

# Bye Bye BT

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## The final road test... (aka "The Volvo hunt")

D Test No 12 - The final road test... (aka "The Volvo hunt")

15/07/2013– 1974 DS23 IE Pallas Automatique

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**Model:** DS23 IE Pallas (DX)

Year: 1974

Years active: 1974-now

Engine:

2347cc Injection Electronique DX5

130 bhp DIN at 5,250 rpm, 141 bhp at 5,500

Transmission: Borg Warner 35 3 speed automatic (bvbw)

Colour: Beige Tholonet (AC 085).

Upholstery: Cuir Noir.

Test duration: 2005-2013

Course covered: Auckland/Waikato/Gisborne/Tauranga

Conditions: Various

For: As-new condition. Lack of arm & leg waving.

Against: It's going to Australia.

As you are probably now well aware, a certain DS23 IE Automatique Pallas will shortly be leaving our shores for the large Island west of Aotearoa.

Looking back at the original test I penned below, two things strike me: 1. This was submitted to the site in 2007 – 5 and a half years ago! It was actually the 3<sup>rd</sup> test I completed, coming in after my first ID19b and BG. 2. It has been a heck of a long time since I wrote one of these reports!

I have been fortunate enough over the years to have had the keys handed to me on a number of occasions. I have been blamed for the front tyres having to be replaced a couple of years ago, and have also been told I will not be allowed to ever drive it again. Quite a few times.

However, as the car has now sold, I was fortunate enough to be allowed to clock up another few k's over the weekend. I had called around with BG (who I had managed to console enough to take up the motorway) to bid farewell to BT and possibly have another wee drive. Well, what a great drive it was. Not only that, the following day we had to take her out to the shed for a couple of minor adjustments/tweaks and I was given the keys again!



More of that at the end of the report – I think it is appropriate to recap on the original test from 2007, and add the more recent excursions at the end.

**I first came across this vehicle** while it was in a skeletal/embryonic stage at Auto France back in May 2002. The engine bay had been painted at this point, although little else had been done.

I thought “Hell – another idiot like myself taking on a project like this” as well as “Will it ever get finished?” and of course “What!! An AUTOMATIC?? He’s NOT converting it to a 5 Speed?? Mad!!!”

This was prior to meeting Mr. Roger Simpson, the owner. The sentiments voiced in the preceding paragraph turned out to be extremely well founded on meeting him a few weeks later.

Over the next 3 years, I did see the car come together in its various stages every few weeks and I always looked forward to calling in and seeing what progress had been made and looking through the latest shipment of parts for her from overseas.

She was first shown at the National Rally at Waiuku in January 2005 where she won Car of the Rally.

### **INITIAL IMPRESSIONS**

Wow! The first thing that struck me was that it was just like a brand-new car, straight off the lot at Shorters, Adlams, Moller Motors or Archibalds etc, depending on what part of the country you hark from.

And of course, the smell of that leather (I seem to have an issue with that, don’t !!)

The engine bay was particularly impressive, albeit challenging, with the myriad of hardware for the fuel injection system neatly hiding any hint of an engine underneath.

At this point the Tester has not yet had a test drive. While sitting in the drivers seat at the National Rally, while the car was on display I was offered the keys. “Yeah right – like that’s going to happen...”.

### **PERFORMANCE/HANDLING:**

Finally, quite out of the blue, I was handed the keys after a DS 50th orginasation meeting 2 or 3 months later. I was expecting only to be taken for a drive, but no – I was allowed a drive *sans owner!!* Joining me on this auspicious occasion was a certain Swiss person from Titirangi. The course covered was from Papakura to approximately half way to Waiuku.

Grinning from ear-to-ear I carefully negotiated Great South Rd until Drury then continued on under the motorway.

We then came across the first straight, slight uphill, with no other cars – specifically colourful Holdens with party lights on top. We had been tickling along with the motor idling quietly in top until now. I buried the accelerator pedal into the plush Pallas carpet and then, as Roger puts it “All hell broke loose!”

A mighty roar came from under the bonnet and the 23 belted up the hill. Most impressive for an AUTOMATIC D I thought. I continued on for some time, enjoying the drive of what really did feel like - and what was virtually - a brand new D. The performance was most impressive and she handled as was to be expected: ‘like a dream’ on her new Michelin 185 HR x 380 XVS’s.

I found a safe spot to turn around and offered Christof the wheel. He politely declined (I could sense a little fear there somewhere) and so I continued on, very tempted just to get on to the motorway and ring Roger from Wellington.

Imagine my surprise when we got back to Chez Simpson and Christof flies out of the car before I had finished parking it to run inside and tell the owner that I wouldn’t let him have a drive!

It was not until October 2006 I got my next fix. On arriving at the final meal venue at Gisborne near the end of the East Cape D-Tour we decided that there was a great space to project photos of the weekend onto one wall from my laptop. I was sent back to my motel unit to get the equipment, with the Keys to the 23 in my hand.

I drove rather conservatively, owing to the speed limit being 50 km/h in the Gisborne “CBD”, and it was night-time. On getting to the motel I realised I had left my unit key back at the restaurant. Cool! I thought – double the drive in Rogers car. I glided back to the restaurant, then to the motel and back again.

This time I was greeted at the entrance by the owner of the Automatique beast, who snatched the keys out of my hand and walked down to the car park and proceeded to walk around the DS and check for damage. This whole episode was done with me using my fingers to affect a certain well-known international piece of effective sign language at the offending inspector.

Cut to October 2007. The D-Tour this year was cancelled, and Roger & I needed some cheering up. We decided to go down to Hamilton to drag Alan Sklenars out of his Honey-Pit, give him a good wind-up and purchase some parts.

It was decided to take the 23. I was told that if I “played my cards right” I might get a drive.

Much to Alan Sklenars annoyance (following a most entertaining visit, and carrying boxes of various D parts), I was handed the keys for the return Journey. Alan has been promised a drive when he is “clean”. We are not sure if he will ever get a drive, poor Alan.

Anyway, much fun was had on the way home. It got to the point, just out of Huntly, that too many other road users had annoyed me. Passing me simply because I was in an old car and they seemed to feel they didn’t want to get held up. This, despite the fact that I had been doing 110 km/h all along.

At least 8 vehicles passed me between Ngarawahia and Ohinewai, these included a boy racer Mazda, Grandma & Grandpa in an old Ford Lazer and a Volvo. Each would pass and then slow down to between 99 & 101 km/h. Except two vehicles. Grandma & Grandpa slowed down to 90km/h. The Volvo did not slow down.

So, onto the Expressway at Ohinewai. The self imposed 110 km/h went out the window and all the vehicles that passed me before (plus numerous others) ended up in my rear-vision mirror by Pokeno, now fully aware that the 23 was no slug. Bar one that is. The Volvo. This was one of those big 4-wheel drive truck like affairs. Every time it saw me coming up behind it, it would bury its boot, moving above my “new” self imposed speed limit.

It is also important to note that during this entire journey, I was constantly being reminded (at approximately 2 minute intervals) that “notice – you do not need to change gear”. If the journey took any longer, I think he would have had to have the Torque Converter surgically removed!

Climbing the Bombays and I was on the Volvo's tail all the way up, all other traffic being passed. Down on to the motorway – still behind it - with some woman in a sports car getting in on the action. Left her behind. Self imposed speed limit was increased still further but then - Bah!! Our off ramp came up!

To this day I am now ostracised by the aforementioned Mr. Simpson for not showing the Volvo the correct procedure when dealing with D's – they should be able to see the chevrons on the boot when looking forward, not the front of the D in their rear-vision mirror.

In view of this I am apparently not getting the keys again!



#### **BRAKING:**

Good, in typical D style but front/rear compensation needs some attention on the Test Car. (Apparently Testers fault as he promised to do this).

#### **RELIABILITY:**

Don't ask. Is great now, but has had a rocky path. The engine at one point seemed to prefer sitting on the workshop floor more than in the engine bay! Then there was the 12v 700 W Alternator. But we won't go to EITHER of those places. Suffice to say she's going great now!!

#### **ENTERTAINMENT VALUE:**

Apart from being a D? I think the aforementioned story tells it all. There will be plenty more of these If I have anything to do with it, but the sheer enjoyment that her owner gets from her, and I get from dropping alternator mounting bolts in the nightmare-on-elm-street-engine-bay in front of the owner and the web-site owner are second to none!

I am constantly finding things on the 'net to bolt onto the car to improve its looks – SM badges for the glovebox, 2cv petrol caps, sunroofs etc and bonnet handles. But Roger is yet to be convinced. Maybe I will take my drill and coach bolts around one day when he is out and mount that spoiler kit on the rear for a surprise eh Mr. Simpson?

As you can make out – most entertaining!

I hope you have enjoyed reading this. It is now on its fourth re-write after Mr. Fussy has corrected me on everything from lack of detailed specifications, year (whoops), leaving out the colour code, inconsistency in the Title of the road test description and typos. I hope it is now up to the high standard required. I do note however, that I have not had this rigorous critique on my two previous submissions.

Will there be another one? I will have to discuss this with my therapist. Lets keep it a surprise.

**Update 2013:** As can be imagined, I have had many discussions with my therapist over the years. There have now been a total of 12 road tests (some a *little* fictitious) but they have been a lot of fun. One car, a certain Blue DSuper, now also residing across the ditch, never did get a report but that was basically because I would never have been able to afford a good lawyer! Suffice to say, I had a lot of fun in that too!



Anyway, there have been 4 other memorable occasions when the resident tester has been given the keys.

### **The Kaimai's**

The first was a few months after this report was written, when Roger had arranged to supply the DS23 for a wedding in Tauranga, however owing to a bad knee that was soon to be replaced, I was asked if I could take the D down to the BoP to drive it for the wedding. I jumped at the chance. I called round early on the Saturday morning to take the keys and get some instruction. The pickup was 12pm at the Groom's residence in Mt Maunganui, and the idea was that I get there early, get the car washed and dress the car and myself in preparation for the pickup.

I had a great trip. Once on the other side of the Bombays, I rang Roger to give him an update. "Is the car going well? Are you enjoying it?" he asked. "Heck yeah" I said "Listen to this" at which point I buried my boot so he could hear the roar of the engine at 5000rpm as i kicked her down over the phone. An ensemble of expletives came over the phone so I hung up.

I was concerned however, that the interior lights were staying on. I thought, heck, I am going to be in trouble for that – what have I done? I thought I would sort it out at the destination.

The flight over the Kaimai's was memorable. All the Japanese 4 wheel drives that were in front of me at the foot of the hill were behind me by the summit. Nice. This was the episode that caused the tyre-wear blame!

Anyway, on arrival in Tauranga, I washed and dressed the car, then dressed myself. I then found a shady spot to park in to sort out the interior light issue. I couldn't find any way of turning them off. Pressing the door switch in and out a few times didn't make any difference, and I wasn't going to analyse the wiring while wearing a suit! A more kiwi method was required. I then set about removing the lamp covers and taking out the bulbs! Sorted!

I then picked up the Groom and his entourage. 4 boys, all well impressed with the 23. The Best Man sat in the front and he said he would navigate. After about 3 k's he suddenly yelled "Whoops, sorry – we were meant to turn right there!" This was a main highway! "No problem" I said and after a quick check back and front, indicated and swung the wheel around clockwise, effecting a very sudden and spectacular change in direction. The boys regained their composure after being forced hard against the left of the interior of the vehicle, when they voiced immense praise for the way that it did an about turn like "it was on rails". "It must have amazing tyres" I just said "Yes" and smiled.

I dropped the boys at the church and then went to the Lodge next door to pick up the Bride and her father, taking photos of the car whilst battling a swarm of wasps! Anyway, on arrival at the church, they locked themselves in the car (a common occurrence) and I walked around the nose of the car to assist, when I noticed – to my horror – that the little inspection hatch thingy was not in place in the left hand headlight bucket. And there are camera's flashing and clicking for Africa! Whoops – I had cleaned the insects out after I washed the car, but forgot to clip it back in!

I got back to Rogers and the car was duly inspected. I never admitted the headlight bucket thing (I had clipped this back in later) but I was given much flak about the interior lights. A previous owner had added courtesy light switches to the rear doors as well (like early Slough built cars) and it was one of these that apparently sticks a bit. I replaced the bulbs with red face!



### **The former President of the Swiss Traction Car Club.**

Christof had a special guest a couple of years ago – Walter Homberger, former President of the Swiss Traction Car Club.

It was organised that I would go around to Christof's and pick the two of them up in BG and take Walter for a Shed visit. He was very impressed with my 21, and also of what he saw at the shed. While there, I was handed the keys and instructed to take the ex-President around the block in the 23 to show him just how well an Automatique 23 would go. We wafted down the driveway quietly, but as soon as we were out of view, I hit the loud pedal. Walter was suitably impressed. On returning to The Shed, he asked Roger "what does "Thrash" mean?" Thanks Walter!

### **The Big Fun Day Out**

On this occasion, we entered in "The Big Fun Day Out". This has been written up on on this website, but was another occasion when I was allowed to take the driver's seat. We came runner up – "Best Losers" but had a lot of fun, gaining points by writing humourously about the car, working out its original cost in Italian Lire, and joining a great barbeque lunch. We didn't take her on the gymkhana in the sand, however!



### **The last drive(s)**

So, as I said earlier, BG and I called round to bid farewell. I was handed the keys again. "I don't want to drive it anymore!" I was told. We headed South to Hampton Downs, with absolutely no obstacle that got in the way staying in the way for long, including BMW's, Audis, Mitsubishi's and plenty of Toyota's, but ESPECIALLY Holdens. One in particular did try and make a run for it, but didn't have any luck. Around the next bend, after I had regained a speed reasonably close to the speed limit again, we saw another Holden, This one was white with lights on it however. Whew, luckily he wasn't about 500 metres further back! Unfortunately we couldn't see any Volvo's. Maybe the word had got out that we were on the road that day!

The 3 of us were on Cloud 9 as we came back via Pokeno, Tuakau and Pukukohē. The 23 was performing as well as she was in 2006 when I got my first drive. She really is a smooth and powerful car – a delight to drive. The strongest critics of an Automatic D have invariably never driven one. I was lucky enough to have another final rural 'tootle' in her the following day.

I will always remember the times I have been allowed behind the wheel with a smile and a sense of privilege in being able to drive not only what is one of the 3 or 4 most enviable types of DS to have been produced, but also a special one such as this that has been lovingly restored and enjoyed over the last decade. She is well worth the money the new owners have parted with – a notable sum in itself that it is the highest amount paid for a D saloon in the Southern Hemisphere to date. She really is "La Reine de la Route". Go well BT – may you thoroughly enjoy your big Australian adventure!

### **Au Revoir!**

(PS - Sorry you never got a drive, Alan!)

