

Ivy Tanks – as recalled by Chris Shattock and Hugh Videon.

Ivy Tanks was a lonely fuel stop on the old Eyre Highway route across the Nullarbor, about mid way between Ceduna and Eucla, which were (in those days) 318 miles apart on a very rough road. This was just a bit too far for a tank full of petrol, so Ivy Tanks was a good place to stop. Chris had been there with his parents in 1952 (Citroen Light 15) and with his Dad in 1966 (MGB). We both visited it in November 1973 on a Holden test trip.



Ivy Tanks, date unknown



Ivy Tanks, Dec 1967.

The two pictures above were found on the internet. All that can be seen these days (2014) is the stone chimney at the left of the cafe, and the original in-ground stone water tank.



By the end of the 1960s, Western Australia had sealed their section of the Eyre Highway. During the 1970s the South Australian side of the old graded road, which went from Yalata, through the “Ivy Tank Motel”, down to the Nullarbor Roadhouse, and then through Koonalda to Eucla, was being replaced. The road was realigned to be closer to the coast, bypassing Ivy Tanks and Koonalda. (The map is much easier to read if you select 150% or higher zoom.)

In November 1973 George Roberts decided that the forthcoming LH Torana needed testing on outback roads, so we set out for Perth, on the first leg of what was a trip to Darwin and return. The cars included a couple of the first pre production builds from Elizabeth, so the crew included Don Bowyer and Jack Alford. The other members were Ray Brooks, Ivan Johnson, Fred James, Hugh Videion, Colin Renton and myself. We had 3 Toranas and a Chassis Cab back-up vehicle. There was elementary camouflage on the Toranas – an extended sailplane which ran from the C pillar to the back of the rear quarter.



The water pump gasket on the air cleaner lid might remind some of you of the water pump bearings which used to walk out of the housing. Ray Brooks, Ivan Johnson, Hugh Videion and Colin Renton examining the problem area.

The sailplane camouflage can be seen on the orange car.



Ivan Johnson, Ray Brooks, Colin Renton, Hugh Videion, Fred James, Jack Alford and Don Bowyer examining the problem.

Hugh recalls our convoy being “held up” before we arrived at Ivy Tanks, on the road near Yalata, by a group of aborigines in full regalia including war paint brandishing spears and boomerangs. All they wanted was to coerce us to buy a few boomerangs and woomeras! He still has one of each in his home study.

At this time the new realigned road was not yet available, but it had been known for some time that Ivy Tanks was going to be bypassed, so it had been let go and was just a shadow of what you see in the pictures above. All Chris recalls of Ivy Tanks is an old shed and a bowser. Hugh Videion remembers that the bowser was about 100 yards from the “motel”. Our convoy arrived late in the morning, and a bloke was filling his car, but no-one else was around. Keen to get our cars filled and back onto the road, we took the man’s money and said we’d pass it on when the proprietor appeared.

It takes some time to fill 4 vehicles from one bowser. When we had finished there was still no sign of any one keen to take our money, so we went and beat on the door of the shed. After a while, a very bleary eyed young man (he looked as though he might have been 18) opened the door and squinted into the light at us. Realizing what was wanted, he came out, still doing up his clothes. As he came through the door, we could see past him into the shed. Inside were two teenage girls, who were also in the process of waking up and struggling into their clothes.

Hugh recalls that one of the two young ladies in the Ivy Tanks café turning green when he asked her to prepare six hamburgers with the lot for our lunch. He had noticed a pile of empty beer and spirit bottles in a corner of the café, so he asked her whether they had had a party the night before and how many were at the party. She replied there had been a party that night with only three people attending. No wonder they were just getting up at 10:0 AM!

It seems working in the middle of the Nullarbor need not have been as lonely as one might expect!