**36th Annual GPA Swim-In and Military Vehicle Gathering Monday March 9th to Sunday March 15th 2015**

On Friday 6th March we arrived in Corowa for the Annual Gathering. This year we decided to go a day earlier to participate in an event organised by the Corowa Historic Vehicle and Machinery Club which was on Saturday and Sunday. Troy and Richard (from the UK) drove down in our Land Rover and made it into Corowa in good time without any issues. That evening we went to the Seafood Buffet at the Corowa RSL, had a few drinks and a good feed.

On Saturday the boys met up at the Machinery Club and participated in the Corowa Annual Vintage Tractor Pull and Vintage Rally. The military vehicles participated in the tractor trek which went over the border into Wahgunyah and followed tracks along the river bank. They stopped half way to have a BBQ lunch provided by the Machinery Club. They came back to Corowa via the new bridge. It was approximately 40kms. Our military vehicles were very welcomed by the club members. Vehicles and drivers attending: Richard drove a Ferguson TEF Tractor, Brian Healey drove an International Farmall, Hugh Thompson followed in the RAAF Ford Blitz Ambulance, Doug drove a Ferguson Tractor, Neville had a Land Rover, Dave Argles borrowed one of Neville’s Land Rovers and David Williams followed up at the rear and had to take David Smith back when his John Deere overheated. Back at the club showground they had a practice Tractor Pull in the afternoon and in the evening we were all able to attend a dinner, auction and presentations. A great night was had by all.

On Sunday we finished off the pre-registered participant packs, visited a couple of wineries and waited for the Radar Van to arrive. During the day I received photos and messages of its progress. More participants arrived on Sunday and set up their sites. What a site to have three Semi’s with vehicles arrive at Ball Park around 5pm. Eddy Gregier drove Dutchies Volvo F88 and towed the radar van behind. We got the van into the right position and started setting it up so it could open for business on Monday morning. That evening we went over to Wahgunyah to Fairies Bistro for an enjoyable meal. During the afternoon I received a call from Harvey Black. He was on his way to Corowa after attending an event at Boorowa and needed to offload a few things . He had previously informed us that he was bitten by a snake a week prior to leaving home.

 Here is Harvey’s story: On the 28th of February, I was called to Woolworths' Narrabri store to remove a black snake from the back store room.  When picking up the catching bag, I was bitten on the finger by the snake inside.  Following a bad reaction, I spent the weekend in Narrabri Hospital. At Boorowa for the local show the following Saturday, the finger became infected and a broken fang came out of one of the bite points;  big surprise!  I didn't want to get stuck in Yass hospital, so decided to tough it out until I reached Corowa the next day. On arrival at Corowa, on Sunday,  and with a red track up my arm, hospital staff wanted to admit me.  With far too much to do, I was able to negotiate a compromise where I wore a cannula in the back of my hand for three days and attended the hospital twice each day to get intravenous antibiotics administered. On the morning of the fourth day an allergic reaction to the treatment set in, and it was off the antibiotics and onto the antihistamines.  All this was going on while I was producing the Daily Dispatches and undertaking my other KVE chores. I am on the mend now and the finger is slowly getting back to normal.  I would have to recommend to anyone contemplating trying a snake bite not to do it!

The first official day was Monday and there were many participants registered in that day. The A Team were first on the scene on Monday with Richard Farrant, Dave Argles and Brian Healey. Many people were interested in the Radar Van and the information sheets that were on the side of the van showing past and present pictures and information. By the end of the day there were over 70 vehicles registered in. Dinner at the local Italian was up to its normal high standard.

Simon Allen shared his story with me about getting to Corowa this year: Journey to Corowa 2015

Being the year of the GM Vehicle I decided to take my GMC 6x6 with memories of a disastrous trip in 2013 , having faded and the truck having been 100% reliable for the last two years, what could possibly go wrong. I have arrange with my friend and fellow VMVC member Dave Mottram to travel together as he was bringing his recently imported Yankee Joe pole setting truck, and hadn’t yet had the chance to put many miles on it or have total trust in it. Safety in numbers we figured! He would be travelling from Woodend and myself from Castlemaine so we arranged to meet at the Lancefield and continue on together from there. I insisted on leaving early as I wanted to leave plenty of time in case anything went wrong, plus it would be cooler both in the cab and also for the engine and a lot less traffic for us to hold up. I left a 4am on the Monday which was a public holiday in VIC with a full load of rusty treasure for the swap meet in the back and the Ben Hur Trailer on behind with all our camping gear. My wife and son (Callum) would be travelling a few hours behind us, the idea being we would all arrive at Corowa at roughly the same time. The trip to Lancefield went fine except for heavy fog and hundreds of Kangaroos on the road between Carlsruhe and Lancefield. Met up at Lancefield with Dave and his passenger Keith Newsome and also Dave Stafford of QLD who was driving a rental and offered to follow behind. We set off in convoy at a slow but steady pace and pulled over at Tooborac as Dave’s dash lights had stopped working. A quick check couldn’t locate the problem but the charging system seemed to be working fine and he had a torch to shine on the gauges for quick checks. Just prior to stopping I had heard an occasional noise coming from the engine – sounded a lot like generator bearings so while Dave was trying to fix his problem I popped the bonnet and shone my torch on the generator while the engine was running. Everything appeared to be ok with no noises present. We continued on to Puckapunyal and then across to the Hume Highway, the noise coming and going. Just before our breakfast stop at Mangalore the light suddenly went dim and the amp meter showed discharge. We pulled into the roadhouse and after lifting the bonnet it was pretty clear the generator was running red hot. Dave Stafford then asked me if I was a smoker and when I replied no he said why are you throwing lit cigarettes out your window then. I said I’m not. The sparks he had been seeing must have been coming from the generator not a good sign. While having breakfast and letting thing cool down I range home and organised for my 13 year old Callum to remove the generator from a spare engine in the workshop. Callum sent me a couple of photos to confirm it was the right part from the right engine and he struggled to remove it, as it was jammed between a car and another engine. Meanwhile after breakfast and the generator had cooled we disconnected the wiring to it and oiled the rear bush and backed off the tension on the fan belt. There really wasn’t much more we could do apart from cross our fingers. Being a public holiday there would have been nowhere open locally to repair it so all we could do was to continue on to Corowa. All went ok until just south of Glenrowan with the smell of burning rubber and clouds of smoke let me know the generator had packed it in for good. We pulled up on the side of the Hume and tried to figure out a plan of action. Dave Mottram recalled being in a similar situation many years beforehand and by shortening down the fan belt enough just to run the water pump. He had done this by cutting the belt and re-joining it using fencing wire and had managed to limp home. This was the only idea we could come up with so the two Dave’s went foraging on the side of road for fencing wire, whilst I removed the fan belt and cut it into the correct length. Eventually they returned with some rusty old wire and the first of many attempts was made to join the belt successfully. Luckily we had plenty of tools but the wire was incredibly difficult to form into the shape we needed. After two hours of attempts and false starts we finally conceded this wasn’t going to work and started to get all the gear out so Dave’s Yankee Joe could tow the GMC and Ben Hur. Would have been a big ask of the Yankee Joe but not impossible. Just then my wife and son pulled up behind us with the replacement generator which took about ten minutes to fit. All I had to do was fit the spare belt and we would be on our way. Lifted the seat and you guessed it no spare belt. At this stage we did not know what to do and were about to resort back to the towing idea when my wife after rummaging around the back of our 4wd came up with a hand full of old belts. None of them where the right section but it was worth a try. I found one that was too long but by releasing the clamp on the generator and laying it over until it was touching the chassis rail there was enough tension to spin everything. We set off at a slower pace the belt continually screeching but holding together. Dave Stafford kindly offered to head to Albury and locate a correct replacement belt and then back track and meet up with us where ever we had gotten too. I really did not think we would get far as the belt was continually screaming but although the engine was running hotter than normal it stayed steady so on we went. After what seemed like ages we limped into Corowa around 2pm. Dave Stafford had already arrived with the new belt and then within ten minutes work had it all fitted and everything back to normal. The week of Corowa and the trip home was mechanically uneventful and as usual we all had a great holiday.

Tuesday saw a lot more vehicles in town. That afternoon Mark ‘Fletch’ Fletcher arrived and joined us for a KVE meal at Neville Smith’s that evening. There were presentations and a few speeches along with a BBQ that nearly turned into a bushfire. There were a number of stories about people’s problems in getting to Corowa this year circulating. We hope in the future people put these in our Suggestion Tim (old Jerrycan) so then we can better determine who deserves awards.

The Albury RSL Sub-Branch and Albury City Council invited us to a parade and display they had organised for the WW1 Centenary. Hugh Thompson left a bit earlier than the remainder of the convoy. The main convoy went via Howlong and David Smith joined. We met up at Hovell Tree Park, were escorted by 4 Highway Patrol cars and the parade went through the main streets of Albury and back to Hovell Tree Park. TV coverage by Fletch from Classic Restos, WIN TV and Prime TV. Fletch will feature some of this in the show he has done for us. Tamara Whitsed from Owner Driver Magazine joined us and did some stories both on Wednesday and Saturday. This will be in the April edition of Owner Driver. The weather was great and the location was shady and gave people an opportunity to meet others and was conveniently located near the Bakery. When leaving Albury some of the vehicles stopped off at David Smith’s property to check out his shed with motoring memorabilia and then looked at a local scrap yard. I left Albury and went back via a few wineries.

Thursday was the trip to Mulwala and Yarrawonga. We had been approached to come across and be a part of their WW1 Centenary celebrations. The first stop was the Sacred Heart Primary School. The school children enjoyed having the opportunity to climb in and toot the horns of some of the vehicles. Some people went straight to Club Mulwala. The vehicles parked amongst the impressive display of military memorabilia on site. 2 free lunches per vehicle were given and it was another great day. During the week Dave Argles had problems with the brake light wiring so had to call on the local auto electrician so on Thursday decided to give it a run down towards Hopefield to check the speedometer and this was its longest test run to date. Brian and Richard both had a short drive and gave it the seal of approval. There were a number of swap meet sites in Ball Park Caravan Park which kept people interested and some bargains were found.

 I spent the day in Corowa assisting Fletch with his ‘Classic Restos’ military vehicle episode. Interviews were done with Richard Farrant who talked about the Radar Van restoration, followed by Andy McFarland and his Chev Cinema Van, Hugh Thompson with the RAAF Ford Blitz Ambulance, Graham Meyer with his Chev Ambulance and while we were having lunch John Belfield arrived with his Kaiser wrecker and Chevrolet LRDG truck on a trailer. Fletch interviewed John and this part of the episode will mention about John’s past endeavours. Karen and Mark Johnson were interviewed about their 1975 Condor A350 (Ex Swiss Army) Motor bike. When back down at the river we got some footage of the GPA’s entering the lagoon and Darrin Wright’s LP2 Carrier. Fletch was given a ride and enjoyed every moment of his time spent at Corowa.

Friday morning was the KVE members BBQ which was very successful and drew members together and also non KVE members who dropped in for a visit which was really nice. Thanks to Brain Healey and Dave Argles for organising the food etc. Fletch joined us for breakfast before departing for Geelong in Victoria. Soon after Tony Nassar arrived in his 1964 Amphicar. While having breakfast a lady from the Rutherglen High School come over and asked if we could organise for the vehicles going to Rutherglen to visit her school. As usual Neville made sure this happened after the vehicles went to the Rutherglen Gold Battery.

At 10am Land Rover owners were asked to take their vehicles over to Rowers Park (Opposite Ball Park) and a photoshoot was done and awards were given to people. The following are award winners: S2-S2a GS Mick M.

S2-S2a 106RCL/Convoy Escort: Glen H. LWeight Air Portable: Phil H. S3 GS: Gary C. Forward Control: Phil C.

Perentie: Glenn C. Perentie RFSV: Adam B.

A convoy left Corowa at 10:30 for the Rutherglen Gold Battery. Named on Australia Day as the shire's top community group, the battery is a unique land-mark that is run by a small committee. Located on the northern fringe of Rutherglen, the purpose of the battery was to crush quartz from nearby quartz reefs and extract gold from within. This site was close to the Rutherglen quartz mine and surplus water from the mine was used by the battery back in its days of use. After being closed down for a number of years, it underwent a restoration in 2011/12 to now be available for public viewing daily between 9am and 5pm. They have managed to receive a few government grants which has helped out a lot. The main aim is to show people what used to be performed here and what it was like in that era.

I had previously seen Tony with the Amphicar on TV in Canberra when Fletch interviewed him. After a few enquiries I got in contact with him and he assured me he would attend our Swim-In. it turns out he lives in Cooma and knows Manfred Henkel very well. I made it clear to him when corresponding that I wanted a ride and he chased me down during the day so I could enjoy another amphibious experience and this time managed to stay dry. Many people had the opportunity to go for a drive and as most of us were used to climbing over the sides of a GPA or DUKW it was a privilege to be able to open a door and get in comfortably. It was in the water again on Saturday. We always welcome people with non-military vehicles who want to come along to our event and particularly those with amphibious vehicles which is why our event started back in 1980.

The committee of KVE were invited to the Corowa Shire Offices for an afternoon tea. We met the mayor, General Manager and other council people who had been involved with us to make sure the event was successful. This led to more exposure in the Corowa Free Press. Richard was interviewed and photographed by the local journalist.

During the day Mike Cecil arrived and he had an opportunity to talk to many people he has known for many years. He also met people who he corresponds with on the MLU forum. That evening he gave a very informative talk over at the Corowa Footy Club. The Footy Club provided us with a delicious buffet meal for a reasonable cost along with drinks.

The main day was Saturday 14th March. We were able to organise a coffee van down at Bangerang Park which was a request from the previous year. At 7am vehicles started arriving in Bangerang Park. This year the parade took a different route which we knew it could raise issues. Thankfully worries were unfounded. The parade left at 9am and went up Reisling Street which is parallel to Sanger Street (main street). The vehicles came down Sanger Street in 2 columns which was more spectacular than the past. Some of the vehicles went left and others went right at the bottom roundabout. There were a number of positive comments about our changed parade route. We will improve on it in 2016.

The swap meet was in full swing when we arrived after the parade and many bargains were found. Each year the swap meet gets bigger and more variety of stalls. Dutchy organised the vehicle line up and photos were taken from a Cherry picker. A photo was taken of MLU Forum members at midday followed by KVE members. This has been a regular occurrence for the past few years.

I organised for all the amphibious vehicles to go down to the lagoon at 2pm. They enjoyed showing their vehicles and taking people for rides. We thank them for bringing their vehicles to our event. I enjoyed chilling out watching these activities.

At 8pm we had our presentations and raised money for the event The World’s Greatest Shave (fundraiser for the Leukaemia Foundation). Jim and Jenny Bennies daughter Helen Koopman and her daughter Emily participated in the shave which was at Strathmerton. Many thanks to those who donated money on the Saturday night.

Sunday was the day where most vehicles headed for home. We had a KVE General Meeting followed by an AGM at the Civic centre. The Radar van was cleared and made its way back to Sydney for interior work. An enjoyable lunch was had at the Chocolate Factory and in the evening we went for a final dinner at the Corowa RSL.

On the way home Ron Fry had some problems. Here is a report from Ron: Drive shaft came off when going down hill at a 'Blistering' 70 kmh. But by the time I could pull up 'with the heavy tank on the back', it had shaken the truck like a paint mixer in a hardware shop and flapped around smashing anything it could underneath. Then the drive shaft dug into the road and tore itself in half and ripped off the uni at the diff, and spread itself all over the highway for other road users to hit and smash their car or wheels and suspension. Daughter Matilda was upset and crying from the scary incident. I had to risk life and limb to dash out and pick up all the metal debris as idiots would continue straight at it, (glaring at me like I should not be there). Got a lift home by a couple of good blokes from the Geelong Re-enactment Group. We were very lucky as most people had already left Corowa to return home. Went straight back with my recovery truck to lift tow the whole oversize combination from the side of the Hwy. I did not think the police would like to find an abandoned tank left at the side of the Hwy, (made sure I removed all the machine gun replicas first). Flashing lights and flags and signs every where I could, as it was getting dark by now. Lift towed the long heavy oversize combination the next 60kms along the emergency lane at 20 km per hour until I got it to the Euroa service centre at 10 o'clock at night. Poor old recovery truck overheating the whole way due to the load. Could not have pulled it during the heat of the day. Lucky the emergency lane was wide enough and clear to continue along. Only had to move out onto the Hwy a few times when going over bridges and such. I could leave it at the service centre until I got a new drive shaft made. Left it where it could be seen by the security cameras and attendants. Had to wait all week for the shaft to be made, @ $600.00. Then another $60.00 for new bolts and a couple of spanners, (in case my tool box had been stolen while sitting at the service centre). Apparently it was a real tourist attraction the whole time it was there. Many oil and fuel leaks due to the severe shaking. Nice mess on the concrete that I cleaned up with heavy duty truck wash before leaving. Drove home, now very clunky sounding in the gearbox and diff. Worried about any little vibration I feel when speeding up over 60kmh down hills. I think mostly in my mind though. After getting home had to get a lift back to Euroa to retrieve my other vehicle. Following days spent repairing oil leaks and fitted a new fuel tank due to the old one leaking. Next job is the exhaust muffler which now has a hole and dents smashed into it. Then onto straightening the chassis and mounts for the Joe box. So an outing that was supposed to be fun for me and my daughter turned into a stuff around and expense. Unfortunately the money I made selling things went to a new drive shaft.

Regards, annoyed Ron and scared Matilda.

Awards for 2015

1. **Mal Mackay Memorial Award**: This award will be given to an individual who appears to get the most enjoyment out of being at Corowa.

Name: John Oldenmenger Reason why: all the work he has done to make sure our Radar Van arrived at Corowa for our 2015 event. This year he spent the whole week with us for the first time.

2. **Hard Luck award**:

Name: Harvey Black Reason why: was bitten by a snake in the lead up to the Corowa event and ended up having to go to hospital a number of times while in Corowa.

3. **Breakdown Award**:

Name: Peter Kunz junior Reason why: Diff broke on his way to Corowa and had a spare diff but it did not fit as it was from a ½ dodge instead of a ¾ ton dodge. He found one in Jindera and then spent Wednesday refitting the diff.

4. **Longest distance driven in a military vehicle**:

Name: Garry Schluter Drove from WA in his Toyota Troopy

5. **Encouragement Award**:

Name: Troy Creamer

6. **Vehicle - People’s Choice For your favorite vehicle attending this year**.

Name: Hugh Thompson Type of Vehicle: 1945 Ford Blitz Ambulance

7**. Emergency vehicle - People’s Choice**: **For your favorite Emergency vehicle attending this year.**

Name: Dave Argles Type of vehicle: 1945 Austin Ambulance

8. **GM vehicle - People’s Choice: For your favorite General Motors group vehicle attending this year**.

Name: Graham Meyer Type of General Motors group vehicle: Chev Ambulance

An award was given to Tony Nassar for the 1964 Amphicar.

Awards were also given to the GPA owners who gave rides: Manfred Henkel, Richard Sanders, Mitch Groves and the Bennie family.

Dutchy received a Dipstick award after we were told he thought for the first 2 days that his tooth paste tasted strange. He finally looked at the tube to find he was cleaning his teeth with Canistan Antifungal cream. At least his mouth should be fungal free.

**Themes for Future years:**

2016: Year of the Tank and Year of the Chrysler 2 Monday 14th to Sunday 20th March 2016

2017: Year of the International and Year of the Carrier 2

2018: Year of the Land Rover

2019: Year of the Amphibian and Year of the Experimental Prototypes

Next year Troy and I will be getting married on Monday 14th March which is the first official day of the event. Weather permitting it will be beside the river and the lagoon. We welcome anyone to come along to the service and you may bring your military vehicle. It will be held at 4pm.

**Vehicle list:**

Vehicle list

 43 Willys Jeeps 31 Ford Jeeps 40 Land Rovers

9 Chev Blitz trucks 6 Ford Blitz trucks 5 GPAs

8 Studebakers 5 Dodge Weapons Carriers 3 Dodge Command Cars

1 Dodge M37 2 Dodge WC53 (Carryall) 1 BMW R-75 motorbike

1 ½ ton 4x4 Yankee Joe 2 White Scout Cars 2 Harley WLA

1 Benz Fire Truck 1 VW Schwimwagen 1 VW 181

1 Chev Cinema van 3 Unimogs 1 C15A Indian Chev replica

1 Datsun 200B 1 International F1 1 International F2

Acco Mk 5 tipper International Acco Mk 4 fire truck 1 1983 International Fire Truck

1 Austin Ambulance 2 Yamaha Motorcycles 1 International Farmall tractor

2 Ferret Scout Cars 1 LP2 Machine Gun Carrier 2 LP2A Machine Gun Carriers

2 Leyland Mokes1 GMC 1 Mule 2 HUMVEEs

1 Zundapp KS motorbike 2 Toyota HJ47 1 Condor Motorbike

1 Chev Ambulance 2 Mutts 1 1979 International 510A

2 Austin Champs 1 Pinzgauer 1 Bedford QL

1 LRDG Chev replica 1 Kaiser Wrecker 1 NM Mack

1 Valentine tank 1 Ford Van 1 1973 VW 182

1 LP1 Carrier 1 Strickland Carrier 1 VW S2E

1 BMW Replica motorbike 1 Schwinn pushbike a few military pushbikes

1 Falcon Wagon

Plus a 1964 Amphicar

Total of 218

Report by: Jan Thompson