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When ten-time Victorian Targa Tasmania competitor Ian Morris decided to take the sunroof off his eighties model Alfa Romeo he had no idea it would offer such an advantage as to have him win the Shannons Classic Competition at last week's annual tarmac rally. Just prior to his eleventh Targa rally, the 50-year-old Blackburn-based builder finally bit the bullet and removed the 20 kilo factory-added feature from his 1981 Alfa Romeo GTV6.

It's a good thing he did really as late on Sunday, after five days of gruelling competition, Morris and his Queensland navigator Alex Molocznyk finally rolled across the Targa Tasmania Official Finish Line at Hobart's Wrest Point with a stunning 31-second advantage over the Classic field. "It feels absolutely fantastic," said Morris. "We have been trying to dial in this car and win since 2001, maybe the sunroof was the final touch needed. I knew I had to work on the car's centre of gravity – I just didn't realise it would have such an impact," he joked.

A win at Targa Tasmania really has been a five year campaign for the former club level dirt rally driver. Previously having run a number of early model Mazda MX5s in the drivetravel.com Modern Competition in the late nineties, Morris first entered his Alfa to mix it with the Classics in 2001. "I was driving pretty competitively amongst the modern cars in an eighties model Mazda and beating the stage times of a lot of the classic cars," explained Morris. "You get more recognition for driving a classic car and I knew that if I swapped competitions I could eventually win." Finishing third in 2001 in the wet-weather preferred Alfa with his then navigator Kate Crib, Morris then joined forces with his friend Molocznyk in 2002.



Finishing eighth outright in their first year together, it would take the new team another three events before they perfect their winning formula. In 2003 the pair crashed on the fifth stage on the final day of competition just 1-second off the lead and then suffered the same fate again in 2004. Undefeated, the team came back the following year to finish third – their first taste of a Targa Tasmania podium. “Having finished third twice before, to go two better is just fantastic,” said Morris at the finish line last week. “After crashing out while only a second off the lead in 2003, makes the win very satisfying.

Happy with the performance of his near-standard 120kw machine that weighs in at a massive 1220kg and can reach a stop speed of 180km/h, Morris admits the real joy comes from beating every Porsche in the Classic field. “When you put in a brilliant effort in a standard car, the feeling doesn’t get any better. We work on high cornering forces and on keeping the car flowing.”

Deemed one of the driest Targa Tasmanias in its 15 year history, tyres, brakes and engines of some suffered due to the lack of rain. Keeping in the shadow of the rival up ahead made for gruelling competition and high-speeds up the pointy end. “Initially our thinking was that we wouldn’t be able to catch [Bill] Pye. Then at the end of day four, and heading into day five, our thinking changed to beating everyone but Pye. We suspected he had a problem as he wasn’t increasing his lead.”

Staying in the top five from day one, Morris and Molocznyk finally made their attack on the Shannons Classic field on day five, as the event headed towards Hobart via the wet and winding West Coast – the Leg Morris says his gutsy little Alfa was built for. “Our car really is made for stages like Mt Arrowsmith and Elephant Pass. After we clocked the fastest stage time on Elephant Pass – we knew we had everyone but Bill then.”

Firmly on the tail of New South Welshman Pye, who this year dominated the Classic field up until the last day, Morris continued to measure his performance off his rival Porsche driver, who eventually suffered a mechanical problem on a touring stage before the event’s final competition stage. “We were praying for wet but that never came. We just thought that we would concentrate on our own race and do what we can do to beat everyone. We knew that if Bill didn’t make it to the end then we would deserve to win.”

Still undecided as to whether or not Targa Tasmania will see the Morris/Molocznyk team back for the 2007 event, Morris is happy just to revel in the current success of having won. “We’re still celebrating – I’d like to come back to defend our title. We’d be happy to leave it on a high or come back and compete next year - which ever way it goes. I love the challenge of trying to win and I’ve done that.”

Targa Tasmania - Shannons Classic Competition Final Results: 1. 625 Ian Morris Vic - Alex Molocznyk QLD 1981 Alfa Romeo GTV6; 2. 573 Peter Eames Vic - Rebecca Eames Vic 1976 Porsche 911 Carrera 00:31; 3. 555 Geoff Taylor Vic – Lee Harper Vic 1973 Porsche 911 Carrera 01:27; 4. 551 Greg Cook Vic – Tracey Williams Vic 1973 Porsche 911 Carrera RS 01:32; 5. 607 Barry Faux ACT – Ray Pollard NLD 1979 Mazda RX7 01:37.

