

## How Covid locks down our cars

What if you had to do without your sole car for a couple of months?

That's been us since the middle of June, when our small vehicle attached itself briefly to a parked version and was in need of moderate repair.



Nobody was hurt and the air bags stayed mute. A pity, said the policeman: "They write cars off if the bags blow."

Unfortunately, repairs went a bit further than beating panels – we also needed a few new parts. There lay the reason it's taken so long - "parts". They're as scarce as Chase winners.

Covid has bugged up global supply chains, and even though our vehicle model has been around for a decade, its bits come from somewhere in the great arc of South-East Asia, where the pandemic has laid waste to factories in the cheap-labour countries that churn them out for the big carmakers.

This hasn't just affected our little machine, which is one of the country's most popular models. Most if not all car dealers are struggling, some even more than ours.

Evidence of that came at the start when we called into one of the rental car places and hired an identical one, expecting we'd need it no more than a fortnight.

The rental man smiled knowingly. Might be longer, he said. We're swamped with people in the same boat as you. It's happening all over the country.

We returned the rental after three weeks and out of pocket by \$1500. Naturally, we hadn't paid that little bit extra on our insurance premium to cover replacement. I wonder how much that's costing the insurance companies just now.

We were saved by brother Rob, who generously loaned us one of the great loves of his life, a 20-year-old V8 Range Rover, which he nurtures still to the extent of keeping it polished and eligible for its WOF (at something like \$600 each new tyre).

"She's fully gassed up and ready to go," he said. It might have been when I collected it, but by the time I got home I noticed the fuel gauge already flicking south. The first call to BP a week or so later cost \$158. Trips to the supermarket became less frequent.

There was a bit of confusion, as well. When we were out, every second person gave us a wave, an enthusiastic gesture that faltered when at first I didn't respond. Rob and Rangie are well known. I started waving back instantly.

Don't get me wrong about Rangie. It's a beautiful machine to drive, and I especially like the fact we're not subject to the same road bullying from SUVs as we get in the absent buggy. It feels good doing 50kmh in Rangie.

And without Rob's generosity we'd be having to walk down to the supermarket every day, and I'm not sure how long it would have taken me to get a dozen zero-zeroes home or even if they'd fit in the backpack.

The long wait was difficult for a grumpy old bugger like me. I went and talked to the panel shop manager, who was apologetic. And at least the little blue beastie was under cover in his workshop.

I made an agreement with his office manager that I wouldn't pester her with calls; she rang the day they had enough bits to get the job started. That raised expectations, of course, which led to nothing much. Still no word.

Lin noticed the car's GPS showing up on her phone and placing the car in another part of town, but in the end we figured that might have been the previous one (same make).

When Covid locked us all down, I despaired and rang the panel shop manager with an idea: could the missing parts be made in one of Taranaki's excellent machine shops.

After all, I was reading of an Inglewood wizard who'd build a replica of a Bruce McLaren racing car...surely a suspension arm or whatever it was could be built here. I'd happily sign a waiver for the car warranty and to keep the insurance company happy.

He called to say it simply isn't an option with such a new car. But his good news was the car was now close to being completed.

Covid had the final say, of course. We couldn't collect it while Level 4 applied. We did under Level 3. Our bank balance and carport now look bigger.