



CARBON NEUTRAL EVENTS
ENVIRONMENTALLY RESPONSIBLE DRIVING



Syd Stelvio – Escape from Ayacucho

Yesterday morning the Lima to Cape Horn rally should have been waking up in Abancay, after a stunning high-altitude run across more of the Andes. We should have been looking forward to a shorter day of rallying to Urubamba and the enticing prospect of the first rest day with thoughts on visits to Machu Pichu. All those plans went to the wall though, in dramatic fashion, when we awoke in Ayacucho on day three to news of civil unrest across the city.

Trouble was brewing, and the first to encounter it were marshals Chrys and Judith Worboys, they were the first underway at 6am when they found that the road out of the city was strewn with rocks, bricks and boulders. A little at first, and then to the point where it was almost impassable for their Hilux utility vehicle, never mind a classic car. The destruction continued for 12 km's, at which point they were confronted by a human barricade of hostile protesters, armed with stones and other tools and making threats towards the vehicle and the Worboys themselves. A hasty retreat was made, and other routes investigated, but they encountered the same destruction wherever they turned. Further attempts were made to leave the city by other routes by the rest of the team, but with the same outcome. Some managed to escape the city limits, only to find roads that turned into tracks that soon became impassable, and then found that upon their return the violence had spread and that the path back into the city was blocked. Our fixer contacted the Police for help, but they were already stretched with further protests in the city centre, just yards from our hotel. Dialogue was opened with those heading up the groups of protestors to try and ensure safe passage for our cars, but it was clear that for the day at least we were stuck.

We were in a strange limbo, trying to enjoy an impromptu rest day, but filled with nervous tension wondering how we were going to breakout of the city. As the team went at it behind the scenes to solve our riddle, others worked on their cars or made the best of the bars and restaurants in the city square that was now encircled by riot police, ready to act if the noisy demonstrations turned ugly, whilst around it all people carried on with daily life.

That evening it was announced that we would be making our escape from the chaos, with the help of the police and the cooperation of the protesting factions, but we would need to leave in convoy at 3:30am and there was still no guarantee that we would get through and that nobody was under pressure to join the escape party. The cheer from the gathered competitors at the news though, suggested that they were all up for getting out, even though it would be a long day on the road ahead. Cities are strange places in the middle of the night, and as we gathered in the square in the early hours the silence was eerie and the silhouettes of the grand old buildings looked foreboding, as they looked down on our cavalcade. The street sweepers, cleaning up after the earlier protests looked at the classic cars with some admiration and the stray dogs that claim this square as their home were confused by the activity at this strange hour. Occasionally a local who had perhaps had a little too much dependency on the local grog stumbled past and waved, completely nonchalant at this peculiar congregation, but let's face it, in their state of intoxication they probably imagine seeing things like this every day of the week.

It was time to go though and there was no doubt some nervousness as we proceeded, and when the police joined our company as well things had started to get a little bit real. The climb to outskirts of the city was painstakingly slow and the evidence of the unrest began to reveal itself, as we were forced to skirt around debris in the road. A set of dirt switchbacks took us up to the location where it had been agreed we could re-join the main road, the point at which the protestors had claimed as the

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front line. We passed the camps of those who had been out protesting now for some 48 hours, huddled around oil drum fires to keep out the cold, and dirt-streaked faces stared at us out of the darkness, lit by the flickering flames. Our pace slowed to less than a crawl, and then, as we reached checkpoint Charlie the snake of rally cars ground to a halt completely.

The police disembarked from their cars, riot shields and rubber bullet guns in hand and the protestors stood firm. There was debris everywhere and as the sun rose acrid smoke hung in the air and subjugators filled the road with their ranks. It became clear quite quickly that they were less than keen to let us through, and more negotiation began to take place. Competitors disembarked from their cars to watch the goings on, and even started showing the ranks of activists their cars. It was all amicable and peaceful, their quarrel was not with us after all, but despite the apparent amenability, they were intent on making their point regardless. Nothing would satisfy their demands and even the offering of 200 or so loaves of bread from our side to feed the hungry souls on the picket line would do nothing to soften their resolve. Perhaps we should have offered up fish as well, it was certainly going to require some divine intervention to part the waves of these demonstrators, but we were all out of miracles and needed to find plan Z.

Plan Z required some on the spot route planning, there were a few tracks out of the location we were in that would take us beyond the reach of our would-be captors, but they were up some incredibly steep dirt tracks, some of which were too rough to tackle. By this point it was around 7:30 am and we had managed to travel just a few kilometres since the 3:30 departure, and the unrest was now visible on both sides of the picket line. There had been a couple of isolated explosions from the protesting party, nothing too serious, but it felt like a knife edge was being trodden and the rallyists had seen enough. It was time to attempt the climb, come what may, either that or we would have been forced back into the city and that was unthinkable. One by one the cars took to the hill, with the organisations vehicles ready to assist with towing and there was some pushing as well, no mean feat at this altitude. Over the next hour, by hook and by crook we all managed to escape onto the empty main road, we had done it, the deadlock had been broken and the rally could resume, although there was now the prospect of a 12-hour drive to Urubamba to grapple with, which at some 600 km's was a daunting prospect after such an early start.

This has been an incredible 48 hours for the rally, for both competitors and organisers, but if you pursue adventure, and travel on the paths less trodden then at some point it is inevitable that trouble will strike. But this is the stuff that is talked about for years after, this is the stuff that binds us and makes us stronger, and the prospect of danger and the unknown are part of the core reasons for which we seek out the more unusual places of the world. None of us want to be caught up in this kind of thing, no more than those that take part in dangerous sports wish for serious incident, but it is the sailing close to the wind that excites us, walking the tightrope between adventure and mis-adventure and when the dust has settled, we will talk of this for years. I hope that the rest of the rally continues without any other incidents of this magnitude, but there is no doubt that this is adventure, and these are the days that should happen to you.

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