



Wet 'n' wild: Paradise Jet Boating – pack a change of pants.



Duke it out: Drink beer and learn a little something on a brewery tour.



Buckle up: Visit the Holden Performance Driving Centre, perfect after a brewery trip.



Home from home: Alpha's base during the hectic weekend; (below) Carrara Stadium welcomes interstate AFL teams.



More than meets the eye

The writer stayed at the **Crowne Plaza Royal Pines Golf Resort and Spa** (www.royalpinesresort.com.au), where he also had an excellent golf lesson and a welcome massage. Go visit the **Gold Coast Titans** online (www.titans.com.au) before making a trip to Skilled Park. **The Farmers Market** is located at Marina Mirage, on Main Beach. Go for a fast ride with **Paradise Jet Boating**, next to Marina Mirage (www.paradisejetboating.com.au). Being on the Gold Coast can be thirsty work. Take a brewery tour with the **Burleigh Brewery Company** (www.burleighbrewing.com) for a refreshing break. Drive a V8 or just have hot laps at the **Holden Performance Driving Centre** in Norwell – go to www.performance-driving.com.au for more info.

The island (containing Chuck's house) is near the end of Paradise Jet Boating's hectic ride through the long, beautiful Broadwater. The boat has a draft so shallow it can skip right along the seashore, or spin right around on its nose. Every time this happens the beautifully dressed Muslim lady next to me gets a face full of water. Her husband thinks this is hilarious, although her eyes above the veil tell me she'd probably rather be shopping.

We race around Sovereign Island, but we can't see Chuck. Maybe he's out serving cones.

12.30pm

I've got half an hour to get down to Burleigh Heads for a tour around the Burleigh Heads Brewing Company. That includes a detour to Surfers to pick up a new GPS. This one sounds like a Pommy butler telling me the ambassador's in the garden with bad news. At least he gets me there OK, although I'm cutting it fine.

Top brewer Brennan Fielding's Duke label has been around on the Gold Coast for less than a year, but is already producing some of the best beer in the state. His tours are popular, partly because of his beautiful state-of-the-art brewing system, but I suspect mainly for the tasty, European-style lagers and ales, a bottle of which I knock back as he shows me around. His trump card is a mid-strength lager that's so full of flavour you'd never suspect you were being robbed of half your alcohol.

Meanwhile, Brennan's getting into it, standing by one of his big tanks and talking about dimethylsulphate in the brewing process.

"You can forget it," I say. "There's no way a word like dimethylsulphate gets into our mag. Can I have some more of that beer?"

2.45pm

At 4pm, I'm due at the Holden Performance Driving Centre in Norwell, and I haven't eaten yet. I bolt into the nearest Red Rooster and grab a full roast dinner (bargain: \$7.95), which I eat as fast as humanly possible.

Back in the car, I type the Norwell address into Jeeves and set off north. It sends me to a farm, 50km away. I don't know where the Holden Driving Centre is, but it's not here. I give the GPS my best death stare. "Route recalculation," it says. "No kidding," I snap back, reversing away from a small dog at the farm gate. I realise that I'm at the mercy of an electronic monster.

4.30pm

Fifteen minutes of swearing later, I'm finally there in the fading light, watching a bloke doing fast double-spins on a skidpan. The school's chief instructor is Peter Bizley, who wants you to drive his V8 Supercar fast – but safely. He explains this to me as we move smoothly out onto the track in a big Holden. Participants can progress through levels of his "Super School Program" by showing they can control the car with a mature attitude.

Bizley's voice becomes hypnotic as he explains this to me, demonstrating the correct seating position, how to grip and turn the wheel, the correct gear selection... I look up and realise we're going at a terrifying pace. I gag with fear as we hurtle into a corner.

"Are you all right?" he asks me as we thrash up the straight and apex another corner at light speed between two witch's hats. "If it helps, concentrate on how I'm driving." He's right. I look down and his flawless technique mesmerises me again. I almost forget the mayhem coming at me through the windscreens. I could do this, I think. I want to be a V8 driver. If only I had the time.

5.30pm

On rubber legs I climb back into my little hire car. I've got an hour to get back down the freeway to the hotel, shower, shave and drive to the footy. And the GPS and I are no longer speaking.

I get back to the hotel and run through the lobby. It's such a waste. This is a nice hotel, a beautiful place, with a golf course and a spa, a swimming pool and restaurants. But it's all a blur. I've got 20 minutes to get in and get out. The shower is quick, the shave a joke.

I give myself one of my worst-ever shaving cuts, a real gusher. I look like I've been in a fight with a tiger. The red numbers tick down over my head. There's just not enough time.

7pm

In more or less one piece, I sink onto my seat at Carrara Stadium. Finally, I can relax with a bit of old-school footy. It's a low crowd, but hundreds of West Coast Eagles fans make it seem like an Eagles home game.

It's a good, close game, but I feel fatigue kicking in. It's been non-stop since I arrived, with more to come. And I haven't even been to the beach yet. I'll have to find the time somehow.

The shave is a joke. I give myself one of my worst-ever shaving cuts, a real gusher. I look like I've been in a fight with a tiger.