

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.