



CARBON NEUTRAL EVENTS
ENVIRONMENTALLY RESPONSIBLE DRIVING



Syd Stelvio – Day Four

Midelt to Erfoud - 467 Kms

The Atlas Mountains, a 4000-metre-high boundary between the Sahara and the Mediterranean, formed some 60 million years ago by the collision of Africa and Europe. 300 million years before that they were a chain that rivalled the Himalayas, the remnants of which can still be found in America. Today they rumbled not to the sound of massive tectonic activity, but to the thunder of classic and vintage rally cars and whilst they may not be as old as these mighty casts of rock they are certainly just as impressive.

Before the Atlas could be conquered though, there was a long run across desert roads. Nothing is small on this rally, including the distances covered. The reward for the early morning concentration run though was a time control section up and over these enormous mountains, and whilst the climb would not quite be reaching the peak of Jbel Toubkal, the highest of all mountains in the Atlas range, it was still a tremendous run.

Up the road went, and the scenery began to change, with huge boulder fields full of sharp, jagged rock. Upon these razor-sharp plains lived herds of Goats and many stray Dogs, not that the occupants of the cars would notice of course as they flew by. All of a sudden, the plateau narrowed and the view to the valley floor opened up, which was nothing short of breath-taking, in a place where oxygen is already in short supply.

Whilst conquering the elevation was one thing, for many of the pilots the run down would demand the most concentration and ask even more of the vehicles, it's not like these cars are running brand new brakes. There aren't really such things as barriers or Armco on the circumferences of the hairpins in this part of the world, The Alps this aint, understeer here would be an error that you wouldn't have long to contemplate, so sharp skills are needed amongst the sharp rocks.

These long distance events aren't just about the driving though, there's far more to travel than that and one of the stand outs of this particular adventure so far has been the exposure to Moroccan culture that those who don't venture off of the beaten may never see. There was a tremendous example of that today, which will definitely be a highlight of the entire experience once we reach the end of this particular rally raid. The route took the competitors through many traditional Moroccan villages, seemingly untouched by the outside world, and in one particular settlement it just so happened to be market day, a market that had been attended by half of the population of Morocco.

There were people everywhere, filling the road that was flanked for a good couple of miles by stalls selling almost anything you could think of. The tents stretched back for row upon row and the people spilled forth as if in a never-ending supply. The cars were restricted to crawling through the melee at less than walking pace, with the swarm of people punctuated at various points by whistle blowing police officers, attempting to bring some order to the chaos, or at least keep the traffic moving. It was tremendous, an incredible atmosphere and something that many of us may never experience again.

Back to the motorsport though and the end of the day would feature the first proper off piste desert section and whilst the route book suggested this might be tackled at just above walking pace, the reality was much more spectacular. The tracks and pathways ran this way and that, converging,



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diverging and offering deception to any unwary navigator that misread the correct route. The evidence of mistakes was obvious, as the fresh tracks were easy to see, embedded in the virgin dust of the thus untrampled desert floor. “You gave me a black eye” said Lagonda driver Mike Dreelan to Bentley pilot Bill Cleyndert, who had overtaken Mike with some verve and inadvertently peppered him with the rocks flicked up by his rear wheels. He was joking of course, but Mike was taking it easy in his immaculate car, and who could blame him. Others were enjoying the extra ground clearance of their machines, like Tom Lee in his Chevy Coupe, “The faster I go the better it floats over the bumps” he said.

At the end of it all Pierre Gerber and Alice Leuenberger had taken over at the top, after picking up just 5 seconds of penalties all day. Alex Vassbotten and Sebastian Gross had also been going well in the Alvis Firefly, improving from fourth to second in their 1933 machine, whilst yesterday’s leaders, Carlos Rieder and Urs Schnüeriger had endured a torrid time of it, with 1 minute and 35 seconds of penalties. It just shows what can happen out here in the wilderness, and tomorrow will see a purely off-road desert loop, that should challenge all and shake everything up again.

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