

## **Peking to Paris 2019**

### **Pre-start. Car collection day.**

Welcome to the 7th Peking to Paris Motor Challenge, the showcase event of the 2019 season for the Endurance Rally Association.

Once again, we're staying at the fabulous Shangri La Hotel in modern, downtown Beijing, which has become the unofficial Chinese home of the Peking to Paris Rally since we first pulled into their carpark in 2007.

Crews have been arriving over the last few days for some sightseeing and acclimatisation time but the rally schedule kicked off properly yesterday afternoon when we were all summoned to attend a briefing by the Beijing Traffic Police.

Getting your temporary Chinese driving permit depended on this, so the room was filled to capacity and every one of the crews sat in silence taking on board some useful hints and tips pertaining to driving in China.

Today though was all about collecting the cars and, after breakfast, a fleet of buses took the 210 competitors the 40 km through the city to the customs warehouse where they were to be reunited with their pride and joy.

Beijing was hot today though; and with the mercury at 33°C, the atmosphere in the warehouse was febrile, suffused with the scent of gasoline and hydraulic fluid and was, as usual, slightly emotional.

Everyone knows that there's a hard road ahead of them but the the road to Beijing has also been a tricky one for many. Endurance rally car preparation is as much alchemy and art as it is engineering and no small amount of blood, sweat and tears will have been shed to get to this point so when the doors of the warehouse were opened the crews rushed in they pretty much ran to their cars. Except Tony Brooks of course, who limped up to Cadillac on the crutches he's still using following the Flying Scotsman carpark slip.

Today is when it all starts to get real, and the view across the serried ranks of vehicles, which ranged from 1907 all the way through to 1976 was an impressive one.

The biggest car was the 7668cc Rolls Royce Phantom I of Dom Bernaz and Juan-Carlos Torres whilst the smallest was the 700cc of the Mototri Contal of Anton Gonnissen and Herman Gelan.

Incredibly there was also a steam car driven by water powered enthusiast Mitch Goss and Christopher Rolph, a Ferrari 208 GT4 driven by Giorgio Schon and Enrico Guggiari whilst Gonnissen and Gelan have possibly trumped them all by bringing their three wheeler to the party.

Melvyn, Mark and Jeremy and Kate from Cars Europe had been in town a bit longer the rest of us and they'd dutifully unpacked every vehicle, cleared customs and completed the compulsory police checks so that all the crews had to do was arrive collect their keys, sign on the dotted line and turn the engine over.

After such a long sea voyage however, there were obviously a few non starters but the sweeps were quickly onto the problems and soon had them running with the pack.

Once they'd pulled away from the warehouse complex, the first test for the crews was to find some fuel and then to pilot themselves through the endless concrete canyons of Beijing, along rivers of tarmac running deep with traffic, back to the safe harbour of the hotel.

Along the route, our automotive dinosaurs stuck out like the proverbial sore thumb amid the throng of electric cars, scooters, hybrid taxis and bicycles though Mitch Goss's steam car was trucked back to the Shangri La for practical rather than mechanical reasons - such a car does not go well in slow moving traffic.

For the duration of our stay, the carpark of the Shangri La has been reserved exclusively for us, so the rows of Tiger Economy Audi's, Range Rovers and Bentley's were shunted to the side streets and over the course of the day their bays were filled with Endurance Rally machinery.

Once the crews and their car had reached the sanctuary of the parking lot they quickly go onto the inevitable sorting, packing and checking which as tool boxes, spares and luggage sat alongside their vehicles whilst the crews looked for weaknesses, oversights or omissions. Luckily there's not much you can't buy or have made in Beijing.

There was also the small matter of scrutineering to get through whereby the cars were checked for safety and compliance by the sweeps crews led by Tony Jones, Andy Inskip, Bob Harrod, Rob Dominy and Russ Smith.

There was also plenty of paperwork, practicalities and formalities to be completed and, as usual the ERA Office manager Eleonora Piccolo led the charge in the signing on department, alongside husband Alan and Sian Mills from the results team. Pete Stone, in a dark corner next to a power socket, was charged with programming over 100 Garmin GPS units with the all important waypoints and route information. Signposts and traffic directions are still a bit thin on the ground in some parts of Mongolia.

To finish off an extremely busy day there were drinks on the lawn in the evening, under a magnificent Beijing blue sky, followed by a traditional dinner where the Chairman of the Hero Group, Tomas Vargas de Machuca formally welcomed everyone to the rally after which the rally adjourned to the bar where discussions re rally strategy and planning went on till late.

Whilst we were busy living the high life and getting ourselves ready for the off, Dick Appleton and Chris Mills - the 48 hour car - left us this morning and we won't see them again until Ypres, we wish them bon voyage and hope that they don't have too much to do en route.

Tomorrow; no doubt there'll be more last minute alterations and adjustment. The clock is ticking and the tension is building.

Syd Stelvio

# Peking to Paris 2019.

## Scrutineering

After the frantic activity and excitement of yesterday, when the crews and their cars were reunited, today was somewhat calmer. There was no drama, no driving and barely anyone left the Shangri La car park all day except to have lunch and take on board the odd cold drink.

It was, in short, a time to consolidate. Those who still had to pass through scrutineering did so and then joined those who were looking hard at their luggage, checking their spares and squirrelling away water and provisions from the well stocked Wu Mart supermarket just next door to the hotel.

Although the old rally adage of “if it aint broke don’t fix it” still rings true, there were some tinkerers in the car park who couldn’t resist checking their brakes, swapping the tyres and topping up some fluids but, for most this was just a case of keeping busy, burning off their nervous energy and, in some cases simply gilding the lily by washing their cars and polishing the windows.

Giorgio Schon had a little trouble balancing his carburettors but, as a one time Ferrari dealer, he knew exactly how to get to the heart of the problem and cure it. He climbed right into the engine bay.

Mitch Gross meanwhile fired up his steam powered Pullman and chuffed softly around the car park. Putting the kettle on has an entirely new meaning for him and his co-driver Christopher Rolf.

The crews were also given their route books today which gave them something else to think about and, throughout the lobby area small knots of anxious navigators compared notes. Those who’d done this sort of thing before were more than happy to have a chat, lend a hand and pass on their hard won experience and there’s no crew more experienced than Gerry Crown and Matt Bryson.

Past winners of the event, this dynamic duo have 11 Peking to Paris starts between them and they’ve finished every one. Gerry first drove with Matt’s father John in 1997 before an age related issue with the Chinese driving license authority ruled him out. This unexpectedly propelled Matt into the navigators seat but suffice to say he filled the vacancy well and was today looking as confident as ever whilst busying himself with the Leyland P76 which has become such an icon of this event.

At the rally briefing, later in the afternoon Guy Woodcock and John Spiller welcomed the crews once again whilst Jim Smith, Chris Elkins and Gill Cotton talked them through the practicalities of the event from start to finish.

Dr Mike Thompson also gave a few useful pointers about to health and hygiene for the traveller whilst master mechanic Tony Jones outlined the role of the sweep crews for those very few amongst us who haven’t been on an ERA rally before.

There’s an early start tomorrow so for most of the rally an early bed was on the cards although with such a date with destiny looming large, it’s not clear how much they’ll sleep.

Syd Stelvio

# **Peking to Paris 2019.**

## **Day 01. Great Wall - Hohhot. 595 km**

If anyone was in any doubt as to what day it was, the carpet in the elevators spelled it out to them in large letters. It was Sunday, and today was the day when it all was to begin. Peking to Paris, a rally adventure with its own peculiar motive force and one of the most life affirming, life changing journeys that anyone can make, rolled away from the Great Wall of China one more time.

There had been thunder overnight, with a bit of lightning and some heavy rain. This made for a restless night but, if nothing else it cleared the air so that when we walked to the cars in the pre dawn half light, the sharp cool of the morning snapped everyone into action before breakfasts were gulped down and luggage was secured to the cars.

An early start was the order of the day. The run from the hotel to Badaling was only 65km but no-one wanted to be late and miss their date with destiny.

Within a few hours we would each be sketching out our own rough drafts of another epic chapter in the Peking to Paris story 112 years since Borghese, Pons et al set off into the unknown.

In addition to the rally, a troupe of dancers, drummers, acrobats and ceremonial lions had once again made the trip to the antique stones of the Great Wall to give us the send off we deserved.

As the 7.31am start time approached, the air was crackled with tension and emotion. The first car over the line was to be the Belgian three wheeler and five minutes before the flag was waved, Gonnissen turned and kissed his Inge, it's been a long way to Beijing for him and he's not underestimating the challenge of getting to Place Vendome, but with Herman Gelan his navigator up front, he's confident that they can do this and bring the first ever Contal from Peking to Paris.

The drum beat was incessant and rose to a crescendo as every subsequent car pulled up the line and was flagged away by the Hero MD Patrick Burke, whilst Tomas de Vargas Machuca looked on with due respect.

Ahead of these 105 intrepid crews lies the adventure of a lifetime and the numbers are astounding. In 14,000 km and 36 days they'll cover 114° of longitude, pass through 1,300 waypoints and 8 time zones whilst transiting through 12 countries.

Naturally there was a huge Chinese presence as well as the friends and loved ones who'd been bussed up the start and, as usual it was at times difficult to see the start gate through the thickets of selfie sticks and camera phones which always seem to spring up whenever the Peking to Paris rally rolls into town.

From the ancient environment of the start line, the way to Paris leads firstly along a modern expressway, which was a good way for the crews to settle themselves into the rhythm of the rally but, after a mere 4km however the crew of the White Pullman steam car had to take a break on the hard shoulder to adjust the burners.

For those not requiring this sort of attention though the only issues were the slow lorries which gradually thinned out the further we got from Beijing allowing us to appreciate the landscapes we were driving through. Vineyards, wind farms, solar farms and stands of newly planted trees rolled along the hillsides alongside us before we turned off the highway to a Passage Control on the outskirts of the walled town of Zhuolu. This is where the tempo of the day shifted and for the next 80km the crews were taken back in time on a selection of unmade roads, alongside well tended fields, through hidden villages and across fast flowing rivers.

Some veterans of the modern event said this this was probably the best opening day of Peking to Paris they'd seen.

All good things come to an end though and soon enough we were back in the modern world with a Time Control in a fuel station cafe in Yangyuan before a run to the first ever competitive section to be held in China.

Tim Guleri and Raj Judge's 1948 Bentley Bobtail however had to sit out the fun thanks to a blown crankshaft gasket on a section of expressway.

The *Up Up and Away* Test was a closed road hillclimb with expansive views over terraced fields and sections of the old wall.

Everyone who drove it loved it although Jo and Heather Worth may be looking at a late night appointment with a panel beater after their brush with the concrete parapet on a tight right hander.

By the time the crews had reached the top of the climb, they were on the home run and for most it was plain sailing although Bruno Lang and Christopher Oechsle were slightly delayed thanks to a broken brake pipe on their Volvo Amazon P220.

The drive into Hohhot and the night halt was a spectacular one by any standards. Hundreds of tower blocks sat between brand new four lane highways perched on countless concrete pillars, whilst cranes and scaffolding marked out neighbourhoods not yet built. This city, if not the whole country seems to be building for the future and, given the traffic we encountered on the way into the hotel, some of us were glad of those sage words of advice given to us by the Traffic Police way back in Beijing.

Over dinner and a few drinks in the modern and well appointed Juva Grand Hotel it seemed that everyone had a story to tell. Whether it concerned a navigational "mishap", a mechanical issue or one of the incredible sights we'd seen along the road.

There's a slightly easier start for us tomorrow so the *reflections* on such an amazing day may well go on a little longer.....

Syd Stelvio

# **Peking to Paris 2019.**

## **Day 02. Hohot - Erenhot 436km**

China is a sizeable piece of real estate and, if history tells us anything, it is that crossing such a country in an old car takes time and effort.

The hard miles must be put in somewhere along the line and today, we awoke resigned to the long hot pull to Erenhot and the Mongolian border.

Jim Smith, the route designer for the Chinese section of the rally though did give us a great send off from Hohot. Following an excellent breakfast in the revolving restaurant on the 26th floor of the hotel, the 3 km Open Pasture Test was a rallycross style loop, thick with choking dust, laced with tight turns and sprinkled with short drops and compressions. This was purely a drivers section and once the clock had started, the navigators only role was to hold on tight and ensure that they got the finish to hand over the all important time card.

With rocky sections, short cropped grass and soft sand, this was the Mongolian Steppe in miniature and we even had a family of startled marmots running for their little lives as the cars slid towards them. As a shakedown for what was to come it was a pretty good approximation and whilst it would be unfair to say who put on the best show, suffice to say that the craftsmen of Stuttgart would have been well pleased with the performance of their handiwork today.

Sadly the day wasn't all fun and games however, and from this section the rally turned straight onto the highway to start the serious business of munching through the miles, in a north westerly direction over low lying hills and into endless rolling grasslands.

The famous Erenhot Dinosaur Arch announced the end of the days drive and for most of the crews the day had been a long but easy run on good roads with plenty to see along the way but, for Mitch Gross in the White Pullman and Anton Gonnissen on the Contal some unexpected challenges were thrown at them.

Mitch's steam powered car needed the sub burner assembly changing and we found the crew by the side of the road, armed with flameproof gloves and a fire extinguisher along with the more usual spanners and screwdrivers hard at in the full sun of midday.

Anton's three wheeler, some distance further along the road, had bent its front axle, so along with Herman his co driver and the sweep team of Bob Harrod and Tony Jones they set about finding a welding shop and effecting the repair. They were soon back on the road only to be thwarted by Chinese bureaucracy which decreed that, as a three wheeler they were not allowed to use the toll roads.

A long detour ensued and Anton and Herman arrived shortly before the rest of us were making for bed.

The 48 hour car have also been busy lately and news reached this evening that we'd likely have to make a few detours tomorrow. Incredibly after the sweltering heat we've been enjoying in China, there have been some flash floods in Mongolia. We'll all be at the border good and early where we'll discover what the scouting teams have discovered.

Syd Stelvio

## **Peking to Paris 2019.**

### **Day 03. Erenhot - Camp. 395km.**

For many of the crews on the Peking to Paris Motor Challenge, Mongolia is the big draw so, this morning there wasn't anyone who was late down to breakfast. Just as leaving the Great Wall was only three days ago, so crossing the border today was a significant milestone on the road to Paris.

The actual border procedures were very straightforward and, from arrival to departure, most crews saw the whole process take less than three hours. The Rally Office and the Chinese fixers had once again done a fantastic job with the background form filling which meant that we sailed from checkpoint to desk to exit gates with the maximum of efficiency.

It was sad to say goodbye to Li Feng and the team once again and we'd like to thank her once more for all that they've done to make our passage through China so successful.

On the other side of the fence though, we were welcomed once again by Helge and the superb Nomads Tours organisation. Pre filled paperwork and a lot of local knowledge sure goes a long way to getting more than 120 cars and around 250 people through a border as quickly as possible.

Border days can often be to be dull however. There are many things which could slow the rally down, customs issues, immigration problems etc so the temptation is to play safe and get every to the next night halt as quickly as possible. Today however, the organisers had a different plan, which not even a re route and a convoy through a tricky section could upset and, just to add a bit of spice to the mix, John Spiller had even laid on a short but sharp sandstorm timed perfectly for our arrival.

Mongolia is modernising however, there's no doubt about that, and with this there has come a significant increase in the amount of tarmac roads but thanks to the efforts of Chris Elkins, the route designer we still got to see and feel what Borghese and Pons must have experienced 112 years ago.

As we thundered down newly laid asphalt, slid through thick mud, scrambled over sand and then bounced over narrow rocky tracks we caught glimpses of yurts, camels, wild horses and those iconic telegraph poles.

We also saw the longest inter' distance of the rally so far. No turnings, no route notes, no instructions for 193km which at least gave the navigators a chance for a sneaky bit of shut eye.

Chris Pike is here for his second Peking to Paris but this time he's got someone to share the experience with and no doubt enjoying a bit of company. The last time he drove through Mongolia he was alone as Jeff Urbina, his navigator had to return Stateside to tend a wife with a broken leg. Today though they were pressing on at the sharp end of the rally and much like the rest of the rally looked too be loving every minute of it.

Some cars were not having quite so much fun though and along the last section of the day we saw Ihsan and Yonca Yalaz sorting out two punctures, Hampi Durrer and Tony von Rotz attempting to refix the wishbone, Alain Lejeune and Christian Chavy's were

looking to make a repair to their collapsed suspension had whilst Shivinder Sikand and Dean Drako's (ex Philip Young's) Peugeot 504 had a half shaft bearing failure. Perhaps the most serious issue though concerned Pier Fontana and Giulio Bertolli's Fiat Coupe which had suffered a differential failure.

The sweeps were kept busy as usual as they carried out running repairs by the roadside and in the campsite itself.

After an epic 395km, the engines were turned off, the tents were pitched and the crews began to sort themselves out for a night under canvas. There were some running repairs which naturally had to be taken care of but the focus of the evening was the dinner. Another excellent three course affair taken in the unique ambiance of the mess tent.

The lights went out pretty quickly after desert though which says much about the quality of the days rallying.

Tomorrow we'll strike camp and head for Ulaan Bataar to enjoy the first rest day.

Syd Stelvio



## **Peking to Paris 2019.**

### **Camp 01 - UlaanBaatar 315km**

As the sun rose over the first morning of camp life, so the slumbering crews stirred themselves from their tents and began setting up for the day ahead.

Breakfast was the first priority and as they had last night, the chef's and kitchen staff had laid on a fine spread for us with eggs, cereal, yoghurt, tea, coffee, fruit ..... In fact, just about anything you wanted was on offer.

To add to the generally civilised atmosphere, the organisers had decided on a reasonable start time as well so, most of the rally had until at least of 9.00am to enjoy the food but, such was the excitement for the day ahead that most instead decided to get back to their cars to do some more spanner checks and to brush up on the navigational side of things. Today was all about the wilderness and no-one wanted to leave anything to chance.

Boris Gruzman was still out in that very same wilderness though. He hadn't made camp last night as he'd got bogged down in sand somewhere off rally route, so he and son Elliot had spent the night awaiting rescue along with the big silver Jag'. Salvation arrived soon after breakfast in the form of the HQ team comprising Gavin Bull and Alan McNaughton who hooked up their Hilux and pulled the big cat and its occupants free from the mire.

Once they'd left the vicinity of the camp, the rally was pitched straight into the Time Control sections which would define the day. Chris Elkins and John Spiller had between them devised a fast but realistically paced cross country route which also required no small amount of input from the navigator to keep the car on the right schedule and the right road. We saw almost no tarmac for 250km of the days route rather spending the day pounding over gravel, dodging rocks or scrabbling through sand.

It was a tough day though and consequently along the route, there were several breakdowns, some serious and some not so.

Rene Backx and Jef Augustyns lost the throttle linkage from their Bentley Speed 8 but found a pair of willing helpers in the form of fellow Bentley drivers Jean Vincent and Marcel Peumans who lost two hours of time for their troubles.

Pete Zimmerman and Jonathan Newhall's Buick Coupe ended the day on a truck headed for a workshop in UlaanBataar for some remedial welding work after the rear suspension mounts failed. And, a mere 5km down the road the pretty little Fiat 124 Spider of Enrico Paggi and Federica Mascetti sat waiting patiently for some assistance to fit new dampers. Nick Wade and Steve Borthwick feared the worst when they heard a "new rattle" from their Ford Deluxe Fordor but thankfully this turned out to be nothing more than a broken bonnet hinge.

Without any mechanical woes to deal with and, as if to prove that no matter how hard the rallying is there's always time for a bit of horse play, we saw Renee Brinkerhoff deep in conversation with a local man and was soon off riding his sturdy little pony over the steppe whilst her navigator, Calvin Cooledge sensibly sat in the car keeping an eye on the time.

The experienced crew of Mark Buchanan and Ralf Weiss suffered one puncture today, but this caused them little trouble and within minutes they were back on the road.

Nick Grewal and Dirk Burrowes were not so lucky and their 1940 Packard 110 Deluxe lost a rear wheel which in turn caused a ruptured brake pipe. This meant two lengthy stops to first repair the wheel and replace the studs and then, once they'd realised that the brakes were affected, to repair the hydraulic line. Jo Worth, whose Volvo had run out of fuel shortly before a filling station stepped up and offered some brake fluid so that all the crew had to do was get the line sealed temporarily before making a proper repair tomorrow.

There was heavy traffic on the run into UlaanBataar this evening which certainly didn't suit the White MM Pullman steam car, but it was seen chuffing steadily along the highway into the setting sun just as the rest of us were racing towards the buffet.

Our night halt is at the Blue Sky, a superb hotel in Central UlaanBataar and as tomorrow is a rest day, the crews are likely to make full use of its facilities as well as making sure that their cars are ready for the next few days which will likely prove to be challenging ones.

Syd Stelvio

## **Peking to Paris 2019.**

### **Ulaan Bataar rest day.**

The first rest day of every Peking to Paris rally is a watershed moment. There's still a lot of nervous energy around which is lucky, because after four days on the road there's a lot to be done. There's the more leisurely breakfast, the laundry, the all important car maintenance and, if there's time, a bit of sight seeing and some cultural highlights. These last two activities are what most people look forward to although Margo O'Brien and George Cohelo returned slightly disappointed after visiting the 'famous' Beatles monument.

Down in the car park and in various garages dotted around town therefore was where the real action was happening. As usual the Mercedes garage was busy and they gave over valuable space in their well equipped workshop to the rally for the day.

Doug and Mike McWilliams were making a new exhaust mounting bracket for their 1958 Bentley. They'd been having way too much fun over the last few days and whilst 'gently in the Bentley' is a good rule to live by, these guys seem to know what they're doing so can press on a bit when required and they are delighted with the way that the "colonial spec" suspension soaks it all up.

Ludovic Bois was somewhat downcast, his Peugeot has mysterious and intermittent alternator and electrical issues, "with mechanical issues you can see them and repair them, with electrics - it could be anything and it's so frustrating". After finishing on the podium in 2016, Ludovic wants to get this problem sorted as soon as possible so that he can climb another step.

Keith Ashworth was looking at his plugs along with the sweep, Jack Amies. There's too much soot on them for his liking and thinks it's down to low quality fuel. In this part of the world that's a real issue and a distinct possibility.

Jim Gately admitted that he was "paying the price of the fun he was having yesterday" and was trying to repair his steering knuckle. Annoyingly he has half a dozen of them lying around the workshop shop at home.

Scott and Chance Perekli were simply checking and cleaning their Ford, there's nothing wrong with it and they're having a great time. They decided to enter the rally after seeing us pull into Place Vendome in 2016 and, as if by magic, three years later they're in the thick of it in UlaanBataar.

Shivinder Sikand got up early and made his way into the auto market and bought two bearings. After the half shaft failure his ex Philip Young Peugeot suffered just before the first camp, he thinks that this might be the best \$8.00 he's spent.

Tim Eades went off to a welding shop to have his sump repaired, a small crack was leaving an oil slick down the road which meant that yesterday the big Chevy limped home at the back of the pack followed by the sweeps, Alan Page and Dave Alcock.

By the time the evening came around, most of the crews were sorted out and their cars were clean and fit for battle once again. There was a sense of quiet satisfaction around the rally, helped no doubt by the cocktail reception which was laid on for us on the 23rd floor of the hotel. From the panoramic windows we could see the way that this modern city in an ancient land was taking shape and it was breathtaking.

Finally, we're very glad to report that Johan Gitsels and Walter Op' t Roodt are back with us after their trip to hospital last night following their little *mishap* yesterday. Whilst they're both in great spirits the car is not so good and is being shipped straight home. There's a broken arm and a torn ear between them but this morning they were laughing and joking and hoping to see us in Paris. They'll be more than welcome.

Tomorrow the traditional restart is from Sukhbataar Square when the fun really begins.

Syd Stelvio.

# **Peking to Paris 2019**

## **Day 06. UlaanBataar - Ulaanbaatar camp 455km**

When we pull into Paris and look back on the preceding six weeks, it'll become clear that from the Great Wall to UlaanBataar we were only shadow boxing. It was a phoney war of sorts. But as from today, as we journey west through Mongolia, we'll perhaps see that this is the real battleground where the three way conflict of attrition between the human spirit, physical geography and mechanical competence is played out.

From here on in therefore it gets real. We strike out into the wilderness and the endurance part of the ERA comes into play. The rough roads of the previous two days will cease to be just a novelty. They'll be a constant companion and as with any partner they must be treated with respect to achieve the best outcome. There's no victor until Paris however, and till then, an uneasy stalemate exists in which each protagonist must maintain their guard and keep their powder dry for as long as possible.

You can lose the rally in Mongolia but it's difficult to win it here. Giorgio Schon proved this in 2016 when his Alfa couldn't take the pace he'd set. He's back this year for another crack at it in a Ferrari but, unfortunately, he had to sit out a few days as his navigator, Enrico Guggiari, found himself under doctors' orders. Now they're back with us though and both are keen to make an impression despite this setback.

Today's restart was from the imposing Sukhbataar Square, the home of the Mongolian government, is a Peking to Paris tradition and, with the brass band, the string ensemble, the speeches and the crowds, the rally was in no doubt that they were in the middle of something big. It's a big adventure and it's a big country.

Upon leaving the ceremonials, there was first a long tarmac pull along the very modern Millenium Road which got the day off to a pretty stress free (if heavily congested) start. As well as a smooth surface this route also boasted numerous fuel stations and an exceedingly western coffee shop and those crews with thermos flasks on board took this opportunity to top up. The next such roadside treats may well lie beyond Novosibirsk.

After almost 200km of tarmac though the rally was turned onto the gravel that we've all come here for and another day of time controls which led the cars over dozens of rocky ridges and miles of tracks through seemingly endless grasslands upon which countless wild horses roamed alongside sheep and cattle and many bright white yurts, (gers if you prefer) dotted the hillsides around us.

It was an epic day for sure with the scenery straight out of the Big Country film department although even in this perfect setting there were some crews who found themselves under a bit of pressure.

Wim Van Gierdegom and Arne Van Collie's 1927 Chrysler Roadster, lost a lot of oil from the transmission and ground to a halt. A return to UlaanBataar was needed for repairs and the crew will play catch up when they've done them.

Philip and Trish Monks lost their exhaust again and ruptured a fuel line to boot. Thankfully the sweeps were soon with them and they rolled into camp only a little behind schedule.

Keith Weed and Richard Holmes managed to topple their Pontiac Coupe onto its side whilst negotiating a rocky gully and now have a big dent in one side of the car for their trouble. Thankfully the only thing that was hurt was their pride and this evening the crew were laughing and joking with the rest of the rally.

Philip and Laurette McWhirter's Alfa suffered several punctures today and by the time they reached the campsite, they were calling and sending out texts to anyone in the area who might just have some tyres to suit.

Tonight in camp the mood was good, with such scenery and variety of terrain there'd been something for everyone today and the setting for the campsite itself was picture perfect. What's not to like about camping at 1500m under a cloudless blue sky but, add to this the first class amenities laid on by the Nomads crews and the word 'glamping' comes easily to mind. Indeed Giles Cooper was happy to let it be known that following his visit to the bathroom, he'd had "not the hottest shower I've ever had. Not the coldest shower I've ever had but it was surely the best shower I've ever had".

Alan and Steve Maden of the Rolls Royce Silver Shadow, were similarly effusive and whilst pitching their tents were heard to say that today was "the best day. We did the whole route, didn't get lost, even saw some time keepers and we loved the scenery".

The organisers have assured us that there's more of the same tomorrow.

Syd Stelvio

# **Peking to Paris 2019**

## **Day 07. Unitiin Brigada camp - Tsagaan Uul camp. 380km**

If the Great Wall of China is where the rally fire is lit, then Mongolia is the crucible where it is melted down and reformed. Legends are written in its never ending and awesome landscape and today was a day which will long be remembered by all of those crews who took part.

We were pleased to see Serge and Jacqueline Berthier at breakfast. They've been playing catch up for a few days and they almost made it back to the rally in the Jensen only to have it break down again within a few kilometres of the pancakes and coffee. For this intrepid crew they've once again been shuffled to the back of the pack. There was better news from Wim Van Gierdegom and Arne Van Collie whose Chrysler lost its oil on the way out of UlaanBataar yesterday. They effected a repair and made it into camp at 5.00am which at least saved them from having to put up their tent.

Strangely however, for a day which was to prove such an epic, it began in an almost mundane fashion with the first 200km of the route running over good quality traffic free tarmac through a wooded and rolling landscape which was home to a scattering of settlements and yurts and the associated livestock. This road took us to Murun, an old Peking to Paris staging post which was replete with fuel stations and tyre shops - the last we'd see for a while. After filling the tanks and perhaps fitting some new rubber, we turned off the main highway and onto gravel for the Special Time Control sections which would ultimately lead to the campsite.

As was the case over the last few days in Mongolia, this section was no walk in the park and required a press on attitude, accurate navigation and a vehicle which was still capable of taking the pace.

There's only so much that man and machine can take though, and by the end of today there were some who were perhaps close to the tipping point of fatigue and mechanical breakdown.

Along the way we saw David Gainer whose Datsun had broken a steering arm and had "lost heaps of time" as a result. The roadside repair was nevertheless a very efficient one and got them all the way into camp.

Shivinder Sikand and Dean Drako's woes continued, their Peugeot 504 lost a wheel bearing and a wheel in quite spectacular fashion whilst Rene Bacx and Jef Augustyns were left struggling with Google translate to ask a Mongolian motorcyclist if he could help them find water for their Bentley.

Alan and Tina Beardshaw were stranded for a few hours when their Volvo's suspension collapsed once again, and Nick Brayshaw and Paul Woolmer also had a long wait for sweep assistance because of a failed wheel bearing in their big orange Chevrolet Coupe. "All we need is a vice" they cried "and then we could get it sorted".

The campsite welder was also kept very busy this evening, Anton Gonnissen and Herman Gelan were rebuilding and strengthening their front axle which has failed once again and next in the queue were David and Jo roberts who needed the magic rod applying to their Sunbeam's suspension as well

For those who'd made it through without any big issues though this was a most pleasant evening. The high altitude campsite (1850m), was bathed in warm sunshine and the usual five star amenities were once again laid on for us.

There's still another two days of Mongolia to get through and there may be some who are a little nervous about what's to come but, tomorrow's another day. Anything could happen - and it probably will.

Syd Stelvio



# **Peking to Paris 2019**

## **Day 08. Tsagaan Uul camp - Undurkhangai camp. 341km**

Sometimes you're the hammer and sometimes you're the nail. That's the way it goes on the Peking to Paris Motor Challenge and today, our two class leaders also bore witness to the fact that you don't win this rally in Mongolia.

Both Martti Kiikka in a Volvo PV544 and Brian Scowcroft in a Chevy Fangio, suffered a multitude of mechanical issues on a day which was one of the toughest we've seen in this event.

Martti lost his driveshaft and spent most of the day sat beside the road alongside the Time Control manned by Jim Smith and Pete Stone. Brian meanwhile first lost his clutch but soldiered on in second gear, then his steering began playing up before a puncture out paid to his chances of making the MTC in camp on time.

It was a beautiful day but it was also a cruel one, despite the fact that, acting on intelligence from the 48 hour car, the Organisers had adjusted the timing to better suit the road conditions but even with this taken into account there were some crews who also opted to take a penalty and to check out early so they were able to take the rough at their own pace.

In 341km we saw not one metre of tarmac and spent the entire day blasting over an endless 1800m plateau ringed variously by snowcapped peaks and wooded hills. As for sharing the road with other traffic, it would be fair to say that we saw more horsemen than cars and we passed no more than a handful of local vehicles. This was a wilderness driving adventure at its very best.

With an 8.00am start in the book, the rally was up bright and early and everyone who could, was keen to press on. Alan and Tina Beardshaw however have had to call in a flat bed for their Volvo. The suspension couldn't be repaired last night so the plan is to truck it into a well equipped Russian workshop, whilst the crew follow on with the rally in the Nomads sag wagon and by Novosibirsk, they should be back with the pack.

Those who did make it out of camp, found themselves straight into the thick of the action with a river crossing, a selection of rickety old bridges (which Borghese must surely have recognised), rocky climbs and sandy piste.

There were times to push on and there were times to slow down and think about the best line. On such a day, car preservation had to be front and centre of the gameplan.

Unfortunately for a few of the rally, this strategy didn't quite work out as they intended. Manuel Dubs and Robi Huber for example were seen lying under their Rockne trying to sort out the broken rear suspension.

Rainer Wolf and Hans Geist lost a wheel from their Mercedes but they managed to get it back together and made the campsite in plenty of time.

Tim Guleri and Raj Judge were struggling again, this time with the fuel system beneath their 1948 Bentley whilst an entire family of nomads sat alongside watching and giggling at the crew who were frantically working underneath the big beast.

Mark Gudaitis and Nico Samaras lost the clutch in their Porsche 912 and also spent a few hours whiling away the time by the side of the track.

Erik van Droogenbroek's Volvo and John Beresford's VW were victims of the sand and both suffered the ignominy of being towed to freedom by the Organisation vehicles. The low slung Jaguar Mk2 with Philip and Trish Monks aboard seemed to handle the sand very well but it had a slow and frustrating time dodging the rocks and boulders strewn along the route.

It's been a busy day for all of us but most especially for the sweeps who, as usual have performed heroically doing all they can to leave no car behind.

We've all earned our beds tonight.

Syd Stelvio

# **Peking to Paris 2019**

## **Day 09.Undurkhangai camp - Achit Lake camp. 450km**

As if the roads hadn't dished out enough punishment for the rally over the last week. Today, the weather had its turn to pile on the agony and, over the course of the afternoon we saw a dusting of snow, driving rain, high winds and a temperature well below 10°. Not quite what we've become used to over the last week but, as more than one crew commented, at least there wasn't so much dust.

The morning at least was fairly run of the mill though, a 200km jaunt down billiard table smooth tarmac road alongside the massive Khyargas Lake and then through the industrial town of Uulangom where it seemed that all police leave had been cancelled - just for us traffic . Every single junction was closed with a baton twirling officer in attendance and red lights meant nothing to the 2019 P2P. Shortly afterwards we pulled off the blacktop and headed for the hills, swimming against a tide of slow moving sheep and their mounted shepherds as they made for new pastures where the grass was undoubtedly greener.

The further we journeyed into the mountains though, the more the weather became an issue. As well as the wind there were now rain clouds swirling around us, with thunder and flashes of lightning accompanying them. The early crews were feeling the chill the most with some of them even reporting the odd bit of snow settling on the windshield.

There was no turning back though, there were no alternative routes so John Spiller, the Clerk of the Course, decided that the best option was to push on - with all due care.

To complicate matters though we were also due to tackle one of the steepest climbs ever to be included in the Mongolian section of the Peking to Paris Motor Challenge, which meant that many of the Organisation's 4x4's were required at times, to pull those who were struggling - up the wet, rocky, muddy slope. Everyone made it to the top eventually but at times the air was thick with cursing and the heady scent of fried clutch. The locals, on their Chinese motorcycles, naturally made light work of it which merely added insult to injury.

Power to weight and grip were the essential ingredients here and one or two navigators were jettisoned to redress any imbalance. Julian Riley for example was thrown out of his seat and made to walk the steeper sections as Jamie Turner tried and tried again to get the Morris Minor of the hill. Eventually however he had to admit defeat and grudgingly shackled the little red Moggy to a Hilux for the final furlong to the top at a heady 2400m.

Whatever the difficulties though, the landscape through which we were travelling, was superb. Bright sun lit the grasslands and picked out the snow on the mountains which themselves were set against impressively dark clouds with the occasional patch of light blue.

Tim Guleri and Raj Judge found themselves in trouble again though and as well as having to be towed up the hill, the Big Bentley got stuck at the top with a broken radiator fan.

Mark Gudaitis and Nico Samaras on the other hand fairly skipped up the hill in their 1968

Porsche 912 and even found time to help a local fix his lumbering old coal lorry before tackling the desert racing style final section into the camp on the shore of Lake Achit.

Tjerk Bury's Datsun hit a big rock along the road which deformed the floorpan but he and Chris were not too downhearted about this as at least it gives them another footrest.

This is our last night in Mongolia and the crews were closing this chapter of the rally with typical gusto, swapping their stories of the day, which became more epic as the evening went on.

Tomorrow's job is to get over the Altai mountains and into Russia so there's an early start on the cards.

Syd Stelvio

## **Peking to Paris 2019**

### **Day 10. Achit Lake camp - Kochevnik camp. 343.14km.**

This morning we began our long goodbye to Mongolia and, upon the shore of Lake Achit, billions upon billions of sand flies arrived to bid us farewell.

We awoke to find that tents and cars alike were clothed in what Kerry Finn thought were lacewings. Whatever they were though they were annoying but, at least they didn't bite. That bloodsucking variety is waiting for us in Siberia.

Maybe it was a sense of premature nostalgia, but it seemed that some of the best landscapes we've seen so far filled the windshields on the way to the border and over the impressive Altai mountains.

The border crossing itself was typically tedious but, thanks to the diligence of the Rally Office and our fixers on the ground, most crews were through, and into Russia within four hours.

As ever though some of the rally didn't make the border crossing without a little assistance but after being towed and trucked across the line, they were delivered safely into the hands of our old friends Arkadai and Sergei for repairs and some TLC.

Nick Grewal and Dirk Burrowes' Packard 110 Deluxe and car Bernhard Rieder and Petra Rieder's Porsche 911 were both headed straight to Novosibirsk for a clutch and ignition problems respectively.

From the border, there was then an easy 166km run into the camp at Kochevnik where a handpicked team of Nomads chefs had been smuggled in to cook us dinner on the banks of a river.

After their own epic and eventful crossing of Mongolia, Mitch Gross and Christopher Rolph almost didn't make dinner - again - and they were last seen chuffing happily westward. They made camp just before lights out and we look forward to catching up with them soon.

It's looking likely though that they've already broken the record for the longest journey in a steam car however.

Finally, we've got to say a big "thank you and goodbye" to Nomads and "hello it's great to be back" to Kyrgyz Concept. We know we're in safe hands once again.

Tomorrow's schedule is a busy one and the long haul through The Motherland begins in earnest.

Syd Stelvio

# Peking to Paris 2019

## Day 11. Kochevnik camp - Aya. 450km

Our first full day in Russia was a truly stunning one. The Altai Republic is a genuine hidden gem. Because of its remoteness there's a real frontier feel to the region and the lack of development - roads; housing, roads and infrastructure - only adds to the special feeling you get as you drive through the mountains, down into the rolling valleys and along crystal clear rivers.

The villages seem not to have changed for a century or more and it would be easy to imagine that you were driving through the set of a Tolstoy novel; weathered log cabins, animal pens and gilded onion domed churches gave way to small stands of silver birch trees - the first of many that we'll be seeing over the next week.

Although the roads seemed to roll between ridges, summits and valleys it was literally downhill all day though as we dropped from the campsite at 2200m to the Aya hotel which sits at a hot and humid 220m and over the course of the day we enjoyed superb tarmac, well graded gravel and what the Himalayan Challenge crews would be able to describe as an *intermittent metalled surface*, which is best described as a series of potholes joined together with either tarmac, gravel or a mixture of both.

Despite the seeming lack of people in the area, there were plenty of enthusiastic rally fans lining the road as we passed by and when they weren't watching the clock, the crews were kept busy handing out stickers, postcards and, in some cases packs of coloured pencils to the children. There was even the odd invitation to step inside one of the cottages, to enjoy a cup of tea and a sweet biscuit or two.

The timing was a little more relaxed today so no-one was under too much pressure which meant that when Andreas Pohl and Robert Peil's Mercedes punctured, they were able to get it sorted by themselves and do bit of glad handing as well. There was even time allowed for a bit of sightseeing and 30 minutes had been built into the schedule for a quick visit to the Denisova Cave complex.

Sadly, Scott and Chance Perekslis have a bit more of a task on their hands tonight though. Their Chrysler's rear axle and diff broke within 30 km of the hotel and all that Jack Amies and Russ Smith could do was to call a flat bed truck for them. The Russian support crew, who are now with us, are masters of the impossible repair though so we don't think that this will be the last we'll see of them.

Tomorrow we push on through Mother Russia but tonight we get to enjoy clean sheets, flushing toilets and showers. We did take a moment to remember the plight of Andy Inskip and Nikolai Ishkov however, the selfless sweeps who stayed behind in Olgii yesterday afternoon with several cars which failed to make the border before closing time. S today's a holiday when the border is actually closed we don't expect to see them until Novosibirsk.

Syd Stelvio

## **Peking to Paris 2019 - Day 12. Aya - Novokuznetsk. 406km.**

Well rested and clean, today the crews realised that they had turned a page and were by now well into a new chapter of their own Peking to Paris story. Having rinsed off the dust they realised that they'd finally got to the end of the Mongolian melodrama. Perhaps now they were looking forward to a slow burning Russian thriller before a fairytale ending in Europe.

Whatever though, this morning there was the traditional re-start arch set up on the driveway of the Aya hotel, through which the cars passed. And, one by one they were cheered on their way by the hotel's more usual clientele of genteel Russian holiday makers.

Once out of the starting gate we quickly found ourselves thumping through a landscape much like the Ardennes, and the Belgian crews amongst us must have felt right at home with the punchy climbs and the wooded corners. And, after last night's rain, there was also a little mist hanging in the trees - which soon burned off as the heat of the day built up.

From here we were straight into the backroads and forests where the famous insect life of the region began to show its hand and assert itself.

Sadly, although the route offered up some beautiful driving, the day turned into a bad day for the blizzard of butterflies (collective noun *kaleidoscope*) which blew over the whole route. For our fluttering friends it was a sort of Armageddon but one we could do little to avoid. And by the day's end, every windshield was smeared with their residue whilst every radiator grill was clogged with their wings. It got so bad for some cars that Corgi La Grouw reckoned they almost caused his Morris Oxford to overheat. It was going to be a messy night in the carpark cleaning them off and Alan and Steve Maden's Rolls Royce Silver Shadow even needed an air compressor to get them all out of the cooling fins.

Some had it worse than others though and, sat up front in his so called suicide seat, Herman Gelan looked like he'd been hit with a confetti bomb.

There were some more serious issues though such as that encountered by Andreas Pohl and Robert Peil who lost the transmission on their Mercedes and are heading straight to Novosibirsk for assessment and repairs. They'll be in good company there with the likes of Lars Rolner, Alan Beardshaw and Rene Brinkerhoff who all suffered one way or the other in Mongolia.

After a long day on the road, our welcome in Novokuznetsk was extraordinary. One of the town's squares, opposite the Retropark auto museum had been cordoned off for us and there were crowds, music and an enthusiastic MC who introduced every car to the audience as it rolled under the arch. The local boys, Alexander Govor and Maxim Otmakhov with their Russian built Vaz 2103 naturally got the biggest cheer.

It's a hot night in Novokuznetsk and there's a party atmosphere developing as we approach the rest day but there's still another day to go before we bed down in Novosibirsk.

**Syd Stelvio**

## **Peking to Paris 2019.**

### **Day 13. Novokuznetsk - Novosibirsk 530km**

This morning's departure from Retropark was every bit as good as last night's welcome. We had speeches, singers, a brass band and a troupe of dancers to send us on our way. Days in Russia can be long and a performance like this can really lift the crew's spirits. There were plenty of Time Controls spread across the day as well and, over the course of the 530km route, they gave the rally many opportunities to take a break, stretch their legs and tuck into one or two of the famous and usually delicious piroshkis on sale in the cafes and fuel stations.

There was lots of great quality tarmac today which was necessary to get the distance covered but, there was also around 150km of gravel backroads for us to enjoy as well.

Right from the breakfast table, everyone was keen to get to Novosibirsk, there's a lot to be done and the word is that the freight companies, couriers and shippers have had the best week in three years.

Lars and Annette Rolner had been in Novosibirsk for two days already but as soon as their Porsche was fixed, they were keen not to incur any more penalties, so they made the trek back down rally route to rejoin us this morning and then they began the drive all over again.

Later in the day, we saw Colin Smith and Hernan Zanghellin's Hudson Terraplane, stricken with a set of broken springs. There was little else to be done but call a truck to bring them into the night halt for repair. In 2016 this same car and crew spent some enforced time in Novosibirsk, so it's likely that they know a good workshop.

Marc Buchanan and Ralf Weiss's Ford Mustang broke a water pump housing in the forest, so they'll be kept busy tomorrow as well.

Since UlaanBataar there have been some rough roads and some tough days but this evening, when we sat down to dinner in the well-appointed Marriot Hotel, these hardships and difficulties became badges of honour and some of the stories we heard were indeed incredible.

Matteo and Roberto Crippa for example, whose Alfa Romeo Spider was pulled from its watery resting place by the Nomads crew, has finally realised that it's not a Schwimmwagen and is drying out in the Siberian sunshine. The signs are good, and we expect to see them back on the road after the rest day.

Manuel Dubs and Robi Huber had managed to repair their suspension after it collapsed on the road to Undurkhangai only to have the entire wheel and hub break free and for it then to roll into a river - lost forever. Tomorrow a new one is being delivered and they're planning to be back on the road as per the schedule.

Since we last saw Jeff Urbina and Chris Pike, they endured a seven-day layover in UlaanBataar waiting for parts which were fitted today in a little over one hour. Now they and their team mates, Time Eades and Jim McLaren (whose BelAir suffered a major oil leak), are determined to make the most of the rest of the rally.

Rene Brinkerhoff is looking forward to having her Timecard stamped once again. Francis Tuthill, enjoying an unplanned city break, has managed to put the Porsche's engine back together so that the Valkyrie can ride again.



The two Mercedes of Andreas Pohl, Roberts Peil, Rainer Wolf and Hans Geist are having new rear axles fitted tomorrow. The Pohl / Peil axle has already failed and there's an alarming amount of movement in that of the Wolf / Geist car.

Novosibirsk is a very cosmopolitan city, there are Porsche dealers, Mercedes dealers and even Volvo dealers but sadly there's nothing for Pullman steam cars or Mototri Contal, so the factories had to send their own technicians out to provide some much needed service.

Finally, we're pleased to report that the sweep crew of Andy Inskip and Nikolai Ishkov along their band of border crossing latecomers, had made good time since crossing from Mongolia and were waiting for us in the Marriot carpark.

The butterflies took a hammering again today but the insect world bit back in spectacular fashion leading some of our Russian hosts to distribute cans of tick repellent to the marshal crews hunkered down under their mesh headsets.

Tonight, there was plenty of activity in the bar but tomorrow we expect the focus to turn towards the carpark.

Syd Stelvio

# **Peking to Paris 2019.**

## **Day 14. Novosibirsk rest day.**

Like an oasis to a thirsty desert traveller, the second rest day in Novosibirsk couldn't have come soon enough for the weary crews of the Peking to Paris Motor Challenge.

There was some drinking to be done (obviously - it's an oasis) but once thirsts had been slaked, there was a fair bit of fettling as well and, whilst the hotel car park was busy from early in the morning till late into the evening. The main action occurred hidden from view, in a myriad of workshops and garages spread across the city.

Parts had been delivered, technicians had flown in and for some there was a lot riding on this rest day.

Whilst the rest of the rally is running to a strict timetable, Mitch Gross and Christopher Rolph however, aboard their Siberian Samovar, have their own schedule so after a quick lubrication service, they pulled out early this morning and set a course for Kazakhstan. The cockpit of the 1910 White MM Pullman looks to be a hard place to spend one day, never mind 36 days across half the world. This is a heroic drive no doubt about that.

Away from the frantic rebuilds and panic repairs there were some crews who had very little to worry about. David Main and Brian Head's Buick Coupe is what they themselves describe as an "original oily rag car" they're not interested in where they finish in the results, rather "they've come for the adventure" and, thanks to their slow but steady approach they can just about "smell the coffee and croissants of Paris". Today was all about spanner checks and making sure that the next leg is as trouble free as the last one.

Barry Nash and Malcolm Lister tell us that their white and black, 1969 Rover P5b hasn't missed a beat in around 22,000km of rallying. Today they were doing the basics and were changing the shock absorbers simply "because we can". And they quipped that "if the suspension collapses tomorrow then that will indeed be a shock".

Stephen Partridge and Corgi La Grouw are similarly delighted with the way that their Morris Oxford has performed, it's "strong, simple and easily maintained and everywhere it goes people seem to love it". The only thing they're getting through more quickly than usual are the rubber spring hangers but, if that's the price for staying on the road then it's one worth paying. It's tiring though and Stephen adds that he doesn't mind getting down to do the maintenance but it's the getting back up he can't be bothered with.

John Young was lying under his Peugeot 504 along with Andy Inskip and, whilst taking a break from the spanners he declared that everything underneath was "ticketyboo, which is exactly why we've got Skippy here - and both front wheels off".

Dieter and Hilla Baumhaeckel were looking to fit some suspension bump stops to their 1961 Volvo PV544 but other than that this Swedish icon has been doing very well thank you.

The galleon that is Doug and Mike McWilliams Bentley S1 has been listing to starboard lately. They know that the suspension is down on one side and this morning they set off to find out what the problem is. As of lunchtime though they were still none the wiser.

Julian Riley, a long time ERA competitor is enjoying his first Peking to Paris and is finding the experience a fantastic one. He's sat beside the very experience Jamie Turner, a gamekeeper turned poacher, who's also giving his little Morris Minor the ride of its life. Alan and Tina Beardshaw along with Serge and Jacqueline Berthier left us in Mongolia with suspension and electrical issues respectively. After a few days playing catch up and chasing spares, they're confident that by tonight both cars will be rally ready and rolling out with the rest of us from 7.00am tomorrow.

Otto Gerhardt and Derek Boycks' Porsche 912 was getting a full car park service and a mini valet right down to Otto sweeping out the engine bay with a rustic besom he'd brought specially for the job. All four wheels were off the ground and a small pile of oil stained Mongolia sat beneath the sump guard. A testament to what this tough little car has been through.

Gary Boyce, an ebullient Kiwi, had enjoyed a fantastic morning and like so many of us was impressed with the helpful and friendly nature of the locals. The garage he visited ordered him a bottle of 30/50 oil which arrived within two hours and in the meantime he used their hoist to do some underbody checks and had the car washed and waxed as well, leaving the afternoon free for a bit of "me time".

By the end of the day it was clear that Sergei, Arkadai, Nikolai and the entire Russian support team had worked miracles to get the cars into the right place and to get them out again. The hotel carpark slowly began to fill with cleaner, smoother running cars than when they left only 24 hours ago.

Tomorrow we'll chase the steam car into Kazakhstan.

Syd Stelvio.

# Peking to Paris 2019

## Day 15. Novosibirsk - Irtysh Hotel. 630km

Today was the longest day of the rally so far and there was a border crossing to negotiate as well but, perhaps because it was a Sunday morning, the drive got off to a good start on excellent and empty highways.

Siberia however has something of a fearsome reputation so, even after the warm (and sunny) welcome we'd received in both the Altai Republic and Novosibirsk, we should not have been surprised, to see this so far benign region, bare its teeth and remind us of its more savage side.

The day had dawned dull, damp and drizzly but there was no sign, as we left the sanctuary of the Marriot hotel, of what exactly was to hit us by midday.

All of yesterday's washing, cleaning and polishing was to be undone in but a few short hours and, by the time we rolled into the night halt most of the cars - and some of the crews - looked worse than when they'd left Mongolia.

Given the way that the rain was falling by lunchtime, the cultural highlight of the day, a visit to a German Village, where they were celebrating the start of summer, turned into the ironic highlight of the rally so far. When we arrived in this neat little town, we found hundreds of revellers sheltering beneath tarpaulin sheets, under gazebos and inside open fronted marquees. It was dark, it was wet, and it was gloomy. There was no sign of any summer to celebrate.

Hovering around the Time Control waiting for the clock to tick over, we could see that Alex Vassbotten's sheepskin flying jacket was soaked through and probably weighed as much as he did. Bill Cleyndert however couldn't believe his luck as this was the first time he's been in a car with a proper roof for many a rally.

From the German Village, the route book then told us that the road turned to gravel. But that was before the weather made the entire section much more entertaining by turning it to mud. And, any rally fans brave enough to face such a deluge were richly rewarded by the sight of almost every car slipping and sliding its way along a 5km track. Such was the viscosity and abundance of the mud, that both drivers and navigators were at times required to reach out and clean the windshield in addition to carrying out their more usual roles.

Thanks to the conditions then, it was a filthy set of rally crews who presented themselves at the Kazakhstan border by mid afternoon but, as usual the Kyrgyz Concept crew of helpers, had done the hard work for us and we all breezed through with the absolute minimum of fuss.

As well as the fun and games though in the dirt though, there was naturally some hard work to be done and, early on in the day we saw a soaking wet Brian Scowcroft struggling inside the Chevy's engine bay, to repair a broken throttle linkage.

Serge and Jacqueline Berthier were supposed to be 'enjoying' their first day back on the rally after their Jensen failed in Mongolia. Sadly though they spent some of the day being towed by the ever helpful Arkadai of the Russian Motor Federation, after their alternator

failed before arriving at the night halt with a battery borrowed from one of the Organisers Hilux vehicles.

Shortly after the Kazakh border, a soaking wet Graham Goodwin was seen sat by the side of the road desperately looking for a reason as to why he'd lost the oil pressure in his Bentley. As the leader of the rally, Graham's blood pressure must surely been rising as quickly as the gauge was falling away but, thanks to his knowledge of the car and the attention of the sweeps, a blocked oil filter was diagnosed and the problem was quickly sorted.

After such an epic day most of the crews would have been happy with a bowl of soup and an early night, but the buffet spread which the Hotel Irtysh had laid on for us was superb and coupled with the ample bar, gave most of the rally a pretty good excuse for staying up a bit later than usual.

Syd Stelvio

# **Peking to Paris 2019**

## **Day 16. Irtysh Hotel - Nur Sultan 565km**

Today, our first full day in Kazakhstan, we enjoyed another mile munching marathon as we made the long cross-country drive to the capital city, Nur Sultan.

After the deluge of yesterday we were all pleased to see that as far as the weather was concerned normal service had been resumed with full sun and a blue sky for pretty much all of the day but even over breakfast, the problems which the muddy conditions had caused were still in evidence.

Alan and Steve Maden's Rolls Royce Silver Shadow for example had seen its exhaust ripped off at the manifold and the big old beast had limped in on only three of its eight cylinders. Consequently, the bleary-eyed crew had managed only three hours sleep after a lengthy session in a workshop and were looking forward to taking things a bit easier today.

Over the course of the 565km route we got to enjoy the best of the new roads alongside the worst of the old potholes, and there were also three excellent off-road sections through typically low, flat and grassy hills. And, at every section there were excited rally fans, policemen and local media in attendance.

Some had even brought their classic vehicles along to add a bit of extra interest to proceedings.

Although a long day, it wasn't too taxing for the cars and most crews made it in without incident but in the car park Keith Weed and Richard Holmes were burning the midnight oil and cramming in mouthfuls of food whenever they could this evening. They were busy repairing the half shaft from their Pontiac Coupe which had shed a wheel on one of the freeway sections.

Similarly, Paul Hickman and Bas Gross were also busy fitting a head gasket to their Bristol which had blown only an hour outside of the night halt and as Paul remarked "it's not a big job but it's an hour less in the bar".

John Crighton was toying with the idea of looking at the starter motor in his MG which has an intermittent fault but, as he's parked on a slope this evening, he could well leave it another day.

Kazakhstan is a beautiful country and they've made us very welcome. We're looking forward to seeing more of it tomorrow.

Syd Stelvio.

## **Peking to Paris 2019**

### **Day 17. Nur Sultan - Balkashino camp 461km**

Sometimes the most unprepossessing of days turns out to be the most memorable and today proved to be one such day.

The Marriott breakfast was great, the roads out of town were unbelievable and the traffic on them was light. But, a storm overnight - on top of all the rain we've already had - meant that the first Time Control section on a stretch of scenic unmade rural roads, had to be cancelled. It was a mud bath and even two of the Organisations Hilux trucks found it tough going, so what hope for the Ferrari?

As a result, we were *forced* to spend another around another 100km on the sensationally smooth and fast flowing freeway, over which the miles fairly flew by. To add to the *hardships* we were enduring, there was also a decent selection of cafes and fuel stops along the way.

This excellent road delivered us to another of the day's highlights, a loop through the National Park and along the lake at Burabay.

Tonight was our last night of camping on the event and, after enjoying the drive along the lakeshore we set a course towards the small town of Balkashino where the dining shelters, showers and a well-stocked bar had been set up for us with only short water crossing required to get there.

The large greenfield site quickly filled with rally crews and hundreds of enthusiastic locals on horseback, on motorcycles or all manner of Lada's, UAZ's, a Moskvitch and even the odd Toyota. The party atmosphere was fuelled by folk dancing, singing and a fair amount of Vodka which had somehow made its way up the hill.

Even another torrential downpour didn't dampen the mood and in the steamy dining shelters the rally filled itself with beef, lamb and chicken. The Krgyz chefs were certainly giving the Mongolians a run for their money in the outside catering league.

Obviously, there were some minor problems along the road today, but thankfully, Hans Ulrich Wartenweiler's problems finished just before breakfast when he emerged victorious after two days in the workshop having finally solved his Volvo's cooling issues.

Today is Rainer Wolf's birthday and what a better way to spend it than competing in his second Peking to Paris. Many happy returns from Kazakhstan.

Finally, we'd like to welcome Rob Kitchen who's just flown in to join the sweep team as a replacement for Dave Alcock who will be re-joining us in Belgium.

Syd Stelvio.

# Peking to Paris 2019

## Day 18. Balkashino - Kostanay 588km

It was a chilly, damp but sunny start to the day and, as we packed up the tents with frozen fingers and tucked into a superb Krgyz breakfast, some of us reflected on the fact that we're at the halfway point now. And, by lights out tonight, slightly more than half of the distance of the rally will have been covered, as well as half of the amount of days ticked off from the route book.

It's an odd feeling. There's relief at getting this far and overcoming some of the "impossible" but there's also a certain sadness with the realization that all good things do indeed come to an end.

The day itself was another epic cross-country blast with three Time Control Sections thrown into the mix just to keep the crews on their toes.

First up in the route book though was one tight, tarmac lap of a biathlon training center which rose and fell through dense woodland. For the vintage cars in particular, this section required some deft footwork and some serious hauling of the wheel to get around the circuit in the best time.

Then it was back onto the open road and into the care of the Kazakh traffic police, whose diligence and understanding of the Peking to Paris Rally must be commended.

There was once again some serious mileage to cover as Kazakhstan itself is a vast country and one with massive differences in infrastructure, from the modern and cosmopolitan Nur Sultan right through to the traditional wooden villages we saw this morning. One thing's for sure though. Wherever you are, you're never far from a fuel station and, for the price of a beer in the Shangri La Hotel in Beijing you can fill your tank here.

In fact, compared to the petrol, buying lunch seems quite expensive but, the cafe at the Chelgashi Time Control did a brisk trade in chicken noodle soup and meat pastries which Alain Lejeune and Christian Chavy declared to be delicious and worth every penny.

Some of us suffered though with mechanical gremlins along the way. Anton Gonnissen and Herman Gelan's Contal suffered a broken chain early in the afternoon but this was easily repaired.

Alex Vassbotten's Alvis though finished the day on a trailer after its gearbox started making a strange noise shortly before the lunchtime Time Control. We're all hoping that he and Randy Marcus can get the silver bullet repaired quickly and will rejoin us somewhere down the road.

Andreas Pohl's Mercedes had a brake pipe failure but Alan Smith and Rob Kitchen rode to their rescue and refined the hydraulics.

David and Jo Roberts suffered more of a setback today, however. Their Sunbeam slid into a ditch just after lunch and also ended up on a truck.

Thanks to Nikolai Ishkov, our Russian speaking sweep, the car was safely collected and tucked up in a workshop by sundown.

David and Jo will probably not start tomorrow, they'll be busy looking for suspension and steering components.

For the rest of us we're heading back to Russia.



Syd Stelvio

# **Peking to Paris 2019**

## **Day 19. Kostanay - Bannoe Lake 424km**

There was another time zone change last night so technically we could have all benefitted from an extra hour in bed. The organisers though had other ideas. As it was a border day they wanted us up and at it as early as possible to cover all eventualities.

In the event though the Kazakh / Russian border was a breeze. It was fantastically efficient thanks to the months of pre planning from the Rally Office and on the ground Kyrgyz support. No-one waited more than an hour from leaving Kazakhstan, to their arrival in Russia, for the second time in a week.

The roads to the border were good, and on our way to the frontier we caught another glimpse of Mitch Gross and Christopher Rolph still ploughing their lonely furrow towards Place Vendome. Their old steam engine was chuffing away nicely on a rolling boil but we did see them stop briefly to turn up the wick some 66km from hotel having just failed to outdrag a classic (and it has to be said - bemused) Lada, whilst pulling away from the lights. It's not often a car of that ilk gets to use the outside lane never mind to pass a White Pullman.

Once we'd crossed back into Russia the fun began all over again with three timed sections which ran through beautiful and deserted birch forests and rolling grasslands which even the ever present insects couldn't spoil for us.

The narrow tracks - with more bumps than a phrenologists training kit - were ours for the day and everyone had great fun kicking up bucket loads of dust and charging from gulley to gulley through knee high grass and soft sandy depressions.

Some of the softly sprung vintage crews absolutely loved it whilst one or two of the lower and more sporty classics were looking hard at their ride height settings for the next few days.

Unfortunately, John Young and Kerry Finn had more serious problems to deal with and look like they'll be out of action for a few days. Right at the end of the timed sections, the engine of their Peugeot 504 seized solid and they've been got enough rallying under their belts to know that it's going to take some serious effort to get the lion roaring again.

Those navigators, with a keen eye on the maps and the clocks would have noted that whilst yesterday we passed the halfway mark of the Rally, today we passed another milestone. We crossed from Asia into Europe over the Ural River, in the town of Magnitogorsk, which sits at the southern end of the Ural Mountains. To mark the occasion, the good folk of the 'iron and steel city' had laid on a reception for us and, above the loudspeakers and the cheering, it fell to Guy Woodcock, along with Ian and Sian Mills to welcome the crews to the new continent.

Boris Gruzman, an American (but a Russian speaker) must have surprised his interviewer somewhat by replying directly to the questions put to him.

The night halt was a mere 40km down the road from Magnitogorsk at the Bannoe Lake resort and here we were treated to another heroes welcome by the holiday makers and enjoyed a dinner on the lake shore ringed by the foothills of the Urals. A pretty good way to end a very good day.

Syd Stelvio



## **Peking to Paris 2019.**

### **Day 20. Bannoe Lake - Ufa. 455km**

There are some days which are easier than others on a long-distance rally and today was one of them. Nobody complained.

From the hotel we had a short hop to a motor racing circuit where the cars were unleashed for one fast and furious lap of the track before turning onto the highway for the easy run to Ufa and the third rest day.

The drive through the Urals was impressive, they might not be the highest mountains we've seen so far but they're beautiful, nonetheless. And, when you add some relaxed timing, a good road surface, blue skies, friendly locals and a great cafe for lunch, then you quickly get into the road trip vibe.

There was pressure for some though, Erik van Droogenbroek and Tone Moller's Volvo had been in the repair shop overnight and the tense crew were only handed the keys a mere eight minutes before they were due to check out of the MTC. The faulty clutch release bearing had been successfully replaced though so after they'd had their timecard stamped, Eric and Tone were free to let rip on the circuit.

Additionally, along the route the sweeps were kept busy as well. Lee Harman and Bill Ward's 1931 Ford Victoria needed some help for a "minor electrical issue with the ignition" whilst Scott and Chance Perekslis's Chrysler finished the day on a truck. There was nothing to be done by the roadside as the temporary repair which they'd made to the differential only a week ago, gave way today so they really need the replacement, which is frustratingly, sat in a Moscow airport customs shed.

Enrico Paggi and Federica Mascetti's Fiat 124 Spider didn't like the last drops of Mongolian fuel which they'd tipped from a jerry can into the tank this morning. The crew reported that it was running rough and misfiring but, as soon as Bob Harrod and Tony Jones offered it some fresh Russian petrol, the little red rocket perked up markedly.

Once we arrived in Ufa it was good to see Ludovic Bois and Julia Colman's Peugeot 504 parked up and hopefully ready to roll out on Sunday. They've had a tough time since we last saw them in Ulaanbaatar, and we look forward to catching up with them and hearing their story.

Almost miraculously, David and Jo Roberts are also back with us. The car still needs a bit of work, but it arrived under its own steam this afternoon and David is confirmed that he can get it back to fighting fitness tomorrow.

Similarly, we were amazed to see Johan Gitsels and Walter Op' t Roodt's Porsche 911T also parked up and looking ready to rally once again and this is another comeback story that we're keen to hear.

Syd Stelvio.

# **Peking to Paris 2019.**

## **Day 21. Ufa rest day**

Ufa is the town where the young Rudolf Nureyev, the Lord of the Dance, learned his trade and, last night we have it good authority that one or two of the rally took to the dance floor themselves and, with mixed success, tried to emulate him.

Even though this is only the third such day, when we rolled out of bed on our Ufa rest day most of us were hit by an overwhelming sense of déjà vu. Repair, rest and repeat is the mantra. The routine stays the same and only the postcode changes.

Some crews squirrel their cars away into specialist workshops for a bit of extra TLC, but some of the diehards prefer to play out their dramas, great or small, in the hotel carpark. Matt Bryson for example was standing in the engine bay of his P76 having made a few minor adjustments. He knows this car inside out and was giving little away as to what he was doing but as the leader of the classics category there would have been plenty of others who would have loved to have known.

The big Rolls Royce of Alan and Steve Maden needed some suspension work doing after the exhaust burned through one of the rubber seal whilst the lights on George Coelho and Margo O'Brien-Coelho's Volvo weren't working properly so Rob Dominy and Matt Smith were rummaging around under the bonnet this morning with electrical spade connectors and crimping pliers.

Jeff Urbina meanwhile was flat on his back, wrestling with his very large (and filthy) sump guard. Alongside Chris Pike they've been sweeping off the accumulated crud and filth of the last three weeks and having a precautionary look around the parts of an engine that are usually hidden away. "That's got to be the first time you've seen me working on a car" Jeff offered as Chris nodded enthusiastically in agreement.

This is turning into a good rest day for cars returning to the rally, we've already seen Ludovic Bois and Julia Coleman make it back to us, as well as David and Jo Roberts and Johan Gitsels and Walter Op' t Roodt's so it shouldn't have surprised us that John Young and Kerry Finn along with their Peugeot 504 rolled into the carpark as well. What they thought was a seized engine was actually a damaged clutch which had shattered and jammed the gearbox. A few hours with a good Russian mechanic and a box of Lada spares later they think that they're good to go all over again albeit with the proviso ringing in their ears that they "should be careful with this clutch, it's a used one".

Alex Vassbotten and Randy Marcus are also back with us. They've got a new gearbox in the Alvis and are ready to take on the rest of the rally. Sadly the gearbox isn't from a Lada though - it's been donated by a Ford Transit which apparently didn't need it any more.

Once they realised that they had a problem which couldn't be repaired by the sweeps, Ludovic and Julia turned back into Ulaan Bataar where a worn driveshaft was diagnosed and repaired by some VW rally mechanics. The crew then had to play catch up and sensibly opted to head North into Russia and make towards Irkutsk, but alongside the shores of Lake Baikal the shaft failed again. Luckily they were rescued and towed to a Mercedes garage where, unseeing the size of the problem, the manager despairingly asked "why me"?

His workshop however came up trumps and the mechanics turned another shaft for the Peugeot with a 10,000km guarantee. A bit more catch up ensued and they rolled into the hotel in Ufa yesterday hoping that they wouldn't need to call upon that warranty until Paris at least.

Our other notable returnees, Johan Gitsels and Walter Op' t Roodt's have brought a replica of their Porsche 911T and have also competed a heroic five day to get themselves here from Belgium. They promised to be back in Paris with us but we didn't expect to see them from this direction.

David and Jo Roberts tell us that in the workshop in Kostanay, they had to make a new kingpin, reconfigure the wishbone and replace the suspension. There was also lots of welding during the 14 hour stint in the workshop but finally the Sunbeam was lowered from the ramps and managed to roll all of the way here under its own steam There's a ore work to be done though as the "steering was, at times, a bit approximate" according to Jo so this morning David and the ever helpful Owen Turner found a workshop to make those final few lat minute adjustments.

Syd Stelvio

## **Peking to Paris 2019.**

### **Day 23. Ufa - Kazan. 616km**

The day following a rest day is usually one full of optimism. The cars are generally much cleaner, and they've had more mechanical attention. The crews are also just that bit fresher and today was no different.

But this was a day to cover some serious miles and it was bookended by some excellent gravel sections in the morning followed by two laps of the famous Ufa Ring right at the end of the day. Literally we took the rough with the smooth and the contrasting surfaces gave the crews plenty of opportunities for some fun whatever they were driving.

It was a sweltering hot day and for most of it we ran through the rolling countryside and oilfields of Tatarstan with its ranks of nodding donkey pumps lifting the black gold from deep underground and then alongside and across the mighty Volga river, the longest in Europe and the national river of Russia. We also hit our lowest point today, according to the Garmin we sunk to -0.6m below sea level.

Luckily, for such a long day, we also had another time zone change so, by the end of it we found that we'd gained another two hours.

Despite this slight time adjustment, two of the cars are running early every day now and living by the mantra that slow and steady wins the race. Charlotte Lockhart and Andrew Barnes have endured a few mechanical woes since having the Great Wall and have now decided to slow things down slightly and nurse their Chevrolet Super Deluxe Coupe all the way to Paris.

Similarly, Keith Weed and Richard Holmes have also decided to give their Pontiac Coupea bit of a break. They rolled it in Mongolia, but they've also had a cracked engine block since the second day in China and are currently using around 5l of oil a day.

Sadly, Gerard and Lorenzo Bas have today decided to retire their Alfa Romeo Giulia after a multitude of mechanical issues, but they've promised to see us in Paris in two weeks' time.

Syd Stelvio

## **Peking to Paris 2019.**

### **Day 23. Kazan - Nizhny Novgorod. 487km**

Today was slated as a transit day so there was no competition or timing, just driving. Plain and simple, through three passage controls and some pretty impressive countryside. Luckily we were leaving Kazan on this busy Monday morning and we rolled out along the mighty Volga River and passed by the old Kazan Kremlin where mosques, churches and a synagogue sit side by side surrounded by imposing walls and fine architecture.

The days rolling route took in massive fields, herds of cattle and many villages and small towns. It was a relaxed drive for the most part with three Passage Controls sited at strategic fuel stations and cafes.

The Peking to Paris rally has visited Nizhny Novgorod three times now and, upon our arrival in we were given another civic reception on a hill overlooking the ever present Volga with Pete Stone and Jim Smith manning the Main Time Control before the short drive along the beautiful riviera to the Marins Park Hotel just off the Kanavino Bridge. This is the fifth largest City in Russia and was, from 1932 - 1990 called Gorky (after the writer Maxim Gorky) and was also a closed city because of the sensitive industry it contained.

After what has been an easy day today, the clock starts ticking and the pressure ramps up again early tomorrow morning and the two leading crews, comprising Graham and Marina Goodwin and Gerry Crown and Matt Bryson need to be on their mettle right from the carpark.

Syd Stelvio



## **Peking to Paris 2019.**

### **Day 24. Nizhny Novgorod Zavidovo. 606km**

The 8.00am start time we saw on the noticeboard sounded civilised enough, but on closer reading we saw that it was actually at a track some 39km from the hotel which meant that we were up and in the thick of things by 7.00am.

Breakfast was very pleasant though, on the sunny terrace overlooking the square in which the cars had been parked overnight watched over by the huge statue of Lenin which stood guard pointing in the very direction we had to take towards the Nizhny Ring.

We used this tarmac circuit in 2016 so there were some amongst us who perhaps had a bit of an advantage over the newcomers who were driving it on sight for the first time. Rod Wade had a good day today though. In 2016 he lost a rear wheel here and although he finished the test, he did lose his Gold Medal. Today he finished with a full complement of wheels and still has the Gold medal he so covets.

Following the fun and games on the track it was then back onto the highway for the drive up to Zavidovo, north of Moscow. Russia's a massive country so the day was a long one but as with the last two days, there were plenty of Passage Controls for rest, refreshment and repair.

Wim Van Gierdegom and Arne Van Collie were glad of one of these stops when their Chrysler 70 Roadster broke a piston so along with the sweeps Jack Amies and Russ Smith, the crew set to work to replace the damaged parts. Even after such a long and tricky operation though they still managed to check into the MTC within their minute and the delight on their faces was clear to see.

Unfortunately, because of some Government activity, the two Tests which had been planned at the Nami vehicle test facility had to be cancelled at short notice, so we pressed on to the night halt for a few cool drinks.

Our hotel tonight is the Radisson, a favourite of Russian Presidents past and present and one we also used in 2016. This evening, as before, the bar was busy before dinner and the bar was busy after dinner too, everyone seemed to have a tale to tell.

Syd Stelvio

## **Peking to Paris 2019.**

### **Day 25. Zavidovo St Petersburg . 668km**

True to the wheel tracks and the spirit of Borghese - and the 2007 Peking to Paris - today we set a course for St Petersburg, the final rest day and then our entry to Europe.

The day itself was an inverted copy of yesterday. A long but easy road section followed by a two-lap blast around the Autodrome, just before the night halt, which served to wake us all up before we sat down to dinner.

We spent most of the day on an excellent new motorway which was a real treat for anyone who was nursing a car that was feeling the effects of the last month. Smooth, straight and well signposted this really took the sting out of 660km and, soon after leaving Zavidovo we undertook what was our final crossing of the Volga River, which has been such a landmark for the last three days.

Thankfully there was no repeat of the heavy traffic of yesterday afternoon, although for most of the morning there was heavy rain instead which, had the added advantage of giving us a thorough, and free, chassis wash.

There was a great lunch opportunity in the charming town of Veliky Novgorod whose claim to fame is that it is where the very idea of Russia as a country was first mooted. With more than 1000 years of history it is traditionally considered to be a cradle of Russian statehood. With around 100 rally cars parked up in the town centre today, it could have also been considered to be the centre of endurance rallying in Russia.

From here, it was straight to the track, where the *run what you bring* championship continued apace. Thereafter, full of adrenalin, the crews continued to the night halt at the well-appointed Baltic Star Hotel.

Fireworks and a well-stocked bar rounded off the evening for us but no-one is daring to relax too much just yet. We might be on the threshold of Europe but there is still some hard work, and some hard miles to be done, and tomorrow's rest day could be crucial.

Syd Stelvio.

## **Peking to Paris 2019.**

Day 26. St Petersburg. Rest day

On the outskirts of St Petersburg we enjoyed the final rest day of the rally and made the best of the last chance for some sustained repair work.

The European legs of the rally are just around the corner and no-one wants anything to get in their way of making it into Paris.

As usual the garages and workshops in the area were kept busy, but there was just enough happening in the hotel carpark to keep us entertained.

Keith Weed and Richard Holmes had another day of changing their spark plugs and refilling their oil. They're getting through as much as 12 litres per day now and they stop to check and refill after every 70km.

Salvation for them is just round the corner though. A new engine is arriving into Finland tomorrow and, having looked at the route book, the ferry timetable and the schedule the crew reckon that they'll be starting the job at about 4.00pm and be finished just before the next MTC.

They've been running a 3 cylinder car since the engine block cracked way back in China and whilst they did roll the Pontiac in Mongolia, the bodywork damage hasn't held them up at all, they even had new glazing fitted in Novosibirsk and managed a bit of panel beating as well.

Marco Halter and Claudia Engelhardt, winners of the Road to Saigon rally, but here on their first Peking to Paris, were busy cleaning their Mitsubishi Lancer. Wiping down the dashboard, cleaning the windows and sponging the seatbelts. The car's been very well built and, along with some skilful driving they've arrived here without too much incident. Marco's hoping that this run of good fortune continues till Place Vendome.

Mark Trowbridge was fiddling with the carbs on his Volvo P1800s. Lately he's felt that the car has been a bit underpowered and he suspects that it has been sucking oil from the crankcase and today he set about getting the problem sorted.

Jamie Turner had a bigger problem on his hands last night, but by mid-morning today he'd got everything sorted.

His Morris Minor needed a new differential but, thanks to the power of social media it was delivered to him thanks to a kindly Russian tourist who was returning home after a break in the UK and, tomorrow he'll see that the round of drinks he had to buy at 5.00am was money well spent.

Syd Stelvio

## **Peking to Paris 2019.**

### **Day 27. St Petersburg - Hyvinkaa. 490km**

It's been a long time coming but today we finally said *do svidaniya* to the Rodina. It's been great travelling through this impressive and welcoming country but, all good things must come to an end. And so, this morning, as the third and final routebook took its place on the navigator's laps, we set our sights for Finland.

One last test had been planned near the border as a farewell tour but unfortunately this had to be called off at the request of the authorities. This left us with another clear and uninterrupted run to the Saimaa Canal border crossing which thankfully was both quick and efficient.

Martti and Petri Kiikka are now on home ground and a bus load of their supporters turned up at the hotel this evening. They and their Volvo will no doubt have the crowd behind them - until tomorrow afternoon at the very least.

The MTC for the day was sited just before the border post which took all of the time pressure off the crews who still had around 250km to go to get to the night halt at Hyvinkaa, just above Helsinki.

The drive to the night halt at the Hotel Sveitsi was mostly on motorways and A roads but there were a good few of gravel sections and minor roads thrown in for us to enjoy as well. And, on the way to the Sveitsi, we passed through the most northerly part of the entire route at Lappeenranta.

This is a beautiful area and when the sun shone as it did today, we really see it at its best. Just south of the Thousand Lakes region, which we enjoyed so much on the Baltic Classic rally, driving here is as much in the blood as rally spectating is. Tomorrow there's some serious rallycross action planned which will please the fans, and after a very civilised ferry ride we arrive into Estonia.

By popular demand, the European Cup competition begins tomorrow. First seen in 2016, this award gives those crews who missed the mark in Mongolia and Russia a chance to redeem themselves. The talk in the bar tonight is that there might just be the odd Peugeot, Volvo or Porsche eyeing this one up. Time will tell.

Syd Stelvio

# Peking to Paris 2019.

## Day 28. Hyvinkaa - Tallinn 143km.

What a way to start the day. The opening round of the European Cup kicked off this morning and with breakfast barely digested, we were off to the first test, at the world renowned Hyvinkaa RalliCross circuit.

There, the Peking to Paris *run what you brung* championship continued apace and piggy backed seamlessly, onto what seemed to be the locals Fast and Furious demolition derby.

Stephen Partridge and Corgi Le Grouw appeared to spend the entire lap sideways, much to the delight of the crowd and their more conventional Morris Oxford also cut somewhat of an unlikely figure in a carpark filled with dedicated rallycross racers.

It's also very probably safe to say that no one watching our antics had ever seen a Contal, never mind one on opposite lock. Quite what Borghese would have made of all this was debated long into the night.

From Hyvinkaa we then travelled the short distance to another rally circuit, Saukkolan which was one we'd seen before on the Baltic Classic. This was a much bigger and more complicated proposition than the first one though and was basically a full-on forest stage.

Naturally the crews loved every minute of it and so did the crowds, the local marshals and the Martti Kiiikka fan club who were still with us.

The MTC for the day was set in the neat little cafe on site, which meant that once the crews had finished their run, there was no hurry to leave.

Delicious coffee, pizza and homemade cakes were served so that those who did hang around at the circuit had something to chew on whilst they watched the rest of the rally strut their stuff.

Kerry Finn enjoyed both sections immensely and, in common with almost everyone else, he enjoyed standing around afterwards watching his fellow competitors. This is his third Peking to Paris and in truth he says that it has left him with some frustration. Along with John Young, their Peugeot has been through a record number of tyres (around 30 since China) and a well flagged clutch issue which left them playing catch up until Ufa.

Alain 'the earthmover' Faymonville however was a little more restrained today than he was when he first visited Saukkola. In past events his signature big Mercedes was noted for flinging buckets full of dirt from its wheel arches. Unfortunately, today he and his Bentley finished the day being towed onto (and off) the ferry after his gearbox failed.

Bernhard and Petra Rieder's Porsche also arrived at the hotel on a tow but once it had been untied it was immediately surrounded by the sweeps keen to diagnose the problem and get it back on the road.

Keith Weed and Richard Holmes though we're having a much better day. Along with the team from RPS, they'd got themselves into a workshop and put in a heroic all night session to fit a new engine block so their Pontiac would be shipshape and ready for today's tests and the crossing to Estonia. When they arrived at the night halt they were delighted and full of praise for their seemingly *new* car.

The trip to Estonia, the sixth country so far of our odyssey, was a very pleasant one. Calm seas, a modern ship with a well-stocked galley left more than one wag to pun that this left the crews enjoying their cruise.

Syd Stelvio

# Peking to Paris 2019.

## Day 29.Tallinn - Riga 352km

Taking more than one leaf out of the Baltic Classic playbook, today was one book ended by two great Tests and we very much took the rough with the smooth.

The Laitse Rally Park was our wakeup call this morning where we enjoyed our return to this classic venue with its crossover tunnel and flyover.

The surface alternated between loose, rough and almost smooth, whilst the turns went from tight to very tight. Whatever they were driving, everyone gave it their all and once the crews had finished their run they had time to sit in the grandstand with the locals and watch the rest of the display.

Some of the crews may have had *fond* memories of this section. Owen Turner, for example who, along with Rachael Vestey way back in 2017, spun their Mini just before the tunnel and rocked to a halt in a cloud of dust. Similarly, Barry Nash and Malcom Lister spent a good deal of their track time sideways back then but today, they seemed to have learned their lessons and put on a very respectable display for the crowd.

Some superb quality tarmac and some lovely gravel roads then whisked the rally to the lunch halt at the Halinga cafe, before a much longer section of gravel in the afternoon brought out everyone's inner Markko Märtin.

Following a scenic run through a dense forest alongside the Baltic Sea, the border with Latvia came and went almost unnoticed. With nothing more than a quick glance at a road sign we suddenly realised that we were out of Estonia and into our seventh country of the event.

The second test of the day couldn't have been more different from the first. The Bikernieki Motor Circuit, next door to the Motor Museum, is truly a hidden gem. Dating back to the Soviet era of the 1960's, the circuit is undergoing gradual renovation to bring it back to its former glory but for us today, as it was in 2017, it fitted the bill perfectly. Wide, smooth and with plenty of corners to play with, this was a fantastic way to end a beautiful day. A visit to the museum itself put the icing on the cake.

The night halt is the Radisson Blu in Riga, on the banks of the Daugava River and, as it's Nick Brayshaw's birthday, his fellow competitor, Artur Lukasiewicz cracked open a bottle of his special vodka. Luckily though it wasn't all for him.

Finally, we're delighted to welcome back to the Rally, Helmut Rothenberger, who, along with his navigator, Michael Schmidt, crashed out of the event in 2016. They're back with their Bentley to conclude "their unfinished business" and to finally get the car over the line in Paris.

Syd Stelvio

## **Peking to Paris 2019.**

Day 30. Riga - Mikolajki. 524km.

Today's menu had a distinctly international flavour and it saw us take our breakfast in Latvia, lunch in Lithuania and dinner in Poland. As important though on a long day such as this, we also swallowed quite a few miles, under the watchful eyes of hundreds of nesting storks - perched on almost every available post.

The road south to Mikolajki was a pretty one and the borders we crossed (from Latvia into Lithuania and thence to Poland) were marked by nothing more onerous than a road sign, and that's just the way we like it.

The second passage Control at Baisogala was a great opportunity to fuel up and take on board some refreshments before the long trek to the first Test, the Nemanus Ring. This is an impressive circuit, it's long and wide with numerous changes of direction and height. In short, it's a drivers delight.

We've been here before though and back then, both Graham Goodwin and Bill Cleyndert collected cone penalties in a chicane at the top of the last hill but this time, they both managed a clean run.

Another notable difference is that this time it's Graham who's leading whilst Bill's lying second overall. Whether the home advantage that Bill's Polish co driver, Artur Lukasiewicz will enjoy for the next few days, helps to push them up a notch, remains to be seen.

Waiting for us a mere 250km down the road from Nemanus, was the day's crowning glory. The Super Special Circuit at Mikolajki in Poland. This is an off-road blast pure and simple and the two lanes, which the crews lap in turn are separated by armco and crossed by a bridge and a tunnel. The surface is loose and slippery, and the turns are tight but, no matter what speed you attack it at, the worst that can happen is a bit of a fender bender.

The night halt hotel was next door to the circuit so there was no hurry to get back on the road and many of the crews hung around to see who did what and how they did it. Giorgio Schon and Enrico Guggiari gave it everything in their Ferrari 208 GT4 and came in four seconds ahead of everyone else and that certainly impressed the paddock.

Tomorrow morning the crews get another chance to better this impressive performance when we take to the track once more before heading to Bydgoszcz but there's a party in the carpark tonight hosted by the sweep crews which can't be missed.

Syd Stelvio

## **Peking to Paris 2019.**

### **Day 31. Mikolajki - Bydgoszcz. 374km**

Looking at the route book over breakfast, there was just a chance that some of the crews might have got the wrong impression and have thought that the day was going to be an easy one. After all it was only 374km and there were only three tests, one of which was virtually in the hotel car park.

In the event though, there aren't really any easy days on rally like this and, within the fairly modest distance, an awful lot of the best that Poland could offer us had been neatly packed.

As promised, we were also slated to have another crack at the Super Special stage straight after breakfast, but before this the cars took a quick detour to the town square to be given a ceremonial send off by an old friend of the ERA, the Mayor of Mikolajki, Piotr Jakubowski. Polish TV crews and photographers milled around the Plac Wolnosci with the cars and then followed them to the track to broadcast their antics to a nation waiting in anticipation. As we saw yesterday, there was some inspired driving between the armco and, whilst there were those who were simply content not to lose any time - or anything from the car - there were others, such as David and Susan Danglerd who really wanted to press home their advantage. Having only just taken second place from the Datsun of Tjerk and Chris Bury, the Danglerd's Porsche was flying once again to make sure that they either hold onto it or improve upon it.

Following the Super Special, the open road beckoned and we enjoyed some stunning driving with a mixture of tree lined lanes, well graded gravel and plenty of velvet smooth tarmac.

Poland's a beautiful country and this is a great way to see it, but the weather played its hand today as well and, in addition to the sun we've become accustomed to there were high winds and some torrential rain for the open car crews to contend with.

Unfortunately, one of the tests had to be called off at short notice because the airfield management company had decided that they wanted to spend more time preparing their site for next week's parachute competition which left the Kartodrom in Bydgoszcz as the second competitive section for the day.

This was a compact track, but what it lacked in size it more than made up for intensity and with barely an inch of straight road within its perimeter, hardly anyone managed to keep their cars pointing in the right direction for an entire lap. Certainly, no-one managed to keep a straight face.

With only 4km into the night halt, the tyres were pretty much still smoking as the cars parked up for the night and the crews began their essential spanner checks before heading indoors to cool themselves down with a glass or two of Tyskie Książęce.

Syd Stelvio



## **Peking to Paris 2019.**

### **Day 32. Bydgoszcz - Szczecin 382km**

As well as the great roads, an excellent lunch and a fantastic Test, today went down in the rally legend as one in which we'd never used so many Z's in a route book.

Heading out of Bydgoszcz today, our destination was Szczecin right on the German border and, with only five days to go the end of the rally is fast approaching. There's still plenty of action to look forward to though and today we got to enjoy another superb test venue, on the site of a disused Cold War airfield in Broczyno.

Over the course of the day we also passed through Zdbice, Szczutki, Mroczka, Zlotow, Palac Siemczyno and Choszczno.

There was a slightly more civilised way to start the day though with another track test hard on the heels of the croissants and coffee.

Last night the crews got to try out the Kartodrom and this morning they were able to put those sighting laps to some good use when they were unleashed once again on the little circuit. Sure, one or two of the bigger cars struggled with some of the tighter turns but that only made it more fun for the crowds of locals who stopped by to see what all of the noise was about and one of them was overheard to say that it would have been even more fun in the wet!

Next up in the route book was the day's big attraction, the so called "Battle of Broczyno", as referenced in the Baltic Classic of 2017 and, as before, the course itself comprised a mixture of tarmac, broken concrete and tracks filled with loose sand and gravel. This 10.10km loop was run as a Time Control section and the navigation required wasn't as precise as the first time we were here but nevertheless, through the waist high grass, and dense woodland, the air was thick with choking dust, squealing brakes and revving engines and a sudden rainstorm only added to the drama.

Despite the easy navigation though there were some crews who were perhaps so inspired by their woodland jaunt, that they sought to do parts of it more than once and as such, Michael Merkle and Firdous Naqvi might have had run short of space on their timecard by the end of the section.

Armed with their clocks though, John Spiller and Rikki Proffitt swapped seamlessly from timekeepers to traffic wardens whenever a wrong approach was detected and some subtle direction was required.

After all of this, the hungry crews enjoyed a good lunch at the Palac Siemczyno before another excellent run through the Pomeranian countryside to the days finish at the Szczecin Marina. We're bedding down in the Radisson Blu Hotel tonight where the end of term feeling is building already.

Szyd Stzelvio

# **Peking to Paris 2019.**

## **Day 33. Szczecin - Wolfsburg 382km**

A packed schedule. An early start. And, another country to tick off the itinerary. Today was perhaps the sting in the tail which many of the crews were expecting with a total of three tests and a cross country run to the home of VW, Wolfsburg. It was short, but it was intense and it's also the 4th of July today, so some of our American Crews took to a bit of flag waving as well.

The first test was mere stones throw from the hotel and ran through the old town and the Waly Chobrego. In two breathless laps it featured cobbled streets, chicanes, a hillclimb and a riverside run. From first light, gangs of workers began preparing the course for us, roads were closed, and streets were cleared. Tow trucks arrived to remove anyone who'd not read the "do not park" notices and dozens of Polish marshals lined the roads and set up kilometres of crowd control barriers.

From the first car pretty much everyone gave it full gas, and the ancient pave provided just the right amount of sideways slippage and acoustic input to make it look and sound even more impressive.

Once their playtime had finished though the crews were guided onto the highway rolled smoothly into Germany and onto the impressive autobahn system. This was our tenth country so far and the worlds 4th biggest economy and they've got the traffic to prove it.

The second Test at the Groß Dölln driving centre proved to be another hidden gem. The track here is wide, fast, and today it belonged to us, so we naturally made the most of it. Matteo and Roberto Crippa's Alfa Romeo Spider - which is now fully dried out - used all of it. Struggling for grip at times the progress of the red nosed convertible was as usual very entertaining to watch whilst Erik Andersen and Mary-Anne Elkington's Oldsmobile gave us all something to listen to as it left the start line backfiring like a box of firecrackers.

The third test at the Stendal Flugplatzgesellschaft (possibly the longest name for a test so far) was set on a live airfield. Albeit one which had kindly closed a runway for us. Dodging the odd taxiing Cessna and parked gliders the cars were cleared for take-off and threw themselves up the runway and around the perimeter track with gusto, and several of them took some of the hedge with them as a souvenir.

The day ended in Wolfsburg where we were treated to a quick look around the VW Autostadt before checking into the hotel right next door. Chris and John Beresford were hoping to be offered a full factory service for their VW Beetle. Tomorrow's times and penalties will reveal the extent of any such rebuild.

Finally, we heard that Giorgio Schon's Ferrari needed a bit of work today and didn't make the third test. We don't think that they ever actually met in real life, but today the spirits of Rudolf Diesel and Enzo Ferrari came together in the fuel tank of the 208 GT4. An unfortunate incident in a service station straight after the second test ruled the Italian Stallion out for the rest of the day whilst it was drained and purged of the heavy oil.

We wait to see how it runs tomorrow.

Syd Stelvio.

## **Peking to Paris 2019.**

### **Day 34. Wolfsburg - Liege 600km**

The final big push. Over the Rhine and through the Ardennes to the days finish in Liege where a traditional, but typically low key, Belgium welcome awaited us.

And, from a country which boasts more than 1600 different beers you'd have expected nothing less.

We covered a lot of ground today, but thankfully much of it was on the autobahn and on high quality main roads. Strategically placed Time Controls kept everyone in touch but nevertheless it was a long hot day in the saddle for all of the crews.

For the Belgians though it was ameliorated by the fact that they were enjoying a well-earned homecoming (and a heroes welcome) although for Johan Gitsels and Walter Op't Roodt it was technically their second homecoming.

Anton Gonnissen, travel stained and almost worn out, spoke for them all this morning when he croaked that they "were going home".

Germany had been great and yesterday was a lot of fun but, when we said auf wiedersehen in the forests of the Ardennes and crossed the line into Belgium, it was a good feeling. If success is defined as a journey, then Paris is surely the destination.

With the tail end of the European heatwave still hanging around, a crowd of well-wishers had lined a roundabout on the road to Stavelot and cheered us all on, wherever the licence plate hailed from.

There was only one test today, at the Peugeot track in Malmedy. Within earshot of the more famous Spa circuit, this proximity seemed to have a vicarious effect on the drivers behaviour and every turn here was tackled with the same commitment and dedication that is required at Eau Rouge, just up the road.

Erik Van Droogenbroek for example gave a bravura display of drifting and powersliding whilst Lars Rolner and Dean Drako loved it so much they seemed to do an unscheduled third lap. Alan and Steve Maden however made it all look too civilised as they wafted along in their big Rolls Royce.

Finally, we arrived in Liege, the city that has given its name to one of the most famous rally timers ever and has hosted many rallies to boot.

After dinner, a long night section was looking very likely as the crews readied themselves for Ypres tomorrow and the traditional pre finish party.

Syd Stelvio.

## **Day 36. Ypres- Paris 284km**

A quote, sometimes credited to Henry Ford says that “whether you think you can or you think you can’t. Either way you’re correct”.

Similar thoughts must have run through the minds of each of the crews upon leaving the Great Wall in China six long weeks ago. And today, as they crossed the line in Paris it looks like they were all proved right.

To the victors rewards the spoils and, after 36 days on the road in the most punishing rally of its kind the corks popped, the champagne flowed and in some cases, the cigars were lit.

A huge crowd had arrived on Place Vendome to see the cars arrive and, over the course of a very hot afternoon tears were shed, loved ones embraced and fellow competitors were congratulated. Whatever their finishing position, everyone who crosses that line is a winner in the Peking to Paris book of reckoning.

The previous tough day of rallying through Flanders and perhaps the party in Ypres last night had left some with a somewhat fragile disposition, but whatever their physical state, everyone was keen to get on the road and get to the finish. Thankfully the route itself was fairly straightforward and there was no competition either.

Once they’d reached Paris and rolled on the red carpet the cars then passed under the finish arch where Tomas de Vargas de Machuca, Chairman of the Hero Group handed the crews their finishers awards whilst Prince Paolo Costantino Borghese was on hand with Patrick Burke to finally flag the cars over the line.

It was good to see some of our past competitors in the watching throng as well. Andrew Twort and Claudine Bloom for example as well as Roman Kainz and also

Matthias Bittner, who sadly had to withdraw from the event at short notice. He had however made the trip to the finish to see his car along with the stand in crew of Burkhard and Roman Verhaelen bring it home and to enjoy the dinner.

The Gala Prizegiving itself was typically upbeat and glittering occasion and, in the packed ballroom of the Intercontinental on Rue Scribe, Steve Rider opened the proceedings by reminding us all that we'd just completed perhaps the longest and "the toughest event in motorsport and you guys have made it to the end. Well done on your feat of endurance".

Tomas de Vargas de Machuca, followed with a "welcome to Paris and for me, mostly watching from home it was an event with a couple of highs and lows. The high was being in Mongolia for two days with the rally and the low was leaving it to fly home". He also explained that our exploits had captured the imagination of the world with more than 3.7 million social media posts and reposts and over 80,000 individual Facebook views. "This has been an amazingly successful event and, standing at the finish gave me goosebumps just as at the start six long weeks ago. The emotion and sense of achievement from all involved was was overpowering".

Prince Borghese, the guest of honour added to this that his great uncle would have loved to have been among us this evening. As a fellow adventurer and traveller, he would have known exactly what the crews had just been through and would have appreciated the efforts that they had made.

Over the course of the evening, the long list of winners stepped up to the stage to receive their reward and in most cases to say a few well-chosen words.

Top of the bill perhaps, with three wins to their credit, 2010, 2013 and 2019 was Gerry *Triple Crown* who along with Matt Bryson have both made history and made the Peking to Paris Motor Challenge their own. Once again they took the top spot in the classics category.

Their massive Leyland P76 sometimes known as the *time machine* was built by Matt and his intimate knowledge of the car must surely have been a large part of their success over the years. Gerry said that this “our third win in the Leyland was the toughest yet but it was also very enjoyable. What we really needed though was a few more 87 year old’s in the field to keep me company”.

“I must also congratulate the organisers for keeping the spirit of the rally alive, it’s the Blue Riband event of the historic world and it needs to be tough”

Matt also added that “driving with Gerry is always a pleasure, no matter how hard it is”.

Graham and Marina Goodwin, winners of the vintage category have been knocking on the door of a big win since taking up Endurance Rallying in 2016 and already have the Road to Saigon on their palmares.

This is their first Peking to Paris however and they fairly dominated their class since taking the lead way back in Mongolia. Putting any fears “that you never win the rally in Mongolia” they drove a careful road with an eye on car preservation as well as the clock.

Describing their Bentley Pyman as “a legend”, Graham also added that “It means so much to win this event in a Bentley in the marque’s 100th year. The event was stressful but thankfully we had a bit of good luck which everyone needs. It was tough leading the event for so long and seeing your lead ebb and flow.

With fellow Bentley Boy, Keith Ashworth in third place, Graham was happy to report that the Bentleys had given the Fangio's a drubbing for once".

Whilst echoing many of Gerry's words, Graham did court controversy though by disputing the claim that Matt was the best navigator on the event. "You haven't got the best navigator in the world, I have Marina my wife and (turning to her) you are awesome".

With cheese, coffee, and desert out of the way, it was then time to slide away into the bar for a little post rally analysis.