

# Road has its share of memories

The little off-white company car didn't seem to be enjoying the road, and I honestly couldn't blame it.

For the second time in three days the aging Escort and I were bounding along the Holberg road, an endurance test for suspension systems and kidneys alike. It just happened to be one of those weeks. I've lived in the North Island for more than four months now, and had managed to visit Holberg only once in that time. Last week however, I had assignments that carried me to the community not once but twice.

To be accurate, I had actually driven the Holberg road once before, but that trip was anything but pleasant. During the mid 1970s, two friends and I came up with a brilliant idea. "Let's go to Cape Scott Park!"

With all the wide-eyed innocence we could muster, the three of us checked out a map, and plotted our trip. The present paved highway did not, of course, exist during the mid-1970s. So the meandering route we had planned took us from Campbell River, through Gold River and up to Woss via a maze of logging roads.

So early one morning the three of us piled into a 1971 Datsun 1200, a car owned by the mother of one of my friends, and headed off on what we expected to be a single day's journey. It didn't quite work out that way!

The actual trip in was wonderful (a little bumpy and long) but the Datsun performed like a trouper. After hours of driving through pristine wilderness, past lakes and rivers, the tires of the car gratefully came in contact with pavement, just outside of Port Hardy. We wheeled into the community and had lunch, before setting off on the next leg of the journey, the run up to Holberg.

Then, like today, the Holberg road was a winding, gravel road, complete with

## A Personal View

with DAVID HOLMES



countless potholes, and the ever present grader. The second of those things proved to be our ultimate undoing.

With my friend at the wheel, the little car was happily rattling down the road, when we suddenly came across a grader. The giant yellow machine was busily plowing a mountain-sized pile of road rubble right into the middle of our path.

The pile of moraine was not exactly in the middle of the road, in fact the on-coming lane appeared to have much more space than our lane. With this fact firmly in his mind, the driver did a foolish thing, he started driving down the left hand side of the logging road. After all, he was only planning on doing this until we could get past the wheel high pile of rocks and gravel, and return to our own lane. Fat chance!

Just as we rounded a corner, we came face to face with a massive yellow tanker truck, bearing down on us like Godzilla onto Tokyo. In a panic move my friend cranked the wheel and tried dashing through the pile of rocky litter to return to our lane. Part way across the rubble we heard, and felt the car hit something very large and very hard. The car began to make funny noises after that.

The tanker truck did not slacken its pace. It just roared off into the distance, trailing a cloud of dust behind it. While there we sat in a suddenly very sad Datsun.

Getting out to examine the damage, we discovered that the drive shaft had been

bent, not just dented, but actually bent like it had developed an instant elbow.

There we were, miles from anywhere, standing in the middle of a rocky logging road with a dead Datsun. I knew that I'd had better times in my life.

But, necessity being the mother of invention, we jacked the poor little car up, and using a large rock like a hammer, tried unbending the drive shaft.

Strangely enough it sort of worked. While not exactly factory fresh, we did manage to at unbend the shaft enough to allow it to spin. Okay, so maybe it did bang against the bottom of the car on every revolution, but it at least could spin. With this banging car back on the road, we turned around and began the journey back to Port Hardy.

Several hours later, sounding like a small, mobile pile driver, we clunked our way back into the town. Of course no one in Port Hardy had a drive shaft that fit, so after spending the night in a hotel, we took the damaged piece, boarded a bus and returned to Campbell River.

To make a long story short, we eventually returned with a replacement part, and in time got the little Datsun back down island. So ended my first experience with the North Island, and the Holberg road.

Now, more than a decade later I'm back in the North Island and regularly driving the Holberg road again. But even to this day I flinch, every time I pass a grader. Some lessons you never forget.