



**Captain Blighy, with a highly suitable but totally unpatriotic car.**



**Austin Maestro – £500 to buy and prepare – departs Hyde Park.**



**“Which way for the Dover Road?” A 2CV makes its first stop for directions.**



**“Blimey ... you’ll never make it, matey!” Our project Allegro in the Old Kent Road.**

the car, a sudden desire to get home, money worries, food worries, health issues like simply not drinking enough, and failing to keep to a discipline of knocking off several hundred miles per day, all combine to sap the determination of reaching the end goal.

This, then, is the biggest, probably best-organised ‘banger rally’ around for low-cost budget cars. It’s not just youngsters, students, and gap-

year wanderers taking part; when we attended the official drivers’ briefing at a café in London’s Indian restaurant district of Brick Lane, we saw a few drivers who would qualify for a free bus-pass from their local council.

The chief requirement is that the vehicle should either be ‘nutty’ and of comedy value, or under 1000cc, as that makes it extra challenging. There is a general ethos that the car should be a rusty wreck, but as there are no rules or regulations other than the engine size, we can’t see why you shouldn’t enter a two year old Vauxhall Agila if you want to. The Mongolian government wants to ban leaving cars over ten years old in the country, which could change things.

So, that’s the challenge. To make it even more tricky, the route splits up at Prague, with most taking a more boring trek across Russia. Some take a middle route through the Crimea to cross the Caspian Sea on a rickety, slow and uncomfortable flat-bottomed ferry, which

creeps along at two miles an hour for fear of disturbing the shallow water, as the mud often clogs the propeller and stops all forward progress. Life on board is no picnic and the toilets are disgusting – welcome to the world’s worst cruise liner.

For Dominic Spill, his sister Vicki, and friend Patrick Sumby, all in their mid-20s, taking an even more southerly direction via Turkey and crossing Iran appealed as the most challenging route of all. Not many take the Iran route, as it’s the hottest time of the year (mid-July) and temperatures can climb to nearly 50C. You then have to cross ‘The Stans’ of Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan. Nearly 10,000 miles, with no back up, no doctors, no sweeper mechanics, no rally marshals to guide you when you’re feeling low. You are on your lonesome, all the way.



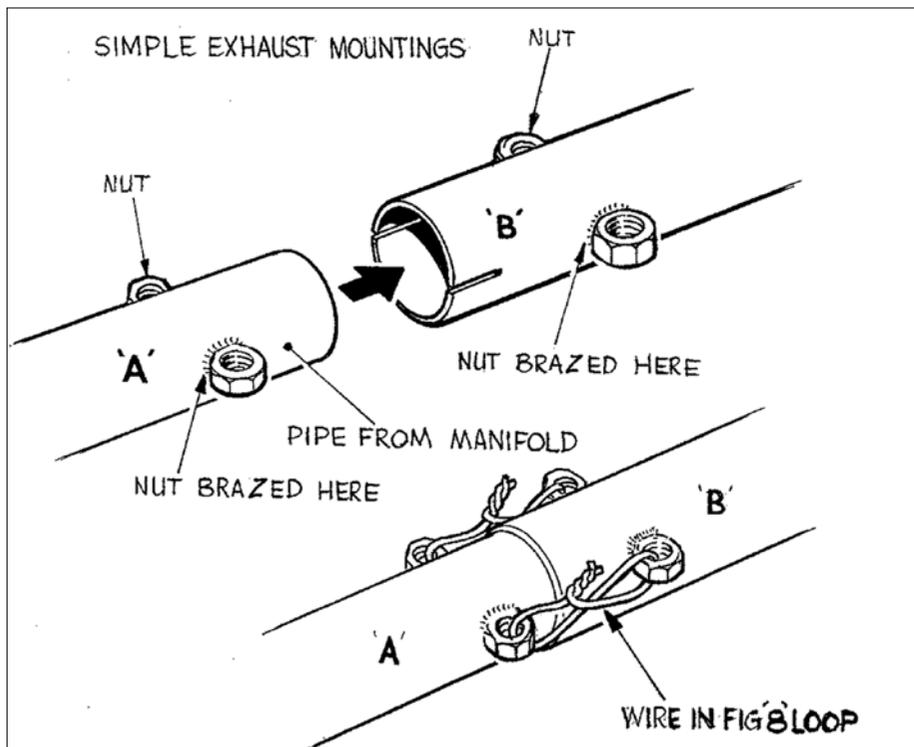
Coat hanger wire is now run through the nuts, in a figure of eight.



If a rock hits the silencer, this can spring apart. The exhaust will hit the ground with far less damage, and engine rock is absorbed thanks to supreme flexibility.

On my Paris Dakar Land Rover the exhaust was totally floppy, all the pipes joined together with wire. It was held up to the floor in a couple of places, but with rubber loops. It flexed, it banged against the floor often, but it never came undone, and it never leaked – we didn't gas ourselves. We had other problems, but exhaust issues were never on the nightly job lists. The final thing to say about exhausts is, the silencer. If it's free flow, if it's slightly more noisy, just remember you have got to put up with it hour after hour. Apart from heat, nothing is more tiring, more wearing, than that booming, drumming noise from the exhaust system.

The front of the silencer probably could do with a skid plate angled at



A master plan of the best exhaust system you can make – cost is one wire coat hanger and four nuts.



This Riley Pathfinder has the exhaust nicely tucked up out of the way – getting at the spare wheel could be a hassle ... nuts under the leaf springs look vulnerable.

around 45 degrees, to help it ride over a ridge coming out of a river, or glide over a brick in the road. Anything with right angles or sharp edges that face the direction of travel under the car should

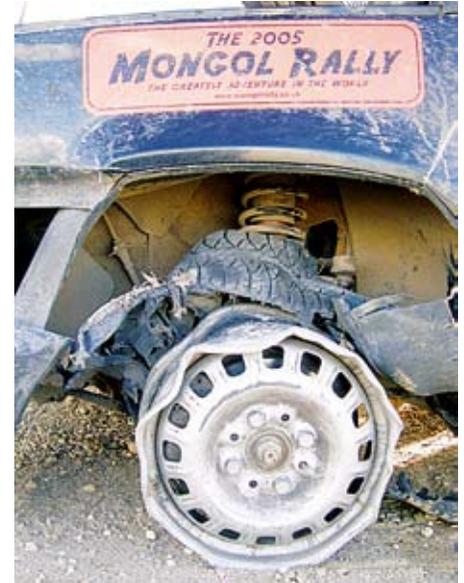


A simple skid in front of the Allegro silencer box will help in desert crossings.

be skidded as a matter of course. It could also make a vital difference in sand, as it doesn't take much extra resistance from the bits that stick down to stop momentum, as you struggle to avoid finally coming to rest and getting totally stuck.



**Jump for joy: an Austin A35 is hurled up a hillclimb on the Lands End Trial, fitted with the much stronger Rostyle wheels from a later Sprite.**



**Fiat wheels are not the strongest, but alloys would have shattered and tipped the car into a ditch.**



**Suzuki with broken halfshaft – an over-heavy, wider tyre added to the strain.**

Choice of tyres is very much a personal thing, but here are a few pointers. Remoulds are popular in the British club scene – a firm called King Pin is long established, and remoulds these

days are tested to the same standards as new tyres. These tyres are marketed by a company called Sportway for club rallying, and a Michelin MXT-patterned tyre using a winter Avon rubber with

reinforced carcass promises to be a good budget tyre for road-based events, such as the Endurance scene.

Long-distance events should be free of any low profile tyre. You need every available millimetre of ground clearance, so, go for an 80 profile. You also need height in the sidewall because a chief concern is protecting the rim, giving you the maximum amount of air between the rim and the road surface. A good budget choice is either Avon's Supervan or Avanza.

An increase in pressure of 10lb or so could be a good idea if you are going over rough desert ground. For one thing you are keeping the blocks open, and so exploiting the tread pattern to its maximum whilst stiffening the sidewalls, therefore helping to reduce the chance of punctures from flying stones. Also, the tyres will run cooler if you add extra air, as well as cope better with unexpected potholes.

Talking of deserts, do pack an



**A Mercedes struggles in the Sahara on the Around the World in 80 Days Rally.**

others are speeding past, you feel pretty deflated. Talking of deflation, letting down the tyres can help (but, have you anything to pump them back up with?), as you close up the tread pattern when you do this, presenting a nice flat bald surface to the sand, which is what you really need in the first place – the best sand tyres are totally bald ones. The last thing you need is any remotely chunky pattern, as this will only bite into the surface and rip down. What is more, deflating also widens the tread area by quite a significant percentage.

If bogged down, you need to dig some way ahead of the front tyres and clear the rear wheels, and ensure the driving wheels are not just going to dig down and make the whole situation a lot worse. This happens. Cars get stuck, the crew get out and think they are digging themselves out but it all comes to nothing the moment a driver gets back behind the wheel and gives it a load of welly.

Watch what the locals do. You never stop learning at this game, and on a trip to Mauritania during the World Cup Rally to Dakar I watched two locals get out

of an old Peugeot 404 and look at a car that had rather made a mess of turning around on a perfectly good stretch of tarmac road, run wide and gone onto the verge, immediately sinking into soft sand. They didn't push and pull from in front and behind. They stood on either side of the car and rocked, crossways. Interesting technique this, as for one tiny split second, the wheels on each side were being rocked upwards just enough for sand on either side of the trench to fall under the tread of the tyres. We are talking a spoonful of sand here, being pushed under each wheel. Through constant rocking, the hole the tyre was in was gradually filling up, and the car was lifted. Once up a couple of inches, it was high enough to drive straight out.

Coconut matting or sea grass is good for interior mats as they are so useful – they grip into the sand whilst rubber mats just spin out. Steal the door mat before leaving home (the chewed one in front of the kennel is even better).

Never use wipers in desert conditions, nor the washers, as they just create an abrasive paste that will seriously scratch the screen.



**Trust the locals ... the Hunter of Freddie Giles went on to win.**

A really strong tow rope is also a good idea, and so too having a bull-bar or similar to hook it onto at the front, something not buried under the bumper. The number of times we see cars that are set on crossing a desert, but ignore this fundamental, is quite astonishing – it's an error in workshop preparation that is repeated time and time again. When the standard tow-hook is buried in sand, you have only to dig that bit extra to find it. Hooking it all up and tying a decent knot in sand, in the full heat of the desert, only adds to the misery of this whole experience. A case here of Prior Planning Prevents Piss Poor Performance.

### SNOW AND ICE

You need to be ultra, ultra smooth. You need to get the braking done when the



**This sisal doormat cost £2.50, stops your trainers from becoming molten rubber on a hot floor, and is great to put under the wheels when you're stuck in sand.**



**Cool dude: hats are important in the fight against heatstroke. Here, a snappily-dressed Alastair Caldwell changes a wheel on his 1300cc 205, on the World Cup Rally around Tunisia. He went on to win ...**

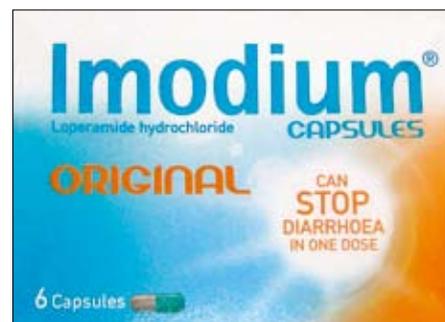


**Mobile satellite phones can be really useful in moments like this. The Flying Doctor Service was called up, and had to land in the road to take away an injured rally driver on the Classic Safari Challenge – the organisers had to set fire to a spare tyre to guide the pilot. The first on the scene was another competitor, who thankfully was trained in first aid.**

advisable, and, in even stronger terms, suggests this is highly risky, it is basing an opinion on its own knowledge of

being in the country. This advice is not given out because it wants to discourage travellers and avoid the problems of lost passports, no money, robbery or petty thieving – that's what embassies deal with all day long. If it says a border is difficult, closed, or, an area is really out of bounds to group travel, or high profile rallies that have advertised themselves to the rest of the world on websites, don't go. This advice has to be respected – it's not fun and not a challenge to just adopt an attitude of "let's ignore officialdom". Not for nothing has the vastly funded and super-organised Dakar Organisation moved right off the continent of Africa for South America.

If you are told "don't come" by the embassy or consulate staff and then choose to ignore it, consider this ... you are not going to get very far up their priority list when you get into trouble – and then have to call them to help you.



Is Imodium any good? Any serious drug sold freely over the counter cannot reasonably be considered to come in max-strength. However, the problem with drugs designed for too much rich food on a Spanish holiday is that the makers presume the sufferer has plenty of time to loll around. On long-distance rallies, a more immediate cure is demanded. Imodium is better than nothing, but the downside is that it often just bungs you up, takes days to work, and only puts off tackling the cause of the problem, which then returns when the effects of Imodium wear off. So don't be surprised if its effect is temporary.

A far better idea is to approach your doctor. If he won't give you Cyproxin or Lomitol, it's possibly because he thinks you can't be trusted – if he only fears you will overdose on it, ask him to limit you to just six. A few tablets of the proper cure is better than none at all, but getting hold of the best drug is often not easy ...

On the 2008 Cameroon Rally one crew went to Tunisia only to find that there is no access to Algeria – it's off-limits – so were turned back. They could have easily discovered this fact from the internet or called up the British embassy first.