



CARBON NEUTRAL EVENTS
ENVIRONMENTALLY RESPONSIBLE DRIVING



Syd Stelvio Day Ten – Uyuni to Tarija

You know a country has been good to you when your time there feels like it is over before it has even begun, and that's probably a fair reflection of Bolivia. Tomorrow, we head for Argentina and the next part of our adventure and say goodbye to some of the best roads yet, but more than that we have finally got a few days of solid rallying in the bag after the tumultuous start to the rally in Peru.

Today was pretty much the perfect last day, and whilst it is true that there are 200 km of driving left in Bolivia, those will no doubt be spent with minds on the border crossing. The start this morning on the Salt Flats was bright and cold, with a few machines struggling to wake up after temperatures fell below zero during the night. Chris Mills was particularly busy jump starting the most stubborn cars and Brian Palmer + Mark Townson's Peugeot 504 needed a tow to get it going. Engine firing issues aside, it was a real treat to enjoy breakfast whilst looking out over the expanses of the flats, very much a pinch yourself moment and an opportunity to get one last look before we headed back to Uyuni to begin the day.

Uyuni is one of those towns that time forgot, originally founded as a trading post, but here the streets are paved with dust rather than gold. Nowadays it acts as a bit of a gateway for tourists visiting the Salt, and in that purpose served us well. The start began in the shadow of deceased locomotives, a reminder of the days when the railway carried much freight too and from this place, but now these steel hulks have been left to rust in peace. There wasn't too much time to ponder on the wrecks though, as there was rallying to be done, 413 km in total with two regularities making up the last elements of Bolivian competition.

The run towards the midway time control at Tupiza was nothing short of incredible. This 200 km run was mostly along one beautifully tarmacked road, with next to no traffic on it, indeed you could have counted the number of oncoming vehicles on one hand. What this pristine length of asphalt is doing here is anyone's guess, who knows who it was built for and why, but today it provided a wonderful place to enjoy our classic and vintage motorcars, in a landscape that began as desert with the road lined by dunes and then one that climbed through rock canyons before the road sat high above the desert plains below. It was quite simply breath-taking.

The afternoon was also extremely enjoyable, but the road surface was in stark contrast to the morning as the immaculate black top was replaced by technically demanding but extremely enjoyable gravel, which would stay beneath our wheels for the best part of 100 clicks. The road carried the cars up to the first regularity of the day, climbing in altitude onto a windswept ridge road that climb even higher once the competitive section began. Up it went, following the edges of the mountains, forming hairpins and switchbacks from which the views stretched for miles. The scenery here was different, much greener than the morning, but the wind has also picked up, howling between the peaks with the gusts no doubt causing some of the open top runners cause for concern.

As the reg finished the landscape changed again as the mountain roads passed into the next valley, the flora disappeared, and bare rock replaced the greenery we had been enjoying. This was a dramatic piece of road, with panoramas that stretched far into the distance and in many parts placed us above the far-off clouds. Any kind of Armco or safety barriers were at a premium here, and careful driving was needed as the long descent into the valley floor began, nobody would want to cook their brakes on these downward spiralling roads, which were often accompanied by dizzying drops.



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We were also sharing these roads with the occasional articulated lorry and bus, in fact there seemed to be more people using this undeveloped stretch of highway than the mega-route we had made such good progress on in the morning, figure that one out! The second regularity was on a similar surface to the first, but at a much lower altitude, relatively speaking of course, as we were still well above 3000 metres and before arriving in Tarija there would be one more climb to conquer, and this it turned out would have its own challenge.

When you cover distances like we do we drive into weather systems, rather than them finding us, and atop the final peaks of the day the road disappeared into thick frozen cloud for some 20 km's. The visibility was reduced to just a few feet in places, even less so when the screens froze, and the precipitation materialised in front of our faces as we picked a path through the gloom. Some of the locals had given up trying to navigate a way through completely and had parked on the side of the road, hazards flashing, seemingly waiting for the cloud, or their windscreens, to clear.

Eventually the road dropped out of the murk, and we descended to Tarija. At 1800 metres above sea level this is the lowest we have been since we first climbed into the Andes 8 days ago, and this drop in altitude will continue as we head into Argentina. Leaving Bolivia and the highest points of our adventure behind feels like somewhat of a milestone, those who are here have made it through some of the toughest roads and the cars will no doubt be happier closer to sea level. But there is also perhaps some sadness that this incredible part of the journey is behind us, even with the difficulties it has provided. Complex at times, but also extremely enjoyable, the past ten days have certainly left us with memories and the stories will be told for a long time. Let us see what Adventures there are in store over the coming weeks, as there is still a long way to go...

Syd Stelvio

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