

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