

Peking to Paris 2019.

Day 33. Szczecin - Wolfsburg 382km

A packed schedule. An early start. And, another country to tick off the itinerary. Today was perhaps the sting in the tail which many of the crews were expecting with a total of three tests and a cross country run to the home of VW, Wolfsburg. It was short, but it was intense and it's also the 4th of July today, so some of our American Crews took to a bit of flag waving as well.

The first test was mere stones throw from the hotel and ran through the old town and the Waly Chobrego. In two breathless laps it featured cobbled streets, chicanes, a hillclimb and a riverside run. From first light, gangs of workers began preparing the course for us, roads were closed, and streets were cleared. Tow trucks arrived to remove anyone who'd not read the "do not park" notices and dozens of Polish marshals lined the roads and set up kilometres of crowd control barriers.

From the first car pretty much everyone gave it full gas, and the ancient pave provided just the right amount of sideways slippage and acoustic input to make it look and sound even more impressive.

Once their playtime had finished though the crews were guided onto the highway rolled smoothly into Germany and onto the impressive autobahn system. This was our tenth country so far and the worlds 4th biggest economy and they've got the traffic to prove it.

The second Test at the Groß Dölln driving centre proved to be another hidden gem. The track here is wide, fast, and today it belonged to us, so we naturally made the most of it. Matteo and Roberto Crippa's Alfa Romeo Spider - which is now fully dried out - used all of it. Struggling for grip at times the progress of the red nosed convertible was as usual very entertaining to watch whilst Erik Andersen and Mary-Anne Elkington's Oldsmobile gave us all something to listen to as it left the start line backfiring like a box of firecrackers.

The third test at the Stendal Flugplatzgesellschaft (possibly the longest name for a test so far) was set on a live airfield. Albeit one which had kindly closed a runway for us. Dodging the odd taxiing Cessna and parked gliders the cars were cleared for take-off and threw themselves up the runway and around the perimeter track with gusto, and several of them took some of the hedge with them as a souvenir.

The day ended in Wolfsburg where we were treated to a quick look around the VW Autostadt before checking into the hotel right next door. Chris and John Beresford were hoping to be offered a full factory service for their VW Beetle. Tomorrow's times and penalties will reveal the extent of any such rebuild.

Finally, we heard that Giorgio Schon's Ferrari needed a bit of work today and didn't make the third test. We don't think that they ever actually met in real life, but today the spirits of Rudolf Diesel and Enzo Ferrari came together in the fuel tank of the 208 GT4. An unfortunate incident in a service station straight after the second test ruled the Italian Stallion out for the rest of the day whilst it was drained and purged of the heavy oil.

We wait to see how it runs tomorrow.

Syd Stelvio.