

# Peking to Paris 2019

## Day 06. UlaanBataar - Ulaanbaatar Brigada 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