

# Syd Stelvio Rally Report

## Day 11 – Zadar to Opatija – 379 km

Today wasn't the longest day of the rally, but it felt like it. The penultimate day of the Adriatic Adventure seemed to go on for a very long time. Perhaps it was just because it was the eleventh day of action, or maybe it was the long concentration run to this morning's first regularity, it could even be that we are now very much at the business end of this competition and this is the point at which nerves for those jostling for silverware start to jangle. Don't misinterpret long as being unenjoyable though, as the day featured more wonderful roads as the circus headed north towards Opatija.

As mentioned, the morning's entertainment ran along a coastal road that extended out in front of the competitors for miles, as the tarmac followed the topography of the landscape the twists and turns were somewhat mesmerising, not even the frequent encounters with slow moving campervans could dent one's enthusiasm for both the drive and the view, before the route took us up a steep, snaking climb to the mountains that look over the coast here. A feature of this entire rally has been how quickly the landscape has changed, today however it felt like we had shifted an entire season as yesterday's heat gave way to a cooler breeze, no doubt aided by the climb in altitude, which stopped somewhere near to 3500 feet and was a height at which we stayed for much of the day.

The view from the cockpit had transformed as well, with the vista dominated by vast swathes of forest, that was a mixture of red, gold and green as autumn took a grip of the vegetation. It was a reminder that we are in fact very nearly in October and, we are also very near the end of this rally and the competition begins to get interesting.

At the top of the pile is still Bruno and Carmo Rodriguez in the Volvo 164, with Simon Spinks and James Grayson a minute and sixteen seconds down in second place. I wouldn't wish to put a curse on the leaders, but it is going to take something spectacular for the black Escort to catch now. The ground that third placed pairing of Timothy and Matthew Wheatley are sat upon is looking less stable though, with fourth placed crew of Florence Fontaine and Morgan Hector tied on time with them in the big Camaro.

Class two is where the nerves are most frayed however, with the top three split by just 13 seconds. With such small margins anything could unfold over the final morning's competition, and whilst there are only two regularities to contend, those in contention will be taking nothing for granted I'm sure.

So, the sorting is almost done and around lunchtime tomorrow we will conclude our adventure in the same city that we began it in, twelve days ago. The circle will be complete and whilst not all of the crews that started the event will finish, those that do cross the line in Trieste will celebrate a fine fortnight's driving, wherever they are finally placed.

Until tomorrow,

Syd Stelvio.