

Peking to Paris 2019.

Scrutineering

After the frantic activity and excitement of yesterday, when the crews and their cars were reunited, today was somewhat calmer. There was no drama, no driving and barely anyone left the Shangri La car park all day except to have lunch and take on board the odd cold drink.

It was, in short, a time to consolidate. Those who still had to pass through scrutineering did so and then joined those who were looking hard at their luggage, checking their spares and squirrelling away water and provisions from the well stocked Wu Mart supermarket just next door to the hotel.

Although the old rally adage of “if it aint broke don’t fix it” still rings true, there were some tinkerers in the car park who couldn’t resist checking their brakes, swapping the tyres and topping up some fluids but, for most this was just a case of keeping busy, burning off their nervous energy and, in some cases simply gilding the lily by washing their cars and polishing the windows.

Giorgio Schon had a little trouble balancing his carburettors but, as a one time Ferrari dealer, he knew exactly how to get to the heart of the problem and cure it. He climbed right into the engine bay.

Mitch Gross meanwhile fired up his steam powered Pullman and chuffed softly around the car park. Putting the kettle on has an entirely new meaning for him and his co-driver Christopher Rolf.

The crews were also given their route books today which gave them something else to think about and, throughout the lobby area small knots of anxious navigators compared notes. Those who’d done this sort of thing before were more than happy to have a chat, lend a hand and pass on their hard won experience and there’s no crew more experienced than Gerry Crown and Matt Bryson.

Past winners of the event, this dynamic duo have 11 Peking to Paris starts between them and they’ve finished every one. Gerry first drove with Matt’s father John in 1997 before an age related issue with the Chinese driving license authority ruled him out. This unexpectedly propelled Matt into the navigators seat but suffice to say he filled the vacancy well and was today looking as confident as ever whilst busying himself with the Leyland P76 which has become such an icon of this event.

At the rally briefing, later in the afternoon Guy Woodcock and John Spiller welcomed the crews once again whilst Jim Smith, Chris Elkins and Gill Cotton talked them through the practicalities of the event from start to finish.

Dr Mike Thompson also gave a few useful pointers about to health and hygiene for the traveller whilst master mechanic Tony Jones outlined the role of the sweep crews for those very few amongst us who haven’t been on an ERA rally before.

There’s an early start tomorrow so for most of the rally an early bed was on the cards although with such a date with destiny looming large, it’s not clear how much they’ll sleep.

Syd Stelvio