

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.