

Peking to Paris 2019.

Day 31. Mikolajki - Bydgoszcz. 374km

Looking at the route book over breakfast, there was just a chance that some of the crews might have got the wrong impression and have thought that the day was going to be an easy one. After all it was only 374km and there were only three tests, one of which was virtually in the hotel car park.

In the event though, there aren't really any easy days on rally like this and, within the fairly modest distance, an awful lot of the best that Poland could offer us had been neatly packed.

As promised, we were also slated to have another crack at the Super Special stage straight after breakfast, but before this the cars took a quick detour to the town square to be given a ceremonial send off by an old friend of the ERA, the Mayor of Mikolajki, Piotr Jakubowski. Polish TV crews and photographers milled around the Plac Wolnosci with the cars and then followed them to the track to broadcast their antics to a nation waiting in anticipation. As we saw yesterday, there was some inspired driving between the armco and, whilst there were those who were simply content not to lose any time - or anything from the car - there were others, such as David and Susan Danglerd who really wanted to press home their advantage. Having only just taken second place from the Datsun of Tjerk and Chris Bury, the Danglerd's Porsche was flying once again to make sure that they either hold onto it or improve upon it.

Following the Super Special, the open road beckoned and we enjoyed some stunning driving with a mixture of tree lined lanes, well graded gravel and plenty of velvet smooth tarmac.

Poland's a beautiful country and this is a great way to see it, but the weather played its hand today as well and, in addition to the sun we've become accustomed to there were high winds and some torrential rain for the open car crews to contend with.

Unfortunately, one of the tests had to be called off at short notice because the airfield management company had decided that they wanted to spend more time preparing their site for next week's parachute competition which left the Kartodrom in Bydgoszcz as the second competitive section for the day.

This was a compact track, but what it lacked in size it more than made up for intensity and with barely an inch of straight road within its perimeter, hardly anyone managed to keep their cars pointing in the right direction for an entire lap. Certainly, no-one managed to keep a straight face.

With only 4km into the night halt, the tyres were pretty much still smoking as the cars parked up for the night and the crews began their essential spanner checks before heading indoors to cool themselves down with a glass or two of Tyskie Książęce.

Syd Stelvio