



**CARBON NEUTRAL EVENTS**  
ENVIRONMENTALLY RESPONSIBLE DRIVING



### **Syd Stelvio Day 14 – Catamarca to Villa Carlos Paz**

Another day of distance on the Lima to Cape Horn, another day of ticking off the miles in our pursuit of Ushuaia and another day with some solid competition completed, for some at least, as for others the reliability element of the trip is taking its toll and the road is biting back.

Another early start took us out to a hill climb at El Portezuelo, for a regularity on the steep and technical climb that would hopefully see the runners miss any morning traffic that might be descending against us. This isn't a very busy road, but it is tight and any oncoming traffic could lead to precious seconds being lost. Any crews that did chance a look over the edge would have seen a beautiful vista stretching out beneath them, gradually being lit by the early morning sun as it gradually rose over the peaks of the mountains and filled first the valley, and then patches of the road, with light.

Unfortunately, the morning had seen early mechanical problems for car 44, Raj Judge + Tim Guleri in the 1948 Bentley 6.5 Bobtail. Their diff had expired, and a trailer was needed, but hopefully we will see the popular pair back with us sooner rather than later. There were also reports that Shiv Sikand was having issues with the replacement diff that he had put into his Peugeot 504, back with the rally again after fixing other issues between Bolivia and Salta, any problems he was having though must have ironed themselves out somewhat as he was definitely with the pack all day, if a little behind at times.

Post regularity one there was a fabulous sweeping road across the plateau of the mountains that overlook the Catamarca province, with birds of prey of many varieties swooping overhead. In fact, it was a bit of a safari of a day, with horses, donkeys, cows, and lizards all making an appearance, as well as all of the feral cats and dogs that are so much a feature of South America. It was all getting a bit wild on the road as well as the tarmac faded and was replaced by gravel and sand, and the route amendments had warned that some of the unsealed roads were now rougher than they had been on the recces. Patience was the best way to tackle some of the rougher sections, and with the day running ahead in time and in the end, cars arriving early at the MTC it paid to exercise a bit of caution.

Speaking of patience, one pair that seem to have it in droves are John + Nicole Whitelock, nursing their 38 Ford Coupe along the route inch by inch, still suffering with cooling problems that have plagued them for most of the past fortnight. Special mention must go to these two, as they just keep going, not matter how painstaking, and still, mostly, with a smile on their faces. Indeed, even the car has somewhat of a grin, although it is a little toothless since an angle grinder was taken to the radiator grill to try and usher in as much air as possible. Not long now guys and the temperature will begin to drop, do not give up!

One car still missing from the route today was the blue Fiat of Luigi Fontana + Michele Lumbroso, has anyone seen Luigi? Rumour has it that he took a jet to Cordoba and has a taxi driver hired for the weekend, though there is no word on Michele. But seriously though, has anyone seen Luigi?

Post gravel and so began a long straight road that had almost zero deviations for well over 100 km's and would accelerate us to the afternoon that was a little more interesting. The road ran through the centre of another salt flat, but as trip fixer Marcelo Bianchi will tell you, it's best to stick to the tarmac and not to go exploring this particular Salt Lake, unless you want to end up sunk... It would also pay to keep a check on the speed on this stretch, as we entered the Province of Cordoba, as the Police here



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are hot on their speed traps and are often where you cannot see them. Tough going when a seemingly endless stretch of tarmac is in front of your eyes, and you desperately want to eat up the miles.

As far as I know, nobody fell foul of the law and the afternoon would see more dirt tracking, although this time on a much gentler route. The countryside here was also very lush and was in stark contrast to the desert and mountains that have so far dominated the landscape. Gentle rivers burred through the farmland, and anyone who stopped a moment to take a glance at them would have seen they were crystal clear and teeming with life, although it was just a pleasure to see the waterways with actual water in them, so barren had the water courses of this country been so far. Elsewhere Parakeets warbled a noisy tune as they built nests in the trees and under the warm sunshine it felt like spring was in full force, and we could perhaps have been forgiven for forgetting that we were here on a rally.

It was certainly a pleasant way to spend the afternoon and time felt like it was going quickly as the miles disappeared. One last bit of competition in the way of a short but technically tricky regularity bookended the day before a quick run into the evenings halt in Villa Carlos Paz. There is a slightly later start in the morning and slightly less miles, which will be music to the ears of those struggling with fatigue and mechanical gremlins, but the longest day of the trip is still yet to come.

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