



HISTORIC ENDURANCE RALLYING ORGANISATION

## **7<sup>th</sup> Peking to Paris Motor Challenge 2019: Gerry Crown, Matt Bryson head field into Russia**

On the 11<sup>th</sup> day of the Peking to Paris Motor Challenge, the remote roads of the Altai Republic greeted the competitors that had made the border crossing on time, as they entered Russia and began the descent from the mountains of Mongolia. There are still 25 days and some 10,000 kilometres to go.

With twenty nationalities taking part, crossing 14 counties over 36 days of gruelling adventure, the event is already proving that only the fittest cars and crews can stay out front. Many cars have suffered damage but are being fettled along the route by any means possible. Their sole objective is to make it to the finish in Paris.

Peking Paris veteran and twice former winner, Australian Gerry Crown navigated by fellow Australian Matt Bryson, are currently leading the classic (pre 1975) class of the 2019 event. That they are leading in arguably the worst car Australia ever produced, a 1973 Leyland P76, is not remarkable as the car has been honed over many long-distance events to become an endurance motor event winner, making it a cult car in Australia. With Bryson's great navigation and continual mechanical work on the car every night, the duo are looking strong candidates for victory, although there is a long way to go. Said Crown; "Mongolia is where the event can be won or lost. The going is so rough there, many cars are broken but if you come out of Mongolia in a good position then you have a chance of doing well."

Graham and Marina Goodwin are leading the vintage class in their 1925 Bentley Super Sports.

Since the last rest day in Ulaan Bataar, the teams had travelled some 2000km's through Mongolia, taking in some of the most remote regions on Earth, not to mention some of the most demanding roads that the route would offer up to the competitors. Those seeking to reach the finish line in Paris would first have to conquer the dust and dirt of this isolated place and trouble would befall crews almost straight away, with Belgians Wim Van Gierdegom and Arne Van Collie's 1927 Chrysler Roadster requiring a return to Ulaan Bataar to fix a leaking transmission, they would eventually reach the nights camp at 5am. Other crews lost exhausts, whilst Keith Weed and Richard Holmes managed to topple their Pontiac Coupe onto its side whilst negotiating a rocky gully, luckily only pride was hurt.

The French crew of Serge and Jacqueline Berthier in the unlikely rally machine, a 1973 Jensen Interceptor, were delayed for two days, finally getting within a few kilometres of camp and a well-earned breakfast only for the car to break down again. They could smell the coffee from there but couldn't drink it!

The pattern of challenging terrain and nights under canvas would persist throughout the journey through the Mongol Plains, with only the scattered Yurts of the Nomadic people that inhabit this area of the globe keeping the traveller's company, as well as their livestock of course. This is one of the huge draws of this adventure though; the remoteness, the solitude and the escape from the populated world and, of course, the roads.

Australians Alan and Steve Maden should be comfortable in their 1975 Rolls Royce Silver Shadow but the ride is proving rough whatever car you are in, Steve said;" We hit an enormous rock, if it wasn't for the crash plate (sump guard) it would have been game over. It sure can be rough out there!"

Up in the mountains, the dusty and pot-holed tracks have provided breath-taking scenery and challenging driving and navigation. The continual punishment heaped upon the cars took its toll though, with breakdowns and roadside repairs becoming commonplace. The campsite welder was also kept very busy, Anton Gonnissen and Herman Gelan were rebuilding and strengthening their front axle of the 1907 Contal Mototri trike, which failed once again and next in the queue were David and Jo Roberts who



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needed the magic rod applying to their 1954 Sunbeam's suspension as well. Herman Gelan remarked that 'you see 99 potholes, but it's the one you don't see that hurts the most', and he should know, sitting out front in the 'suicide seat' of the Contal three-wheeler.

The challenges and spectacular roads continued, with snow-capped peaks giving way to rickety wooden river crossings. The breakdowns continued, and then the weather had its turn to pile on the agony and, over the course of the afternoon competitors saw a dusting of snow, driving rain, high winds and a temperature well below 10°. Not quite what they've become used to over the last week but, as more than one crew commented, at least there wasn't so much dust. The weather became worse, with flashes of lightning, as the teams climbed one of the steepest passes ever attempted in the history of this event and more than one crew needed assistance to conquer the ascent.

Mongolia was a test for both crew and machine, but then it is also one of the biggest draws for those that come on this adventure of a lifetime. Russia will provide a different challenge for the competitors, but no less enjoyable, before they take on the trials of Kazakhstan as they head ever west towards their goal.

Russians even in the sparsest villages along the route, have heard that the Peking to Paris is passing through. In the towns they have turned out in their hundreds to witness the spectacular vehicles that form this epic motoring adventure. Local support has naturally been directed at car 45, the VAZ-2103 of Russians Alexander Govor and Maxim Otmakhov as the pair acknowledge the Russian flag waving people and patiently pose for photographs whilst trying to refuel the black VAZ for the next section of the journey.

The 2019 Peking to Paris Motor Challenge is proving to be a captivating, inspiring and exciting adventure. For information about the frequency of media releases, or to enquire about the use of materials for features and coverage, please contact ERA Communications Director, Tony Jardine:

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