

STUMPY

Beaten by the CSR

By Phil Bianchi



After seeing the film *Seriously Series - Road to Ruin* and wanting to know more, I visited Kalgoorlie to interview the main character, Geoff Lewis. "Rather than talk at home, let's go bush to a scenic spot," said Geoff, "and I'll take you out in a real 4WD, a Land Rover."



Having seen the film, my mind immediately clouded with serious misgivings, but I didn't let on. After all, we would be close to town and wouldn't be stranded for long if something went wrong.

Arriving at the said spot and seated in the shade within a grove of majestic Eastern Goldfield's Black Butts, we began the interview.

Geoff told me he was Tasmanian born and completed studies in geology and geography. During his university breaks, he came to WA and worked on the St Barbara mine at Gwalia, and with some of the money he earned he bought a Series 2A 196C (1964) Land Rover for \$250.

Geoff transferred the canopy to 'Lara', his other Series 2 Land Rover (1961), then dismembered the remainder of the Series 2A and sold the components for \$2500. His business was called 'Lewis Land Rover Spares' and his life as a tycoon began, well he hoped it had. The proceeds were used to restore, to operating condition, his Series 2 Land Rover, Lara. She would be the vehicle he would later use to get to WA via the Eyre Highway.

After completing university studies in 2013, and with no geologist work available, he went to the USA after being told there was a lot of work there. This was not the case however, but he had a great holiday!

Within two months he was back in Tassie where he began cutting firewood to sell by the roadside, which enabled him to get by. He even had a job gutting fish.

Realising there was virtually no chance securing geologist work, he completed a course in Civil Construction. He then found that there was no work available in that industry either.

There was only one course of action left; go to WA and try his luck. However, to do this he needed money so in the meantime he managed to find odd jobs, which included house painting.

Damon, Geoff's friend, needed a film project for his cinematography course so decided to join Geoff on his trip from Tasmania to WA. It took them six weeks to prepare the Series 2, and thankfully many of the components they required were already on hand. In mid-March 2015 they set off, taking 2½ weeks to drive from Hobart to Bunbury where Geoff's parents resided.

Geoff, still determined to get work in Geology, went to Kalgoorlie and found a job as a Pit Technician.

While in Kalgoorlie, and having a thirst for adventure, Damon and Geoff decided to tackle the Canning Stock Route (CSR). Planning commenced in late 2015.

Rather than just drive the CSR with little fanfare, they decided to produce a television series about the CSR, its history, geology and geography. For this trip they purchased a Series 3 1975 Land Rover (later named Stumpy). It, however needed serious modifications to enable them to carry enough fuel and water for the long, gruelling distances they would have to travel.

They endeavoured to keep Stumpy as authentic as possible by using as many genuine accessories that were available for the 1975 model. Items fitted:

- Two 65 litre fuel tanks
- Fuel lines from an ex-army 2A Land Rover
- Aero parts capstan winch
- ARB nitro charger shock absorbers, 1975 stock (but still new)
- And a myriad of other accessories

Thankfully, they had assistance from some very generous sponsors including ARB, Goldfields Off Road, Toyo Tyres, ICOM Radios and Tyre Plier Engineering and Exploration Centre. These sponsors assisted with providing or reducing the costs of some equipment and accessories for the vehicle. No actual funding was given.

Leaving in September 2017, Geoff, Claire Woollacott, Damon Heather and Stevie Tuchowski set off to travel the CSR. Stumpy suffered numerous problems; mainly the result of rushing the trip preparations.

By Well 2, the starter motor had failed. By Well 2A, the new fuel pump stopped working. This pump would cause much frustration and grief on the entire trip.

Two days later they discovered why Stumpy was running intermittently. It was due to



Well 2. ▲

Photo: Damon Heather

dirty fuel which had been purchased on the way to the CSR. Running the fuel through a strainer called 'Mr Funnel', it removed most of the sand, dust, and small bits of rubbish, however, sadly, some still found its way through.

The roof rack then came loose which smashed the roof gutters. To hold the roof rack up, a wedge was cut from mulga to replace the passenger side front leg. The weight of the roof rack kept the mulga in position.

All set to go.

Photo: Claire Lewis.



Having to stop every 10-15 kilometres to tend to fuel-related issues together with the monotony of severe corrugations, the dry heat took its toll. There wasn't time to enjoy the ever-changing scenery of springs, salt lakes, desert oak forest, mulga woodland and sand dunes. As they continued up the CSR things improved with Stumpy only breaking down three times a day instead of the usual average of six!

While driving along the western side of the Durba Hills towards Durba Springs, the rear section of the exhaust fell off. It was tied in place using plastic coated electrical wire after the previously cut up rubber floor mat wasn't doing the job. Reaching Durba Springs, under the cover of darkness, they found they had the site to themselves.

Two rest days were taken which provided time to explore Durba and to also complete significant repairs to Stumpy. This included cutting the front to rear steel brake line as it was leaking through a small pin hole, then by using a rock and a punch flattened the brake line which sealed it. Stumpy now had front brakes for the first time on the trip.

At Durba, on top of the opening of the gorge in the setting sun, Geoff proposed to his now wife, Claire. He was thankful she said yes and a bottle of champagne, secreted in Stumpy and still intact, was opened in celebration.

Setting off northward around Lake Disappointment, Stumpy again stopped with fuel problems. They drained the fuel out of the driver's side fuel tank then filled it with approximately 60 litres of clean reserve fuel which had been kept in the support vehicle. Much time had been lost to ongoing breakdowns, so the team decided that at Well 33 (Kunawarritji) they would re-evaluate whether they had sufficient time to complete the trip.

The next day was to be their best with 150km covered, then disaster struck when approaching Well 25. Damon was driving Stumpy over a sand dune, and to seek more power, he changed down gears resulting in an almighty bang.



It's dead.
Photo:
Damon Heather



Open heart surgery.
Photo:
Damon Heather



Fuel pump overhaul.
Photo: Damon Heather



More troubles.
Photo:
Damon Heather

Damn the corrugations.

Photo: Damon Heather



Hearing this, Geoff climbed the sand dune. "I think I've snapped an axle," came a voice attached to the two legs sticking out from under the vehicle.

"What else can happen?" thought Geoff in frustration as he reversed Stumpy down the dune. The broken axle was removed and to not damage any other diff components with metal shards, the prop shaft and remains of the axle were also removed. Stumpy was now a front wheel two-wheel drive.

Satellite phone calls to nearby communities revealed no Land Rover wrecks from which to scavenge parts. They also knew that the sand dunes would become taller as they headed north so the decision was made to give up on the trip and return to Well 23, then head for Newman.

This became a 36-hour grind of retracing their steps over the sand dunes. To give



Bush mechanics. ▲
Photo: Damon Heather

"I think I've snapped an axle."

Stumpy the best possible run up, much shovelling of sand was required to smooth out tank trap-sized holes on the sand dune approaches. The support vehicle, having already crested the dune, would then pull Stumpy over the summit. On large dunes a tow strap was needed to get Stumpy over. Exhausted, but with a huge sigh of relief, they made it to Georgia Bore.

While on the road to Newman they noticed the handbrake kept coming on. A check showed that the engine was listing severely to the driver's side. Further investigation revealed that the engine mounts along with the passenger side gearbox mount were also broken. The handbrake had been coming on because the listing engine was leaning on Stumpy's handbrake cable

Didn't make it.
Photo: Claire Lewis. ▼





▲ **Dejection.**

Photo: Claire Lewis.

and stretching it. They also found that the throttle linkage on the carburettor was stretched as well.

Unable to drive the vehicle in that condition, as further significant damage could be the result, several options for makeshift repairs were considered. They finally decided that something like a sling in which the motor would be suspended was the best option. Hunting around the area, near a very dejected Stumpy, they scored their first bit of luck on this trip by finding old fencing wire, bolts and some angle iron that had seen better days. They put two



Newman bound. ▲

Photo: Damon Heather

lengths of angle iron east/west across the top of the motor supporting them on the mudguards. The motor was jacked into position and numerous strands of fencing wire were looped under the front and rear of the motor to create a sling/cradle. The wire was then tensioned using a flat bladed screwdriver.

Once they determined what parts were required, these were ordered by satellite phone for delivery to the Newman Post Office. In Newman they spent five days trudging to the post office from the caravan park to collect parts as they arrived.

Novel engine mount.

Photo: Claire Lewis.





▲ Oops.

Photo: Damon Heather

The usual time needed to traverse the CSR was 3-4 weeks, however, this journey had taken 25 days from Wiluna to Well 25, and returning to Georgia Bore.

The list of major problems encountered by Stumpy includes:

- Fuel pump or carburettor rebuilt 24 times
- Broken axle U bolts
- Broken spring centre bolts
- Broken gearbox mount
- Failed brake lines
- Failed roof sills

Spare parts.

Photo: Damon Heather



Shady spot. ▲

Photo: Damon Heather

Before we finished the interview Geoff told me about Stumpy's genuine factory fitted dual battery/starting system. Digging away inside Stumpy he revealed a crank handle. "This is it", he declared while giving Stumpy a crank. With an asthmatic cough and a splutter, Stumpy came to life and idled away. A very funny man is Geoff.

He then asked if I wanted a drive and not wishing to offend, I jumped in, or should I say contorted my way into the driver's seat; it was a bit like trying to squeeze a 10kg bag of sugar into a 5kg bag! If I ever buy a Landie it's going to have to be a stretch job, I thought to myself.

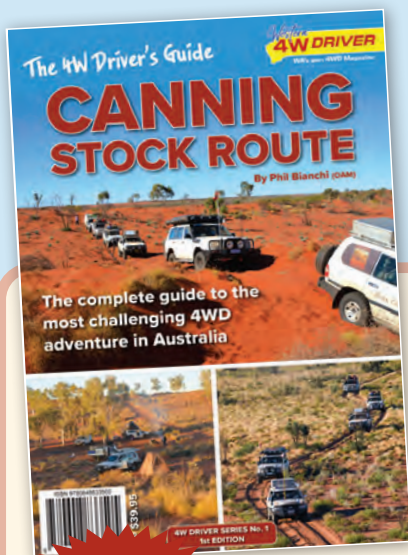


We set off for home, calling into Geoff's house, where I loaded my gear into my Cruiser. I said my goodbyes but not before sterilising everything, including myself, as I didn't want to chance catching 'Land Roveritis'. I've been told it's worse than COVID-19 and there isn't a vaccine!

What's next on the agenda for Stumpy and the crew? "A trip from Warburton, down the Connie Sue to Rawlinna and then into Twilight Cove", says Geoff.

All jokes aside, I thoroughly enjoyed my day with Geoff and his very dry sense of humour. With his determination to meet any challenge head on and his passion for 4W driving out back in his beloved Land Rovers, we will see a lot more of Geoff in years to come.

Have we got a budding Malcolm Douglas here? Time will tell, but I'm sure Malcolm would be impressed by what he's seen so far.



\$39.95

WANT TO KNOW MORE ABOUT THE CSR?

Written by our own Phil Bianchi, this is the most comprehensive guide produced in over 26 years, and a must-have for anyone planning an expedition along the Canning Stock Route.

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www.western4wdriver.com.au/shop

INFORMATION BAY

Don't take a trip on the CSR lightly. Significant planning and preparation is required.

Get a copy of *Western 4W Driver* magazine's *The 4W Driver's Guide - Canning Stock Route* for everything you need to know.

www.western4wdriver.com.au/shop

PERMITS

Permits are required for CSR access, and application can be made online at: <https://permits.canningstockroute.net.au>

PASTORAL STATION ACCESS

Seek access permission beforehand, your presence may interfere with mustering and other station activities.

Fees are payable for access to and from the CSR via

GlenAyle Station (08 9981 2989) or Granite Peak Station (08 9981 2983).

Check out Geoff's 'Seriously Series' YouTube channel for info on the movie *Road to Ruin*.

For a comprehensive history of the CSR get *Work Completed, Canning. A Comprehensive History of the Canning Stock Route 1906-1910* by Phil Bianchi.