

Rolls-Royce Owners' Club of Australia

Peking to Paris Motor Challenge

Leg Three - Istanbul to Paris

By John Matheson, 1998

We left Istanbul for an easy run through to Greece. Again, the formalities at the Greek border were quick and efficient. Once into Greece borders virtually disappear and it was simply a matter of driving through Europe.

We travelled down through Thessalonika past Mt Olympus looking at some beautiful country. We eventually crossed over the Corinth canal and travelled down to Patras. There were some competitive stages through Mt Parnassos and I am happy to report that the Phantom, now running on all four springs, had no trouble with these sections and indeed we clean-sheeted as far as the rally was concerned all the way through Europe.



SVF179 in Italy. After the rigours of Tibet, India, Pakistan and Iran this was just cruising!

If we had not had the spring broken in Tibet, we would have been quite competitive on this trip. However, the laurels for that were to go to others. In the classic section of the rally the Australian Holden came second which was a most commendable effort, and indeed, Team Australia came 4th overall although we were hardly contributors to the success. We finished about two-thirds of the way down the fleet, being promoted in the order mainly through the failure of other vehicles rather than for our ability to catch up on four lost days in Tibet.



Leaving San Marino for Italy.

Many of the cars had been given nicknames on the journey. Some of their owners' own invention and some forced on them. Our car became known as Lizzie's Taxi, a name which stuck throughout the journey.

Patras proved to be entertaining. There was a small earthquake while we there, but it was only a shake. Outside Patras there were Albanian refugees camped in tents and abandoned railway trucks. They would climb onto the axles of the semitrailers going onto the car ferries and try to smuggle themselves across to Italy. There were at least two attempts to get on to our ferry. This resulted in the Greeks dragging these Albanians off and really treating them quite viciously, kicking and punching them and throwing them out of the ship, an action which I thought was quite unpleasant and unnecessary.

We were late leaving Patras because our own ferry had actually had a successful stowaway on it on the earlier run. When they caught him, he jumped overboard so they had had to stop to go and pick him up thus delaying the ferry for a few hours. The ferry trip was uneventful ... it was high wind conditions but no waves, it was all quite pleasant. We got off at Ancona and were again joined by Lord Montagu. We went past Riva del Garda where Prince Borgeese had had a palace out on an island in the lake. We stayed at a Hotei just opposite the palace. Prince Borgeese was of course the winner of the first Peking to Paris Motor Race in 1907.



Hanging Monasteries of Meteora, Greece, dating from the 14th Century. A James Bond movie was made here.

The run up through the Alps was through the easier roads. Unfortunately, there were no attempts to take us over the Stelvio. It had commenced snowing, and the organisers were a bit worried. It was a pleasant run up through the Alps.

We crossed the Alps through Austria and then onto Germany to the side of Lake Konstanz where we had another night off. We then motored on through the Black Forest and to some steep country around Freiberg and then finally down the Rhone Valley and up through the champagne country into Rheims. The rally finished at Rheims in effect. The final day from Rheims to Paris was just a short run in a non-competitive sector.

Paris proved to be a disappointment. We pulled into the Place de la Concorde where we were parked very inefficiently and very slowly in an area which was moderately crowded. There was originally to be a procession up to the Arc de Triomphe, but this never eventuated, instead there was a welcoming lunch at the Auto Club de France but by the time we were parked and got there they had run out of champagne and food so that was a bit of a busted flush. In all, it was a low key and disappointing end to the rally. That evening we had a dinner which was pleasant, and we were able to say goodbye to the friends that we had made. The following day we took the car down to Charles de Gaulle airport and left it in a compound where it would be containerised and shipped back to Australia.

The following day we flew on back ourselves. We wanted to get home at that stage. For us the rally had really ended in Istanbul, and the last part was a bit of a phoney rally as we got more and more homesick and missed the children.

Would I do it again? Yes, I would! It was an adventure. There was a lot of anxiety. Pleasure is really an inappropriate word to use in the situation. I am certainly glad I have done it but I am certainly glad it is over.

Would I do it again with this rally organiser? No, I would not!

The rally was poorly organised. It was a cheap~ affair in the end. We did not receive the support that they said we were going to get and the ending was a bit of a fizzer.

It was six wonderful weeks on the road. We made some staunch friends. There was not a dislikeable person amongst the competitors and there was a great spirit of help and camaraderie.

Beautiful stopover at Lake Garda at Peschiera, Italy. Prince Borgeese lived on an island in this tranquil lake setting



The overall winner was a 4-wheel drive vehicle - a Willys Jeep of 1942 vintage.

Photographs by the Author and Jeanne Eve



Snow in the mountains in Germany. The black ribbon on the Spirit of Ecstasy in memory of Josef & Rene Felt who were killed in Pakistan.

Kangaroo en Paris! Place de la Concorde, October 18th, 1997.



Chauffeur-driven all the way. Jeanne Eve in the rear compartment, John Matheson driving. The (unbroken) sherry glasses could have been a bit bigger for the celebratory champagne!

