



**CARBON NEUTRAL EVENTS**  
ENVIRONMENTALLY RESPONSIBLE DRIVING



## **Syd Stelvio - Day Six**

### **Merzouga to Ourzazate - 400Kms**

Halfway through the adventure, for those that have made it this far anyway. This morning began in the desert, as last night we camped under the stars and in the shadow of the sand dunes of Erg Chebbi, rising up 150 metres from the surrounding hamada. These dunes and this area of desert are somewhat of a playground for thrill seeking petrol heads, and are often occupied by dune buggies, enduro bikes and off-roaders, but for one glorious afternoon they played host to day fives competition and became an adventure within an adventure.

It felt like the highlight of the rally so far, a brisk time control section tackled on GPS alone on a completely off-piste route. Sure, there are tracks in the desert, but there are many tracks in the desert and picking the wrong one can carry you off course by a long way very quickly. Worse it can offer up hidden hazards not detailed in the road book notes, and some of these hazards were hard enough to spot even with the road book warnings. Soft sand, wadi's, ruts large enough to send a wayward car airborne and undulations and drops that could do exactly that but fivefold.

Several competitors were caught out by one particular section that caused many a machine to lose contact with terra firma, perhaps the most spectacular of these was Mike Dreelan in his, up until now, immaculate Lagonda. The number seven car took off, landed, the front lifted again, then as soon as it returned to the ground the back rose up high in a seesaw motion that repeated itself until the suspension had managed to catch its breath.

But what fun, what an absolute blast. Streaming across the desert floor, rooster tails of dust and driver's eyes fixed firmly on the fast-approaching horizon, whilst the navigators did their best to control the exuberant use of the throttle pedal and keep the pilots on course. In the end there were also great displays of teamwork, as people succumbed to some of the deeper drifts of sand others stopped and helped propel the stranded machines to firmer ground. After all, we've travelled quite some distance together now, and nobody wants to see anyone fall behind, such is the spirit of the group.

A night under the stars was a fabulous way to reflect on the afternoon's entertainment, but for some it would be a late night on the tools. Last into camp was the zero car of Tomas de Vargas Machuca + Josh Thompson, the giant LaFrance succumbing to the soft surface of the worst sand drifts more than others. It had gotten so close to the end of the run, but a seized clutch meant a tow into the camp site and, for Tomas and Josh and those that helped them, lengthy repairs that lasted until 3am.

One machine that wouldn't make it out of camp this morning was the Morgan of Bjorn Schage + Trond Brathen, who had suffered in the sand and despite an attempt to weld up their stricken differential, the car was sadly going nowhere fast. Everyone else though had to



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keep to schedule, on another 400km day that began with a reversal of part of the previous days desert route.

Under the morning sun the cars looked magnificent in between the rocks and the sand, and after overcoming the fuelling problems from earlier in the trip the number 44 Porsche 911 of Lars Rolner + Annette Rolner was enjoying the opportunity for some merriment. Lars was exploiting all of the potential of the Safari spec machine, using the car as it was designed and putting on a great show. He wasn't on his own either, Jos Dejongh + Marc Verheyden in the other rally spec Porsche, this time a 914, were also displaying just what these cars can do in the right hands.

The rest of the day went by in somewhat of a blur, our heads still filled with the excitement of the time control desert sections, and no doubt the stories told around the dinner table this evening will be of slides and jumps and dust trails.

But wait! This is a competition still, and today did have the hardest regularity so far, that confused many of the navigators with its slick speed changes and challenging changes of direction. So, what of the standings at the halfway point? Well, unsurprisingly there have been some changes, although not to first overall, which still belongs to Pierre Gerber + Alice Leuenberger, the Ford Coupe now with a slender 4 second lead over hard chargers the Cleyndert's who clearly enjoyed the desert challenges. Joining in the podium spots is car 16, crewed by Jorge Perez Companc + Jose Volta in their Chevrolet Coupe. It is the first event for the car, and not surprisingly Jorge was more than at home in the desert after his Dakar experiences. In the classic category first place is now back in the hands of the Woofs, who now have a 42 second lead over 39. Franc Hofermann-Kiefer + Fritz Hofermann-Kiefer in second place, after they suffered 2 minutes of penalties during the day's tough navigation. But this thing isn't even close to being over and tomorrow see's another 460km day on this marathon of an event.

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### **HERO Events Limited**

138 Southern Avenue, Command Works, Bicester Heritage, Bicester, OX27 8FY, United Kingdom

t. +44 (0) 1869 254979 · enquiries@hero-era.com · www.hero-era.com

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