

## **1999 Panel - Last Mail from Birdsville**

Tom was 85 years old when the film ***Last Mail from Birdsville – the Story of Tom Kruse*** was shot in October 1999. The mail run re-enactment in his fully restored 1936 Leyland Badger was the subject of an evocative, colourful and emotional documentary.

Tom never believed he would drive the Badger again. ***Last Mail from Birdsville – the Story of Tom Kruse*** traces the attempted recovery of the badly deteriorated Badger from the desert near Birdsville in 1986, its painstaking three-year restoration from 1996 at Northfield in Adelaide and the final mail run re-enactment down the Birdsville Track in 1999.

Behind the wheel again after almost 40 years, Tom carried over 7000 letters from well-wishers from around the world. More than 120 vehicles joined the convoy, following the last mail run re-enactment from Birdsville to the National Motor Museum (NMM) at Birdwood. The Badger was welcomed to the NMM by SA Governor His Excellency **Sir Eric Neal**.

The Badger was low loaded from one location to the next during the 9-day re-enactment. **CMV** provided and **Mark Metzger** drove the support vehicle.

***Last Mail from Birdsville*** includes images of never before screened footage of **Tom Kruse** and other outback mailmen during the 1940s. This historically significant and remarkable black and white footage was shot by pioneering mail contractor **Harry Ding** and made available from the Ding family archive.

There were many many highlights over the nine days of filming. The night in the Cooper Creek with 500 people, fireworks, **Swampy Marsh** singing, a **John 'Watto' Watkins** RFDS auction, **George Bell's** 80<sup>th</sup>, a bush BBQ and ***The Back of Beyond*** film magically played on an old clack clack 16mm projector (now in the corner of this room), took a bit of beating.

**Dave Burge** and **Ian Doyle** managed the event from Birdsville to Birdwood. Australia recognises far too few of our real heroes. This documentary celebrates the life of one of this country's legends.

**Keith Webb**, **Roger Clarke** and **Ian Doyle** of Corrugated Air Productions produced ***Last Mail from Birdsville - The Story of Tom Kruse***.

The documentary was made with the assistance of Australia Post, Shell Australia, Fuelink, Optus MobileSat, Australian Satellite Services, Shane Grover Toyota, Peter Cochrane Transport and Peter Lehmann Wines.

The DVD of the production, as part of ***The Back of Beyond Collection***, is dedicated to the memory of a thorough gentleman and life long supporter of the Tom Kruse story, **Mr Jim Crawford** from CMV.

**Photo credits:** Mark Metzger collection