



**CARBON NEUTRAL EVENTS**  
ENVIRONMENTALLY RESPONSIBLE DRIVING



## Syd Stelvio Day 18 – San Rafael to Neuquén

There comes a point on any rally like this where you need to put in a long day on the road and cover some serious distance. Let's not forget, we're travelling most of the length of a continent, 12,500 km, and whilst 30 days is a long time on the road it still isn't long enough for every day of this event to be on the fun roads or the most interesting route. Today was the day where we put in some serious leg work, ticked off 750 odd kilometres and forged ahead to Patagonia.

It wasn't pretty, it was a brutish haul on lengthy sections of largely arrow straight roads, a protracted concentration run that took us cross country into a never changing landscape that looked exactly the same whichever way the compass pointed. The road projected out in front of us so far that even the most prosopicient couldn't see where it ended, as the line of tarmac thinned and then disappeared into a mirage, from which far off trucks, that for long periods were all we saw, wobbled out of the haze to greet us as we sped towards them.

The gift that a dull day on the road does present to us is an opportunity to take stock and reflect upon all that has gone so far and consider what might be to come. The driving itself isn't exactly retentive and both driver and navigator can find themselves drifting into an almost meditative state on days like these, and thoughts no doubt drifted to all sorts of matters, including the events that have already come to pass on this adventure. The chaos of Peru, the noise and clamour of Bolivia, the incredible roads and the challenge of ascending the Andes in a day, and the slightly less colourful days of covering distance in Argentina.

Argentina itself has been a vastly different experience to that of Peru and Bolivia, clearly far more affluent, especially more so than Bolivia, and much more western in culture and surroundings and far more densely populated. As we travelled today though, that felt like it was changing ever so slightly, as the towns began to thin out and there seemed to be little in the vast expanses of land other than scrub. It was the first day since our second day on our travels that mountains hadn't been the dominant feature of the landscape and the sparsity of everything will perhaps continue as we head further south, its beauty should certainly intensify and despite us now facing into the autumn of the trip there are still some real highlights to come.

There was one special part of the day, despite the laboured nature of today's primary task and it came from the most unlikely of sources. At the passage control of the route, at a petrol station in some far-flung town word must have gotten round that some special cars were passing through and all of a sudden great swathes of school children marched en-masse, with teacher accompaniment, to see this living history in the flesh. No, I'm not talking about Chris Mills on the control, but the moving history lesson that are these wonderful cars. Seeing the kids faces as they encountered these machines, and the generosity of spirit from the competitors as they engaged with the youngsters was truly one of the trip highlights. Even Luigi in car number 20 couldn't help but crack a smile as he and his Fiat was mobbed by the kids; they love you Luigi, they really love you!

Back onto the rally and for many it is now simply about making the finish, come what may. There has been so much invested to get this far and for those still in the hunt in the competition there is still plenty of time for things to go awry. One pair that were sitting well poised until today are experienced competitors Bertie + Charlotte van Houtte, very much in the hunt for honours and largely problem free up until this morning, when their engine started losing performance. The sweeps are currently deep



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into the innards of the '65 Porsche 911, suspecting a burnt valve and everyone will be hoping that B and C are underway again when we set off tomorrow morning for day 19 of this competition.

**Syd Stelvio**

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