

## **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**