

# Peking to Paris 2019

## Day 19. Kostanay - Bannoe Lake 424km

There was another time zone change last night so technically we could have all benefitted from an extra hour in bed. The organisers though had other ideas. As it was a border day they wanted us up and at it as early as possible to cover all eventualities.

In the event though the Kazakh / Russian border was a breeze. It was fantastically efficient thanks to the months of pre planning from the Rally Office and on the ground Kyrgyz support. No-one waited more than an hour from leaving Kazakhstan, to their arrival in Russia, for the second time in a week.

The roads to the border were good, and on our way to the frontier we caught another glimpse of Mitch Gross and Christopher Rolph still ploughing their lonely furrow towards Place Vendome. Their old steam engine was chuffing away nicely on a rolling boil but we did see them stop briefly to turn up the wick some 66km from hotel having just failed to outdrag a classic (and it has to be said - bemused) Lada, whilst pulling away from the lights. It's not often a car of that ilk gets to use the outside lane never mind to pass a White Pullman.

Once we'd crossed back into Russia the fun began all over again with three timed sections which ran through beautiful and deserted birch forests and rolling grasslands which even the ever present insects couldn't spoil for us.

The narrow tracks - with more bumps than a phrenologists training kit - were ours for the day and everyone had great fun kicking up bucket loads of dust and charging from gully to gully through knee high grass and soft sandy depressions.

Some of the softly sprung vintage crews absolutely loved it whilst one or two of the lower and more sporty classics were looking hard at their ride height settings for the next few days.

Unfortunately, John Young and Kerry Finn had more serious problems to deal with and look like they'll be out of action for a few days. Right at the end of the timed sections, the engine of their Peugeot 504 seized solid and they've been got enough rallying under their belts to know that it's going to take some serious effort to get the lion roaring again.

Those navigators, with a keen eye on the maps and the clocks would have noted that whilst yesterday we passed the halfway mark of the Rally, today we passed another milestone. We crossed from Asia into Europe over the Ural River, in the town of Magnitogorsk, which sits at the southern end of the Ural Mountains. To mark the occasion, the good folk of the 'iron and steel city' had laid on a reception for us and, above the loudspeakers and the cheering, it fell to Guy Woodcock, along with Ian and Sian Mills to welcome the crews to the new continent.

Boris Gruzman, an American (but a Russian speaker) must have surprised his interviewer somewhat by replying directly to the questions put to him.

The night halt was a mere 40km down the road from Magnitogorsk at the Bannoe Lake resort and here we were treated to another heroes welcome by the holiday makers and enjoyed a dinner on the lake shore ringed by the foothills of the Urals.

A pretty good way to end a very good day.

Syd Stelvio

