

# The Inca Trail Rally 2001

24,000 kms around South America







**THE INCA TRAIL**

CLASSIC RELIABILITY TRIAL & 4X4 ADVENTURE DRIVE

**Key**

- Night halts
- Part Rally night halts
- Rest days
- Route variant for some crews
- Route
- Railway trip
- Ferry

# **The Inca Trail Rally 2001**

## **Preparation Report**

Having completed the London to Peking Rally in a Landover acting as the driver for the film crew, I had realised that endurance driving to countries I have never been to and moreover are unlikely ever to visit was a fantastic way of seeing the world.

In late 2000 therefore I signed up to the 2001 Inca Trail which was to circumnavigate South America more or less. My son, Charles, was to have a gap year at the same time so my choice of navigator and co-driver was obvious.

Having established that we needed a car for the purpose of the rally and on the advice of the organiser, John Brown, that this should be a pre-war car I somehow or other ended up buying a 1936 Buick Convertible from a dodgy car dealer outside Manchester. A decision that I was to regret more so as it was a pre war car than that I bought it from a dodgy dealer.

Anyway, my mechanic, Chris George, set about sorting out this car from scratch, and a lot of money later we finally had a vehicle ready to go and looking the business.

Sadly, our problems were about to begin. Some months before the start we shipped the car to Rio de Janeiro ready for our arrival. A few weeks before we got there the organiser phoned me to say they had had trouble starting the Buick and had got a 'Formula 1 Mechanic' to have a look at it. I had no idea just what a disaster this would be.

We flew out to Rio on time giving ourselves a week in the Copacabana Palace to get adjusted to life in Brazil and allow Charles to go surfing on the fabulous beaches there. However, when we picked up the car it was a mess. The mechanic had broken one of the stabiliser arms, God knows how, and had then welded it up with the battery connected – destroying the battery.

The car ran badly and we knew something was not right but could not figure out what. This was to be the beginning of 22,000 km running battle to keep the car going, although at this point we did not know this !

## **Report No.1**

The hotel insisted we leave the car outside the front entrance so all their guests could see it and indeed see Charles and I working on it.

Having decided that the car was probably OK we set about enjoying the many attractions that Rio had to offer from the cable car up the mountain to the night clubs along Copacabana Beach. We had a driver who took Charles surfing each day to the west of Rio whilst I fiddled with the car and met the other rally drivers, some of whom I knew from L to P.





On the day of the start, we all formed up at the Copacabana Fort on the west end of the beach and were seen off by the organisation.

The first day was a long drive north to Ouro Preto which was not without issue as the car was just not performing well. On arrival several mechanics looked at the engine before Bob O'Hara asked whether the ignition leads were going to the correct spark plug. I said I was sure they were as we had set all these in the UK.

After a day of sightseeing, we set off on our second long day to Campos do Jordao which is an easy drive but the car is still feeling all wrong. Again, in the evening everyone has an opinion but we still cannot find a problem and Bob once again asks me about the leads. Stupidly and to my much regret I once again said they should be fine.

## **Report No. 2**

Well, what a week, this report is very late due to our inability to find any time to write or send it. It has been a really demanding week. From the start we have had engine problems which not only held us up but meant we were working late every evening. By day five, after a day of difficulties with the engine cumulating in it overheating and blowing a small hole in the radiator we drove for 960 km and arrived in Londrina at 0100 - a hideous day.

By this time, I asked Bob to help me and he set about looking into the ignition leads, sure enough he had been right, the bloody mechanic in Rio must have had them off the plugs and put them back on the wrong ones. Cylinders No.5,6 and 8 were muddled up.

The following day was better and we made reasonable time to the Iguacu Falls which are mega spectacular making Niagara look like a garden waterfall. Charlie and I went out under the falls in a 900 HP Rib which when we were in the centre of the scream was pushed backwards at FULL throttle. It was great fun and a great break from engine problems.

The next day to Corrientes went fine but something still appeared to be wrong, anyway we made it and arrived at this port 1,600 km from the sea, it was really lively with major celebrations going on. We had a great evening before collapsing in bed ready for the 850 km drive the next day.

Dawn broke and we left Corrientes for Jujuy, we were 20 km out of the town when we blew two spark plugs. Is this the end? the rally mechanic was doubtful and counselled returning to Corrientes, we must have lost a piston ring or something. We let them get on and in despair pulled out the Sat phone to talk to Chris our mechanic in the UK.

In the meantime, a lovely couple, Simon and Gail Gaul, in a Mustang came along and sat with us whilst we decided what to do. Chris asked a few questions and then said we should try to continue, so we fitted new plugs and headed off. A mile down the road Charles said why don't I read the manual and see if we can get any ideas from that. We stop the car and get the manual; I

turn to the spark plug page and eureka the book says we must not under any circumstances have too big a gap. We stop and adjust all the plugs, No.1 by this time has also disintegrated so we replace that.

We start off again push up the speed and everything is running smoothly, the best this rally, we are over the moon, for the next 830 km we average about 80 kph and arrive in Jujuy just after dark at 1930. Quick discussion with the mechanics and an inspection of the spark plugs reveals all is well. Thanks heavens for the manual.

The next day however proved to more horrendous than we could ever imagined. We had a fairly straight forward drive to the Bolivian border a Villacon but after that the road ended. We bounced and bumped for 300 km on a track so bad it made anything we had seen on London to Peking a cake walk. This is the so called 'Sundance Trail' notorious for its namesake and for it's appalling surface! To add insult to injury there was a toll for using this thing !I. We made 30 kph for many miles with things falling off all over the place. In the afternoon we started having problems with bad fuel and limped along for miles before deciding we would have to blow all the lines.

By 1900 it was dark and we were exhausted, the lights on the old girl are useless and we were driving along the edge of a cliff with a 1,000 ft drop off and still 100 km to go.

Charlie suggested stopping and camping in the car, it seemed more fun than pressing on so we stopped in a Bolivian village and were soon surrounded by inquisitive locals. They found our camping stove amazing; when I brought out the Sat Phone and started talking into it they were mesmerised. We finally said goodnight to our hosts and slept surprisingly well in the car.

In the morning at 0530 we set off again - 50 km on we broke a shock absorber clean in half, I changed this and we headed on arriving in Potosi at 1000 full of gloom and intent on giving up.

However, after a two hour sleep and with amazing help from other competitors throughout the day we finally went to bed at 2100 exhausted but with a car that could continue the rally, Hooray!

The next day more gravel on our way to La Paz, supposed to be 100 km of 'good' gravel in fact it was 150 km of atrocious gravel. It took us 4.5 hours to get over it before we had good asphalt into La Paz. We arrived at the Radisson La Paz with a police escort at 1830 and were dead beat. Charles slept for 12 hours straight. The only difficulty that day had been a lack of brakes but that was nothing compared with the previous few days.

I am writing this note as we leave La Paz for the Lake Titicaca ferry, brakes are now good, the president of Bolivia waved us off from the Cathedral and we are feeling a lot more refreshed. The shaking has loosened the passenger seat so much that without a seat belt I would fall onto Charles who is currently driving.

One exciting bit of news we are one of only two pre-war cars to make it so far and the other hardly has an original part on it.



This has led to everyone helping us and the news crews have made us international celebrities in Argentina and Brazil. This morning Charles had two very pretty models on either arm as we prepared to go.

We have been taking our altitude sickness tablets which are essential as we get very out of breath if we are too energetic, especially with two models around!

Even the modern 4x4's on the rally haven't been without their problems - AC breakdowns and Oh my God ! – Punctures!

### **Report No.3**

A rather belated report brought about by the stress of the Rally. It has been incredibly pressurised so far.

Having written my last report on the way to Lake Titicaca we pick up from there. This was a fabulous day; the Lake is enormous and extremely pretty. We were put on individual ferries which resembled small wooden barges with a big outboard on the back. These took us across the lake to Peru.

Having passed through Customs which took hours we raced to the town of Puno on the banks of the lake. We were invited aboard an old steel ferry built in England in kit form and brought out to the lake a century ago. This is now being restored by a bunch of crazy Brits who live here.

Next day we went to Cusco, car still performing OK but something still not right with cylinder No.7. However, the undercarriage is now fully restored after all the gravel and we are fine on good roads. We arrived in Cusco in good time to check into the Monasterio, the best hotel in Peru. It is a monastery owned by the Archbishop of Cusco but let out to a hotel chain. Great rooms and superb restaurant.

For you that know him Trevor Kay Russell was also in town at the same time but we missed one another, it was a bigger place than I had expected. Whereas Trevor walked the many miles to Machu Pichu, Charles and I went in a helicopter, no time honest!

What a fantastic place Cusco and Machu Pichu are, absolutely amazing must see if one is travelling to Peru.

As the main rally was due to go further into the mountains for three days before arriving in Lima, we decided with 30 others to take a shorter route down from Cusco to the coast at Nazca and then go North to Lima. This was not popular with the Rally Organisation until they realised a third of the rally was detouring. I am very pleased we did as the road beyond Cusco were horrendous and even our shortened route included 5 hours to do 120 km of gravel and dirt.

We couldn't make the coast in one night so camped in the car again at 15,700 Feet (It was freezing), however after Lancashire Hotpot, from our emergency rations, for supper we were set in for the night.



We carried on down the mountains to the sea the following day and went to a resort called Las Dunas in Ica, it was just like Dubai 20 years ago. Dunes everywhere, great hotel and plenty of things to do.

I spent a day working on the car, the door lock on the driver's side has broken its spring and the window frame snapped clean in two from vibration. Everything is loose and covered in dust. On top of this No.7 seems to have given up the ghost - I can't find any compression so we continue on 7 cylinders for now.

It was an easy decision to avoid Lima altogether and to stay here an extra day or so until the rally caught up with us.

Ica was a good break for us Charlie went dune surfing, swimming and off hunting a Big Mac (without success I might add). We also took a small light aircraft up to explore the Nazca and Palpa lines. These are drawings made in the sand of the desert by the Nazca people a millennium or 2 ago. They are huge covering many square miles and vary from animals and birds to Trapezoidal shapes. No one is sure of the significance but they are considered very important scientifically. Unfortunately, the Peruvian government does not seem to be looking after its heritage and they are being damaged by 4x4's and Motor X bikes. Anyway, well worth seeing whilst they last.

Back to rallying, we were off again from Ica to Nazca to catch up with the rest of the rally and then drove hell for leather down to Arequipa.

There is one other car in our category, a much modified 1925 Chrysler driven by Bob O'Hara and Bob Newman. This car, along with a 1949 Ford driven by William Secrest and David Brayshaw are the only other really old cars still going strong in the rally.

Charlie and I are finding the long drives every day too much for the Buick which can only do around 80 kph for any extended period of time unlike the post war cars that can maintain 100 kph or more. To try and improve things we have been taking short cuts which have helped us enormously with fatigue but does mean we are more or less doing our own rally not the Inca Trail.

The number of damaged cars is mounting daily even the 4x4's are in serious trouble. A brand new Landcruiser that has warped its brake discs had three punctures in a day. Another has been rolled over and written off. The car accidents mount, a Volvo hit a truck on a gravel road and although everyone survived, the car was a complete right off. A New Zealand couple hit another lorry in a Holden three days ago, totalled the car and put them both in hospital but with nothing worse than a broken ankle. These incidents worry us all and the rally is probably moving slower today than a week ago.

The good thing about an old Buick is that it is not so fast but steady. Its only ambition is to drive into Rio after 22,000 km of some of the most difficult roads on earth. We keep going ....17,000 km to go!

## **Report No.4**



The drive south to Arequipa is marred by engine problems and it is clear we now have a leaking head gasket to boot.

In Arequipa we find a garage that is willing and capable of lifting the head and fitting a new gasket. This is not a major job and should be completed in two or three hours. With this in mind Charles and I go for lunch with the view of returning after a siesta as we are both exhausted.

However, on our return and to our utter horror the mechanics have not only removed the head but also dropped out the pistons and con rods. I am totally speechless; we have but a few hours before we travel south again and then supposedly up into the Andes and the entire engine is spread over the floor of the workshop.

After a hurried argument I insist they re-assemble the engine as quickly as possible and allow us to get on our way.

The next morning the full extent of the disaster hits us when we can feel that the engine is not running well and rather than improve our already perilous situation these mechanics have made matters worse.

Quickly deciding we need to peel off from the main route up into the Andes we decide to stick to the coast and head directly south across the Atacama Desert to Santiago and meet up with the rally there. This will mean a 2,800 km journey over one of the bleakest deserts in the world.

However, needs must and just as we are about to set off, Ralph and Dorothy Jones in a beautiful DB5 approach us and ask if we can escort them to Santiago as they are finding the rally too much and want to fly home from there.

Charles and I are happy for the company and we head off south across the desert. The first day we stop in Arica from where the rally is turning East to proceed up into the Andes. We will not see them again for 3 days at least.

On the second day we drive 700 km down Route 5, the Atacama Highway seeing little if anything other than sand and mountains to the east. There is nothing on the road so after a long day we turn west from the main highway down to a town called Antofagasta which is a major Nickel mining port. This was a good call as we found a great hotel right on the water to stay overnight in.

The second day starts with us resuming the highway south and takes us down to another seaside town of La Serena, a brief uneventful stop before the final push to a town to the NW of Santiago where the rally is supposed to form up in two days' time.

We took one look at the accommodation and decided to continue on past Valparaiso into Santiago City and stay there in the Camino Hotel, the best in Chile.

Great call, after the last three weeks we are so tired we just pleased to have a comfortable room and bed to recover in. During our stay we help Ralph and Dorothy organize a flight home and make the decision we will break off from the rally and head



south to Terra del Fuego through the fjords rather than thrash over the mountains again into Argentina at Bariloche.

After a drive through the Chilean wine vineyards en route to Temuco we say goodbye to the rest of the rally as we continue south to the ferry.

## **Report No.5**

What an eventful week, we joined the ferry in Puerto Montt as planned, it was almost full !. 8 other rally cars have followed our lead and also board along with a 100 plus backpackers from all over the world.

The trip was spectacular, very similar to the Norwegian Fjords and incredibly pretty. We saw penguins, seals, sea lions, condors, cormorants, stormy petrels, dolphins and other wildlife, no whales though. The fjords are made up of numerous high mountains and volcanos. Snow on the most of them even now. Glaciers flow into the fjord although we could not see these from the boat. We did however have one day of small icebergs (Growlers).

The cabins were two berth just like being at sea again, we dined with the captain every night but only after I had interviewed him and his officers to check their competency! Funnily enough the ship was built in the same year as the Pacific Constructor (a vessel I commanded in the early 80's) in Japan and save for the radar's had most of the same bridge equipment. It was an ex Norfolk Line RORO converted for additional passengers. Thoroughly recommendable.

We arrived in Puerto Natales on the morning of the fourth day and disembarked straight into the Patagonian bitterly cold wind. From there we drove to the Torre del Paine national park considered to be the last unexplored park on earth. It was fabulous, glaciers everywhere with mountains and huge lakes.

We stayed in an hotel at the end of a lake, The Explorer, with the rooms looking straight up the lake to the glacier at the end. Wildlife was prolific - condors, parakeets, eagles, and foxes galore. Also, the Patagonian version of a Llama called a Guanaco, hundreds of them living wild. It was the highlight of the trip so far along with the ferry and Machu Pichu.

From here we drove down across Patagonia to the Straits of Magellan ferry which took us across to Terre del Fuego. On the way we saw rheas which are like a small ostrich, The ferry takes 15 minutes and is followed by pods of dolphins, a very special black and white variety called Talionis dolphins.

From the ferry we drive to Rio Grande the up and coming town closest to the oil exploration. It was a funny little place but very friendly. An hour out of the town whilst transiting yet more gravel the flexible exhaust pipe broke and we became a dragster for a while. Needless to say, a little garage in Rio Grande had it off in an hour and replaced with a new one, cost 30 USD.

Back on the road the next day for yet more gravel we wind our way south to the city of Ushuaia, the southernmost city in the world, although it is actually only 56 degrees south i.e., where Newcastle upon Tyne is in the northern hemisphere. It was a fun



place with another exceptional hotel which was not on the rally itinerary but which we stayed in.

Charles went exploring here and found some new friends but not a Mac D! The view of the town and the Beagle Channel from our hotel was lovely and we thoroughly enjoyed our two days here. We had king crab and sea bass for supper, the latter was enormous, 100 pounds or so, they are caught at a depth of about 3000 feet., delicious!!

You can ski in Ushuaia but ski lifts are few and far between, the temperature is actually very warm but if you are caught in the wind the chill is extreme. We contemplated flying to Antarctica for a day but couldn't pluck up courage to fly 4 hours in a ten seater King Air over the coldest and roughest water on earth, keeping this experience for another time, would have been great though.

We have been travelling for the last few days with a select band of rallyists including Chris Denham my partner on the London to Peking rally and Tim Franey who we met in one of the 4x4's. However, in Ushuaia we met up with the bulk of the rally, many of whom had abandoned the official route in favour of driving down the east of Argentina on tarmac, this was a big surprise as the really keen guys, 'Petrol heads', never deviate from the official route.

So much damage has been done to some cars that I think people just felt enough was enough. Even car No.2, the Chrysler, which is winning our category, went off route once they had been assured by the 'disorganisation' that they would not incur penalty points.

We have left Ushuaia a day before the rally proper to try and drive direct to Rio Gallegos on the Argentinean mainland, this is a 600 km drive with two borders, a ferry and 250 km of gravel. However, it gets us ahead so that we can spend more time in Buenos Aires where Charles would like to enjoy the night life.

Unfortunately, on arriving in Ushuaia I detected a vibration from what I thought was a wheel bearing but by the time we had reached Rio Gallegos have now realised it is a problem with the damping mechanism on the front of the crankshaft. This once again threatens our ability to continue as it would eventually damage the crankshaft, bearings, and/or seals.

Last night after many discussions with Chris in England we decide to get to a local garage to epoxy the small flywheel in place so it cannot go eccentric on us again. However, after only 8 km this morning the epoxy failed. Tim Franey (now known as Ingeniero Franey) stayed with us today whilst the garage, with his help, removed the dampening device. To do this we had to remove the front engine mounting bolts and tip the engine back to pull off the device. This done we found the 65 year old springs had broken causing the device to fail. It is now removed and we are driving North to Comodoro Rivadavia with our fingers crossed.

## **Report No. 6**

WE ARE STILL GOING - JUST !

Been a hell of a trip since the last report. We left Commodoro Rivadavia without further problems and drove north to the Welsh, yes, they are here too, town of Trelew. A nice little town full of Welsh names but no Welsh men they integrated these into the local population many years ago.

This was a quick overnight stop on our way to see the Penguins at Punta Tombo and the Whales at Puerto Madryn. The penguins were great fun, 500,000 of them in a colony of a few acres, you could hardly miss treading on them there were so many. We were exceptionally lucky as they commenced hatching eggs the day before we got there, so we saw both eggs and chicks. Wonderful !!.

Puerto Madryn was a very lively town; they drove around the streets all nights keeping us older folk awake whilst Charles was out on the razz. We went on a whale boat the next day to see the mums and pups playing in the Golfo. They are all Southern Right whales here that grow to about 30 feet, amazing sight coming alongside these creatures with a gap of only a few feet. We could also see them from the shore particularly on the high tide. It was a fabulous two day stop, with no further car troubles, these were to come soon after.

From Puerto Madryn we drove an unremarkable, endless Patagonian Road, i.e., Desert and scrub to Bahia Blanca. We didn't stay long enough to see much of the city but the towns are definitely becoming more civilised as we move North. Everywhere however poverty and problems caused by the recession including money coupons are in sight. Argentina is in big trouble by any measure.

A break from the narrative here to mention some of the things going on in other cars. Four 4x4 have now been rolled on gravel, the latest caving in the front of the roof as well as every other panel. This is now back on the road having had its roof pulled out and a Perspex windshield taped on. Yesterday we saw a road transporter with 8 rally cars on it, mostly wrecked or with blown engines, these were apparently going to Rio, the easy way. Every car is in a poor state, no immaculate cars on this rally anymore.

People are going home in their droves with the few of the camp followers being signed up as navigators where the incumbent has abandoned the rally and headed home. One lady involved in a 360 spin on gravel went home that night even though the car was largely undamaged. Fights between participants and the organisation continue over the route, hotels, and other things. It is just like a travelling circus.

There are perhaps 4 cars still deadly serious and maybe 10 more trying. Many like us have modified the route to avoid some of the worst excesses and this has kept us going.

All of our friends are still going bar 4 who pulled out. We have been helped by so many people it gives one a real boost in the belief in human nature.





Back to the road and now for the latest disaster. We left Bahia Blanca in high spirits heading for Buenos Aires, we had booked ourselves in the best joint in town and couldn't wait to get there. We have been experiencing a knock ever since Arequipa, 6,400 kms ago, but had largely got used to it, so when the engine temperature rocketed up on the way to BA and the knocking got really bad we were somewhat surprised.

However, having stopped the car 100 km from BA and allowed it to cool down our worse fears were realised. One of the big end bearings had dissolved and the oil spitting out caused the high oil temp. Luckily we stopped the car before any further damage was done but the big end was banging very loudly by then.

Tim and Wendy Franey who had been close to us in their Toyota Landcruiser came to the rescue and towed us into the outskirts of BA. We were stopped from entering because of the tow so we had to drive this noisy beast into the hotel. We were 4 hours later than planned but had got there, hot, and exhausted. But for the Franey's we would have had to wait much longer for a tow.

The hotel however lived up to expectations and we were really pleased to be in some comfort again after some fairly mediocre ones. Our friends the Noors, Moffatts and Foxes were already there so as it is Ricardo Fox's hometown we went out for dinner and onto a Tango Bar. Have to admit I didn't Tango, in fact I was so tired I didn't even realise when I was propositioned by a local streetwalker, luckily I managed to resist by falling into a taxi, literally !!

Next day Ricardo took me to the Mercedes dealer where they agreed to take off the sump and inspect the damage. This was terrible, not only was No. 6 bearing completely worn away but there was quarter of an inch movement in the connecting rod. Worse still was that Nos 5 and 8 piston skirts were both broken off below the little end and pieces were floating around in the sump tray.

Much gnashing of teeth and shaking heads later we are at a loss as to what to do. I decided to try and get a local classic car specialist to come and have a look at it which duly happened, he said all was fixable but he needed two weeks without parts and one with! I phoned Chris George in England to discuss matters and then Bob's Automobilia in Atascadero for parts. Trouble is not only can we not get enough parts but they can't just be fitted without extra work.

By the evening a sense of gloom hung over both me and the car - we are preparing to withdraw and ship the car out of BA. Upside being this is a large port and we are comfy in the Alvear Palace.

Neither Charles nor I felt very happy that we were pulling out with only 3,200 kms to Rio and the finish. The local mechanic was wonderful in offering us a choice of 4 pre-war cars to continue but we had set our hearts on getting the Buick back and doing it in another car defeated the object. We thanked him kindly but decided to ship home.

I thought we would try and speak to Bob O'Hara in car 2 who is known as a whizz with the most horrendous problems. Bob as usual was upbeat - "take out the damaged con rod from below, smash the piston so you can get it past the crankshaft, forget



about the broken piston skirts and keep going! Phew!, after talking to Chris we decide this might work and is worth a try.

So, we spend two hours smashing the piston in No.6, cleaning up the debris, disabling the valves and boxing up the engine. We also notice we have snapped a rear tie bar and a front stabiliser. All this is repaired and we start her up. Jesus the vibration, with the con rod and piston out of No.6 the crank is out of balance and vibrates terribly. Made worse by our removal of the engine damper in Commodoro Rivadavia. However, the engine runs fine, back on 7 cylinders again !

After a test run around the city with our teeth chattering we decide to go for it. We managed to get Bob to inspect the car in the afternoon and after much tinkering the vibration reduces to the level of a Kango hammer. We will have to take the headlights off I expect as they will break off otherwise, but at least the car is going and hopefully will get us to Uruguay tomorrow.

## **Report No. 7**

Just a quick interim report to announce we are still trucking.

We left Buenos Aires for Uruguay, shaking like a Kango hammer but caught the ferry and arrived on the far side of the River Plate. After an enthusiastic welcome we drove to Montevideo for lunch. Rain started early and the wipers worked OK, but I have always worried that they wouldn't last. By lunch, which we had in the port market and which was exceptional the rain was coming down in floods. We carried on to reach Punta del Este at 1700 still without incident, but on our approach we hit floods.

By now the visibility was minimal and the rain relentless, we drove though the floods without incident, marvellous car the Buick. However, others were not so lucky. The TR2 got well and truly stuck in the water and could not move. The Buick moving into rescue mode waded out and we towed them through the floods to dry land, on 7 cylinders! It gets better, a brand new BMW 3 Series was also stranded with a very pretty 21 year old blond on board, Charlie immediately went to the rescue and we towed her out as well. We actually arrived at the Hotel at 8 pm just as the rain stopped. What a day!

Unfortunately, the big end on No.5 had been knocking all day and after consultation we decided to disconnect the spark plug from it to stop the problem getting worse. As this is one of the cylinders with the broken piston skirt it was not the end of the world. We left Punta del Este on 6 cylinders, vibrating more than ever.

We started having problems with the starter motor on the way to Florianopolis and found that the main power cable connector had broken clean off from all the vibration. We also broke a rear tie rod again and the front stabiliser bar. The vibration being the cause of all this. We lost our wipers on the long drive to Florianopolis in very heavy rain and I had to put the roof down, sit on three jackets and drive with my head above the windscreen, it was ghastly, worse day in some time, really scary as the road was full of lorries. By the time we reached Florianopolis after 700 km we were limping again.



The day in Florianopolis was spent repairing the power cable, breaking off the tie rod (Unnecessary accessory !) and tying up the stabiliser. We found the power cable had chaffed on the chassis and was shorting which has either done for the starter or the battery. Either way we bump start from here on. Wipers are beyond repair so we resorting to magic liquid to keep screen clean. I had some of this from the start but gave it to Chris Denham weeks ago when his wipers failed so have had to bum some off car 5, can't bring myself to ask Denham for mine back.

We have found a window of minimal vibration at 3,000 revs which is about 88 kph. This is a great help because at that speed we can continue.

We left Florianopolis yesterday and decided to miss the next stop, leap frogging to Santos. This was a 770 km drive without rain, thank heavens and except for the banging stabiliser, turned out to be an easy day. Crankshaft holding but we have no idea when it will give, with 550 km to go we keep our fingers crossed.

We are now in Santos, we had considered driving on to Rio today and arrive a day early but instead have decided to stay a night in Paraty, of Mick Jagger fame, before joining the rest of the rally for the finish tomorrow.

Fingers crossed car holds up.

## **Report No.8**

Charlie and I along with the Buick are back in Rio de Janeiro, in one piece without a scratch on the body of the car. It has been a very emotional arrival back here with our final crisis occurring as we entered the city. We loaded a bad tank of fuel and it stopped us dead in the middle of the rush hour! we managed to get in on the dregs of the other tank. The last 3,200 km have been excruciating as we worried about the crankshaft snapping from the strain of three bad pistons. We needn't have worried it just carried on and got us here as if nothing was wrong.

The last three days were just a hard push for Rio, we did have a fabulous night stop at Paraty which is the town where Mick Jagger met and wooed one of his many bimbos. It was fabulous and we enjoyed our evening there very much, especially our first spicy meal in two months at the Basil Thai restaurant.

All the remaining cars are back, there were three more accidents on the penultimate day but none of these was as bad as the organisers car that rolled 4 days ago and seriously injured one of the team. In fact, if his co-driver had not been a doctor and unhurt it is unlikely he would have survived. However he is recovering after neck and head surgery.

We have avoided all these incidents but with difficulty the rally was very severe on cars and people and it is with mixed feelings that people are celebrating today.

We have had a marvellous time and have seen so much. It will take a lot to get back to normal. We have driven 22,000 km in

55 Days over some of the worse roads in the world in a 65 year old car! hard to believe.





