors involved. As it turns out, my favourites are closely linked to my favourite cars that they drove. Juan Manuel Fangio (in my opinion the greatest of them all), Jack Brabham (of course) and Phil Hill. Fangio and Brabham need no introduction to race enthusiasts, but Phil Hill is somewhat lesser known. I liked him for his ability to drive F1 and the demanding sports racing cars of the era equally well. As usual, if you want to know something about someone, the first thing you do is ask Wikipedia.

‘Philip Toll Hill Jr. (April 20, 1927 – August 28, 2008) was an American automobile racing driver. He was one of two American drivers to win the Formula One World Drivers' Championship, and the only one who was born in the United States (the other, Mario Andretti, was born in Italy and later became an American citizen). He also scored three wins at each of the 24 Hours of Le Mans and 12 Hours of Sebring sports car races.

Hill was described as a "thoughtful, gentle man" and once said, "I'm in the wrong business. I don't want to beat anybody, I don't want to be the big hero. I'm a peace-loving man, basically."

Career

Born April 20, 1927, in Miami, Florida, Hill was raised in Santa Monica, California, where he lived until his death. He studied business administration at the University of Southern California from 1945 to 1947, where he was a member of the Kappa Sigma fraternity. Hill left early to pursue auto racing, working as a mechanic on other drivers' cars. Hill began racing cars at an early age, going to England as a Jaguar trainee in 1949 and signing with Enzo Ferrari's team in 1956. He made his debut in the French Grand Prix at Reims France in 1958 driving a Maserati. That same year, paired with Belgian teammate Olivier Gendebien, Hill became the first American-born winner of the 24 Hours of Le Mans[with Hill driving most of the night in horrific rainy conditions. He and Gendebien would go on to win the endurance race again in 1961 and 1962.

Hill began driving full-time for the Ferrari Formula One team in 1959, earning three podium finishes and fourth place in the Drivers' Championship. In 1960 he won the Italian Grand Prix at Monza, the first Grand Prix win for an American driver in nearly forty years (except the Indianapolis 500, once part of Grand Prix World Championship series), since Jimmy Murphy won the 1921 French Grand Prix. This also turned out to be the last win for a front-engined car in Formula 1. The following season, Hill won the Belgian Grand Prix and with two races left trailed only his Ferrari teammate Wolfgang von Trips in the season standings. A crash during the Italian Grand Prix killed von Trips and fifteen spectators. Hill won the race and clinched the championship but the triumph was bittersweet. Ferrari's decision not to travel to America for the season's final round deprived Hill of the opportunity to participate in his home race at Watkins Glen as the newly crowned World Champion. When he returned for the following season, his last with Ferrari, Hill said, "I no longer have as much need to race, to win. I don't have as much hunger anymore. I am no longer willing to risk killing myself."

After leaving Ferrari at the end of 1962, he and fellow driver Giancarlo Baghetti started for the new team ATS created by ex-Ferrari engineers in the great walkout of 1961. In 1964 Hill continued in Formula One,

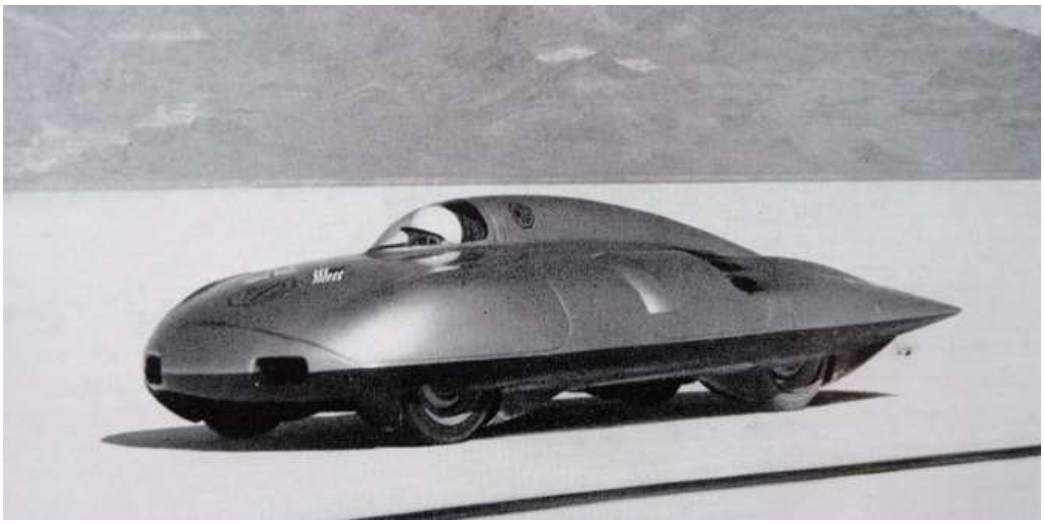
driving for the Cooper Formula One Team before retiring from single-seaters at the end of the season and limiting his future driving to sports car racing with Ford Motor Company and the Chaparral Cars of Jim Hall.

The fearsome Chapparal.

During the 1966 Formula One season, Hill often participated in race weekends behind the wheel of a Ford GT40 prototype, accompanied by a remote-control Panasonic camera in order to produce images for the movie *Grand Prix*. In that same season, he entered his last Formula One race, the Italian Grand Prix at Monza, racing for Dan Gurney's All American Racers, but he failed to qualify. Hill retired from racing altogether in 1967.

Hill has the distinction of having won the first (a three-lap event at Carrell Speedway in a MG TC on July 24, 1949) and last races of his driving career, the final victory driving for Chaparral in the BOAC 500 at Brands Hatch in England in 1967.

Hill also drove an experimental MG, EX-181, at Bonneville Salt Flats. The "Roaring Raindrop"[7] had a 91-cubic-inch (1.5 L) supercharged MGA twin cam engine, using 86% methanol with nitrobenzene, acetone, and sulphuric ether, for an output of 290 HP. In 1959 Hill attained 257 mph in this car, breaking the previous record of Stirling Moss in the same car, 246 mph.



The Roaring Raindrop.

You Call That Cold?

Club member Mark Hollins contacted me recently to make the following observation:

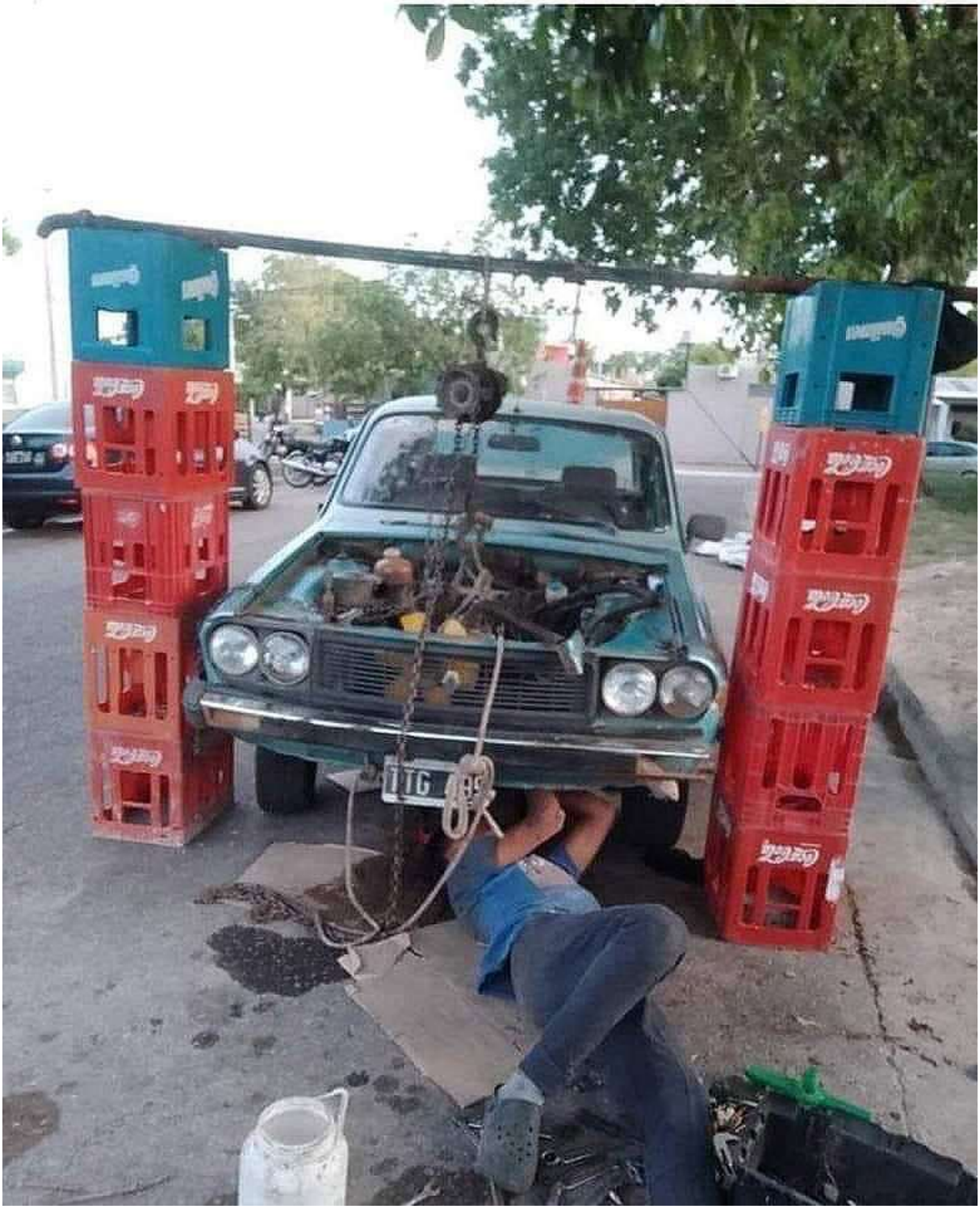
'I have just read the latest BEAC News Letter, in which was mentioned how fresh it was at the last meet. We have just returned from Switzerland. The accompanying photo was taken at Thun (I think) just to show how cold it could be.'

Now of course such a scene is commonplace in Switzerland (at least in the winter). In Australia we think of such scenes as a rarity, being usually confined to the extended Snowy Mountains area or parts of Tasmania. But that brings up the interesting fact that **the Australian Alps get more snowfall than the entirety of Switzerland**. The reason is that the mountains in Australia are located near to the coast while Switzerland is a landlocked country. Coastal regions will always get more precipitation than inland regions and if it is cold enough it will fall as snow.

Snow covered at Thredbo.

MOTORING MIRTH

Interesting way to remove an engine



Thank you to all contributors to this edition.

Phil O'