

Peking to Paris 2019.

Day 29.Tallinn - Riga 352km

Taking more than one leaf out of the Baltic Classic playbook, today was one book ended by two great Tests and we very much took the rough with the smooth.

The Laitse Rally Park was our wakeup call this morning where we enjoyed our return to this classic venue with its crossover tunnel and flyover.

The surface alternated between loose, rough and almost smooth, whilst the turns went from tight to very tight. Whatever they were driving, everyone gave it their all and once the crews had finished their run they had time to sit in the grandstand with the locals and watch the rest of the display.

Some of the crews may have had *fond* memories of this section. Owen Turner, for example who, along with Rachael Vestey way back in 2017, spun their Mini just before the tunnel and rocked to a halt in a cloud of dust. Similarly, Barry Nash and Malcom Lister spent a good deal of their track time sideways back then but today, they seemed to have learned their lessons and put on a very respectable display for the crowd.

Some superb quality tarmac and some lovely gravel roads then whisked the rally to the lunch halt at the Halinga cafe, before a much longer section of gravel in the afternoon brought out everyone's inner Markko Märtin.

Following a scenic run through a dense forest alongside the Baltic Sea, the border with Latvia came and went almost unnoticed. With nothing more than a quick glance at a road sign we suddenly realised that we were out of Estonia and into our seventh country of the event.

The second test of the day couldn't have been more different from the first. The Biķernieki Motor Circuit, next door to the Motor Museum, is truly a hidden gem. Dating back to the Soviet era of the 1960's, the circuit is undergoing gradual renovation to bring it back to its former glory but for us today, as it was in 2017, it fitted the bill perfectly. Wide, smooth and with plenty of corners to play with, this was a fantastic way to end a beautiful day. A visit to the museum itself put the icing on the cake.

The night halt is the Radisson Blu in Riga, on the banks of the Daugava River and, as it's Nick Brayshaw's birthday, his fellow competitor, Artur Lukasiewicz cracked open a bottle of his special vodka. Luckily though it wasn't all for him.

Finally, we're delighted to welcome back to the Rally, Helmut Rothenberger, who, along with his navigator, Michael Schmidt, crashed out of the event in 2016. They're back with their Bentley to conclude "their unfinished business" and to finally get the car over the line in Paris.

Syd Stelvio