



Episode 1 – Before the Start

You have been carefully chosen to once again have my families adventures dumped on you. This time my daughter, Ayesha, and I are off to cape Town to the start of a rally to Malindi in

Kenya. 5,000 gruelling miles up the west side of South Africa and then across to Kenya. 21 exciting days hopefully with less mechanical problems than we had last year on the Inca Trial Rally viz - 3,000 miles on 5 out of 8 cylinders !.

Not taking the Buick this time, we are going in our 1936 - 4.25 litre Derby Bentley, photo below. This has been vigorously prepared to handle the endless miles of desert roads, wild animals and local inhabitants. This is a big change from it's last rally when it waltzed Myra and I to Prague on perfect German roads !!.



We start on the 16th February and end in Malindi on the 6th March, hopefully safely, with car and in one piece.

If you are not remotely interested in our adventure then send me an email whereupon I will immediately remove any record of our relationship from my files.

As with previous travelogues I am going to try and send photo's back, past experience has shown that only some people will receive these. I will send them a BMP files if possible and as an attachment in the main. Hope you get them !!

Episode 2 – Namibia calling.

Rather a long period before my first bulletin but we have not been idle, safely at Twyfelfontein which is more than can be said for our friends from the Inca Rally Bob O'Hara the mechanical genius and his partner, Richard Newman who as I write are being airlifted to Swakopmund after a nasty accident earlier today when their back axle snapped on the nearside catapulting the car out of a dry river bed into the bush. They will be ok but it has given us all a bit of a shock as they are brilliant drivers.

Well, back to the start, after a great 5 days in Cape Town involving Myra and Ayesha in sun bathing and shopping we finally set sail last Sunday at 1 p.m. Itching to go we were flagged off by Lord Montagu of Beaulieu who just happened to be on holiday in South Africa.

We had enjoyed Cape Town tremendously and had been down to The Cape of Good Hope to see it from the landward side having both Myra and I been round it several times in the early

1970's when we were both at sea. The same penguins we saw in Punta Tonga, Argentina last year seemed to have swum over here to be with us again at Boulders ! called Jackass in Argentina they are called African (not hard to guess) here.



We also visited the wineries, great fun but difficult to drive home from and went up table mountain, the obligatory photo of which is below.



The first day out of Cape Town was uneventful for most although number 1, the Silver Ghost seized it's engine shortly after we overtook it 60 miles from the start. The owner is dogged by bad luck, the last time we met was on London Bridge at the start of the London to Peking rally when he went ill at literally the last minute and had to bail out. This time however he was not to be beaten and although we did not see him again for 4 days he turned up in a 1958 Mercedes in Namibia that he had bought for next to nothing in Cape Town.



We also had some fun, we suddenly lost power in the heat of the afternoon due to vaporisation in the fuel. This is a much discussed topic in rallies and is caused by hot driving and hot weather it peaked at 47 C that afternoon. I think the Bentley duel pumps are on their way out, they have been noisy ever since the car came out of the container. However, Bob O'Hara recommended that I put a booster pump inline close to the tank to force through unvaporised fuel. WE did this on the first evening replacing an easy to get at filter with a borrowed pump. We have had no vapour problems since and have hit highs of 49 C in the Narib Desert!!!

Not a wonderful start to the rally but far worse was just around the corner !!!.

In the evening after fixing the car we had a 'Braai', a South African BBQ, at which we were entertained by local school children who danced several dances showing the cultural diversity of South Africa through it's history. Great night followed by great grub.

Day 2, hot out of the hotel at Clanwilliam we head for Fish River Canyon in Namibia. 700 kilometres of blisteringly fast tarmac with temperatures soaring to 48 C. We set off at high speed and achieved 300 kms in no time at an average speed of 112 kph before stopping for fuel and lollies. Yes, this trip is being measured in lolly consumption that Ayesha is buying each day with the water. A short aside, the Camelback water bottle we bought with the long drink straw are fantastic a must for this sort of trip.

We had just got started again, Ayesha driving !, when we hear a rattle in the front, we stop quickly and look under the bonnet. I can see a small pipe missing that fits between the rocker cover and the air filter, I figure this has fallen off and disappeared under the car. So we start up and the rattle starts, so shut down again. Just then the next car arrives this is the Dunkley's in another Bentley who stop to help. Chris Dunkley is immediately suspicious and suggest we look remove the rocker cover. We do and, horror of horrors, the inlet valve spring on Number 6 cylinder is broken and the valve dropped into the cylinder. The 'Inca's' pass before me and I am near to fainting !!! On closer inspection we find all the other valve parts but the valve has definitely gone.

I am just about to phone one of the sweeps, master mechanics who shadow the rally and fix the most incredible problems, when Peter Banham, the master himself, turns up, takes one look at the situation and asks have we a spare valve, etc. I reply we have pushrod and valve but no springs (do not ask me why ??). He says ' Right lets have the head off !', on a motorway ! in dust ! 45 C !, you must be joking. No he's not. We take 30 minutes (Ristes eat your heart out) to get the head off and onto a piece of canvas lying in the dirt. We are in luck, the valve is only slightly bent and more importantly has not broken the piston. Peter is happy, we have the bits less a spring but we can turn the two broken pieces of spring back to back and have that as a tempoarly spring until we can get a new one tonight. 1 hour later the head is back on with a new head gasket and we are adjusting tappets.

Peter is worried about the dryness of the rocker assembly and surmises that the spring broke due to a rocker seizure. He thinks there may be a further problem here.

This rang alarm bells, before we left Alan Jeffrey in Plymouth who runs a performance tuning shop had mentioned that he was not entirely happy with the engine and wanted to lift the cylinder head. I had decided not to do so as it was over xmas and the car was been shipped the week after the New Year and I felt that if we had found problems there wouldn't be time to fix them so best to leave sleeping dogs alone. In reality the problem Alan had detected was in fact caused by stiff rockers and tight tappets.

Peter however wants to get us moving so we manually lubricate the rocker arms and replace the cover.

After just TWO HOURS we are back on the road and hammering up to Fish River Canyon. By the time we reached the Namibian border all the other cars have left and we sail through arriving at the Hotel by 4 p.m.

That evening whilst Ayesha settles into a Sundowner Trip to see the sun set over the Canyon, Peter and I whip the rocker cover off to check the tightness of the cylinder head bolts and see if the rocker is now being lubricated, it isn't. However we do think we may have an idea of the problem and hence poke about a bit but alas this did not work, more diagnosis to follow.

We stayed the night in tents with a solid bathroom block attached to the back of them. Myra and I had seen these in Kenya and they are very cool and pleasant. Ayesha decided to avoid my snoring by moving into the bathroom complex and sleeping on a mattress with a fan nearby !! First decent sleep she had had she announced afterwards.
simon

The story continues ...

I have set up a web site (well in fact Simon Bloodworth in the office has) called www.themarklands.info where you can see more photo's than I can possibly email so do try it sometime, it is probably still a bit short tonight but by the weekend should have quite a few pictures.

Episode 3 – The Accident

We departed Fish River Canyon early the following morning. Ayesha and I decided not to detour to the main vantage point as most of the contestants who had been the night before were disappointed. We got started en route to Sossusvlei (Vlei meaning Flies) which is on the outskirts of the Namib Desert National Park where the world's largest sand dunes are to be found. We were most excited about seeing these and had a fairly uneventful day working our way across the Namib desert before seeing the first signs of the sand suddenly appear behind a hill.



The sand is said to come from the Kalahari, washed out to sea by the Orange River and then landed on the skeleton coast before being blown into the Namib Desert.

We had a small incident with the car due to a mistake on my part leading to a jammed accelerator but decided scaring the bejesus out of us this caused no problems.

On arrival at Sossusvlei, we decided to check the cylinder head nuts for safety and found these a bit loose. After tightening we decided to dismantle the rocker bar to see if we could find the reason that the rocker area was so dry of oil. After 4 hours of testing and checking oil flows we eventually found that there was a blockage between the side of the cylinder head block and the centre outflow for the rocker arm. This appears to be a problem caused by misassembly of the cylinder head in the past and this problem may have existed since the last overhaul of the engine. We cannot fix without taking the head off again which we are most reluctant to do.

We decided to sleep on the problem as early next morning we go to see the huge sand dunes by bus before having a brunch back at the tented camp. The dunes are spectacular, Ayesha and others climb to the top of Dune 47 which is huge before sliding its entire height back down to the desert bottom, great fun, I watched !!.



On the way back I discuss our problem with Mike Greenway, a professional rally navigator and mechanic who is travelling with Ray Carr in a 1949 Chrysler. He suggest bypassing the rocker outlet by drilling a hole through the rocker cover and rocker bar end, sliding a pipe into the bar from outside the cover and then tapping into the oil pump outlet to force oil into the rocker cover.

On return to the car I am just about to tell Peter about this when he suggests the same thing. So, we still have two hours to brunch, off comes the rockers for the twentieth time and on goes the mob. Just before our start time we are fixed and tested, yes oil to the rockers !, brilliant.

We leave on a high in temperatures of 47 C again and head off across the desert to Walvis bay. Still in gravel, have I mentioned the gravel, ugh ! not like South America but still tons of it. You can push along at 60 mph but the problem comes with the dips and corners. Dips are simple, wait until you can see how big a dip it is and you are in trouble, so it's all guesswork, sometime you enter the dip with all wheels locked trying to slow down and others you waltz through with hardly a touch down on the bump stops. The corners require even better guess work, you cannot brake cornering on gravel, you spin off, hence you have to get your entry speed correct before the corner. This requires some sort of guess as to how far round the corner goes, the tighter and longer the more you must brake in advance. Needless to say one sometimes gets this wrong, which is truly a scary, oh cripes moment when all could be lost at any second.



Ayesha, like her brother before her is getting to grips with these and we are only fish tailing some of the time. However long gravel runs are very tiring and this day is no exception.

We finally break out of the desert and reach the coast near Walvis Bay. It is good to see water again but that is all there is to say about the coastline. We travel to Swakopmund which is a small but busy main town just north of Walvis but which has a great hotel and a decent garage to service the car and change the oil;.

Nest day we are up and off early to Twyfelfontein, the car is going really well and we are setting a blistering pace on gravel. During the middle of the day we decide to try and win the Medallion Speed Section as the gravel is good and the car smooth as silk. That is until we round a corner and see number 11 the Inca Special upside down on the side of the road, with both driver and navigator lying injured. We are not the first there but are the first with a Satellite phone. Ayesha jumps out to help the other car at the site, Colin and Philippa, she is a bit shocked by the state of the two men but handles things well. I, in the meantime start calling for help, our own doctor is 30 k away and he is immediately informed.



Happier Days !

Subsequently, an air ambulance arrived and ferried Bob and Richard to hospital in Windhoek where they were x-rayed and operated on. Miraculously they were not too badly hurt with Bob having a major cut to his head and Richard a compound fracture of his elbow. Harnesses and a roll bar had saved them from worse.

Needless to say Ayesha and I slowed down after this incident but pressed on to the lodge at Twyfelfontein where we were to see the rock engravings left by bushmen many centuries ago.



Every one was very quiet that evening although the news coming in was better than hoped. The car had broken off the rear axle and hence the boys had loss the whole wheel etc., the car had

rolled twice before coming to rest on its side. One of the macabre requirements of an accident in any country when travelling on a Car Carnet is that the car must be removed from the country and brought home if you are not to pay the customs duty on the importation of the car. This means that even if the car is no more than a few nuts and bolts, you have to export it again. The boys had therefore repaired the rear axle sufficient to tow the car so that it could be taken to Walvis Bay for shipment to the UK.

At supper that night it turns out that Ayesha and I had been awarded the Champagne for the Medallion Section anyway, seemed a bit strange after the events of the day but we drank the champagne without any hesitation !.

Sun up in Twyfelfontein and we are on our way again. this is another long gravel day to take us up to the Etosha Park in central Northern Namibia. This is the first day we really start to leave the desert behind us and see the start of the greener scrub.

It is an uneventful day which leads to us entering the park shortly after lunch. We are staying at a government camp near to the west end of the Etosha Pan. The camp is fine and we settle in for an evening of care cleaning and maintenance. There is a water hole within the camp where one goes to see the various animals drinking and we had hoped to see Rhino's there late at night. However I got a bit drunk and spent an hour trying to find the place before finally arriving to see a stork like bird enjoy a bath !!! No Rhino's.

The story continues

I have been having enormous trouble Emailing this report and photo's such that I only got episode 2 away yesterday, I hope to do better tonight and to get some photo's sent off, patient may be needed, this is Africa !!.