



CARBON NEUTRAL EVENTS
ENVIRONMENTALLY RESPONSIBLE DRIVING



Syd Stelvio - Day Eight

Tafraoute to Essaouira - 404 Kms

“It’s the first time it has rained in five years” said Hassan, the petrol pump attendant, as he squeezed as much fuel into our tank as he possibly could, just to extract that final few Dirhams from the vend. He looked like a man who had seen a thing or two as well, and whilst tall tales to tourists may be part of his shtick, he didn’t seem like he was making it up. So, it was brilliant to know then that the previous days downpour was a freak event that had just so happened to coincide with the rally’s visit to town.

Still, no matter, as when the morning call to prayer cascaded over the rooftops of Tafraout, the first hint of a sunrise was also creeping over the horizon and although there was still plenty of cumulous nimbus above our heads it was surely going to be a better day on the road?

400 km was chalked onto the roadbook for today’s competition, so a short day by the standards of this rally! It would turn out to be one that needed plenty of concentration though, with dozens of tremendous ascents and descents as well as four regularities to get one’s teeth into. It started with a tricky little number in amongst the squat trees and scrub of the area in which we should have camped the previous evening. The ground was a mixture of soft sand, slippery mud and hard rock on tracks that seemed to cut through the undergrowth in narrow tracks that came and went with no rhyme or reason and not surprisingly there were several interesting interpretations of the navigational tulips.

Straight after the regularity the first casualty of the day occurred, as the wheels fell off Peter Moore + Dan Stellmacher’s challenge, again! This time it was the front left wheel that had fallen off of the plucky Sprite, after the track rod, that had been repaired a couple of days previously by a furniture maker, gave up completely. These two don’t know when to give up though and were immediately drawing up a battle plan to get the car back on the road. The last that we saw of them they were being recovered to Marrakech to await parts and re-join the rally on Day 10.

Lars-Olof Staffans + Heikki Saloheimo, in the Morgan 4/4 were also planning to head straight to a hotel, but this time the evenings halt, and as the day drew on more cars began to skip regs, cut ahead and suffer mechanical issues on a day that saw the endurance and reliability elements of this adventure begin to catch up with people. Those that were able to see it through though enjoyed some of the most amazing roads yet, although the mornings low hanging cloud stuck clung on for as long as it could and for a time, we were up in it. But this only added to the drama of the views as it began to clear, or, as in some cases, we climbed higher and above it.



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As the day drew on though the sun returned with a vengeance, casting its hot rays on the parched landscape once again. Fear of more drought laden drives would abate somewhat as the welcome sight of the Atlantic Ocean came into view towards the end of the day. It's funny, despite yesterday's freak storms, it has actually been a good long while since we have seen any meaningful bodies of water after the desert escapades, and seeing the deep blue sea, shimmering in the late afternoon sun was a comforting vision, as well as a reminder that we are now approaching the late stages of this adventure.

So late, in fact, that things are finally beginning to settle down a little at the top of the leader board, in the Classic competition in any case. There is now daylight between all the cars in the top three, although I hesitate to mention any names, as not to provide the 'commentators curse'. The fight for the overall win though now has a new name at the top, the Cleyndert's, after a good day for them was mirrored by a tougher day for former leaders Pierre Gerber + Alice Leuenberger who had a torrid experience on the third regularity and lost over a minute on the day.

But, there is still a quarter of the way to go, and whilst we will be cutting a largely northward trajectory from here on in, if this rally has taught us anything so far it is that reliability, concentration and endurance will all be tested to the maximum. Nothing wilts faster than laurels that have been rested upon, and a chasing pack is a hungry one.

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