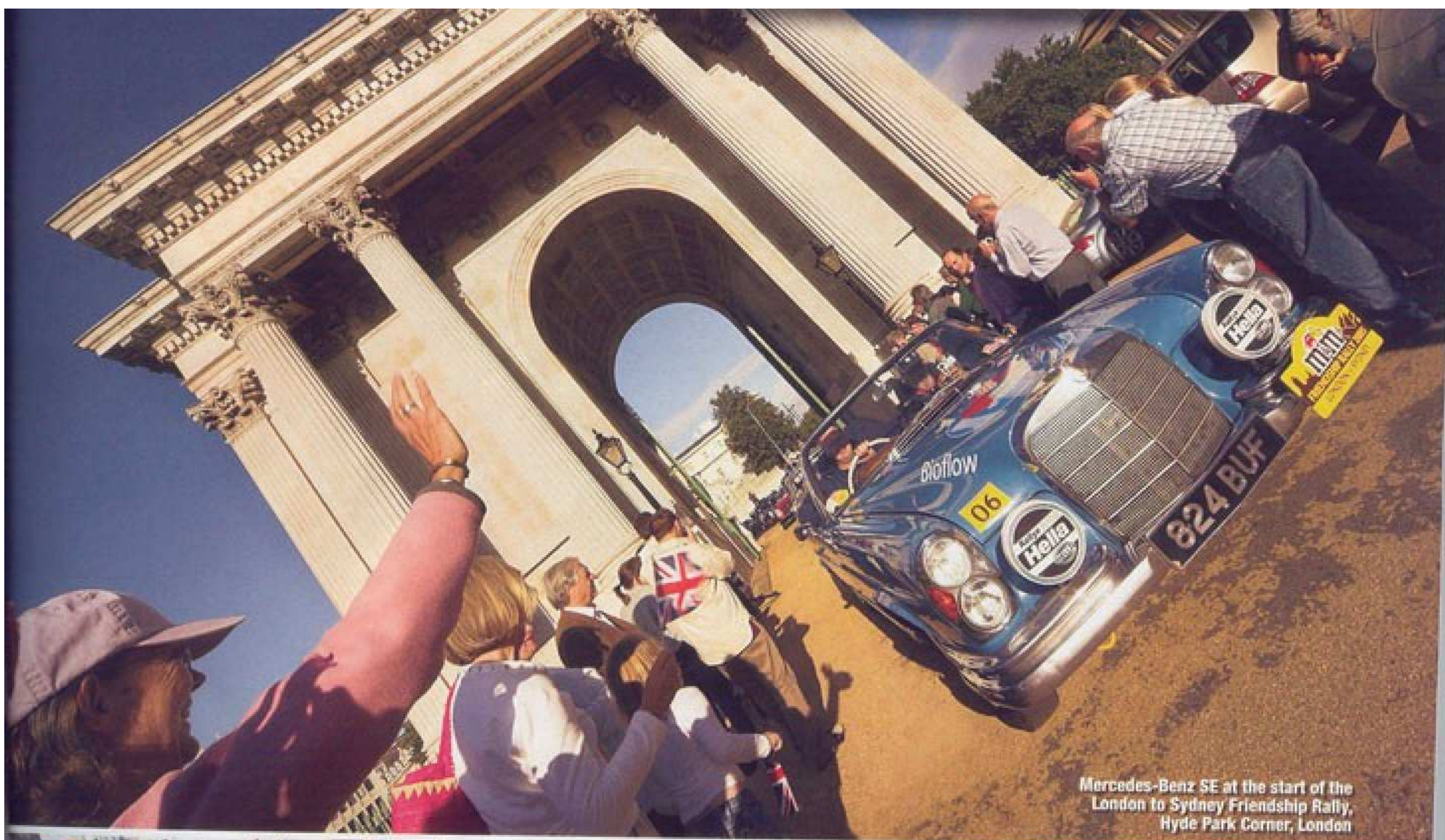


An aerial photograph of a two-lane asphalt road winding through a desert landscape. The road is flanked by red soil and sparse green and yellow vegetation. A small blue classic convertible car is driving on the road. The text "London to Sydney Friendship Rally" and "August to November 2005" is overlaid on the upper part of the image.

# London to Sydney Friendship Rally August to November 2005

Paul Markland





Mercedes-Benz SE at the start of the London to Sydney Friendship Rally, Hyde Park Corner, London



Casting a wide net at the Beaulieu Autojumble



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# Classic Cars



Sunday morning, 13th August 2005, and far too early, the team assembles at the Wellington Memorial, Hyde Park Corner to start the London to Sydney Rally. Many Ecoflow Distributors have turned up, along with Stuart Gale our Sales Manager, to see the start of the first rally to go through the Memorial since the Gumball Rally tore up the gravel several years ago. On strict instruction and with very little fanfare, the cars headed off under the arch on what is an 18,000 miles marathon crossing some 16 countries to reach Sydney in mid November.

For the LS2005 team in Car 6 this is the culmination of months of preparation both personally and for the Mercedes 220 SEB which will be our partner for the next 95 days.

The last week had been a particularly taxing time after I foolishly lent the Mercedes to the Bovey Tracey Carnival Committee for the annual procession through the town. This was a desperate mistake as it was returned with the clutch burnt out after it was driven by an imbecile for 90 minutes. The situation was made worse by the fact that we did not finally decide that something was wrong until 48 hours before the start of the rally. Only thanks to Brian Gunney, the preparation engineer, dropping everything to obtain a new clutch, and then to fit it on Friday did we manage to save an awful situation.

I drove the car to Cardiff on Friday for the clutch replacement and then on to London to test that it was a successful repair. And at 5 am on the Saturday, the car had a further test out on the M25 before we were certain no other damage had been done.

From London we zoomed down to Folkestone and boarded the train to France. An unexciting dash across Northern France brings us to Metz for our first night. The rain started late afternoon and for the next two days we are to travel in a constant rain storm.

Steve Hill, team navigator for this leg, settles in quickly to the role, mastering our

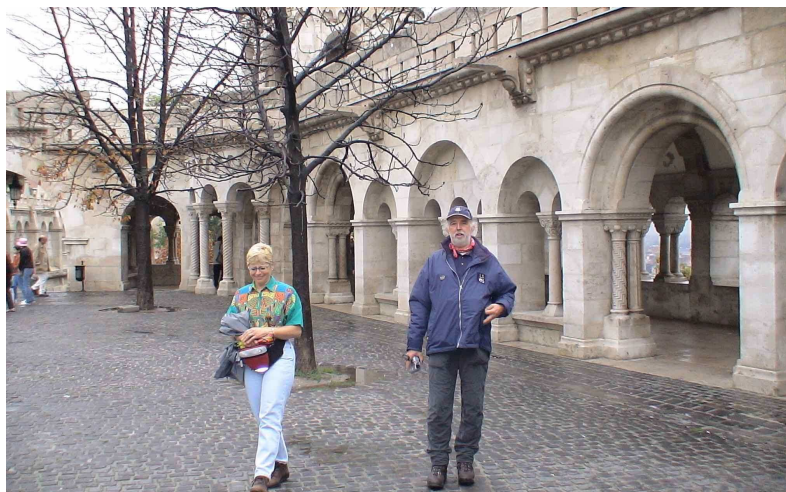






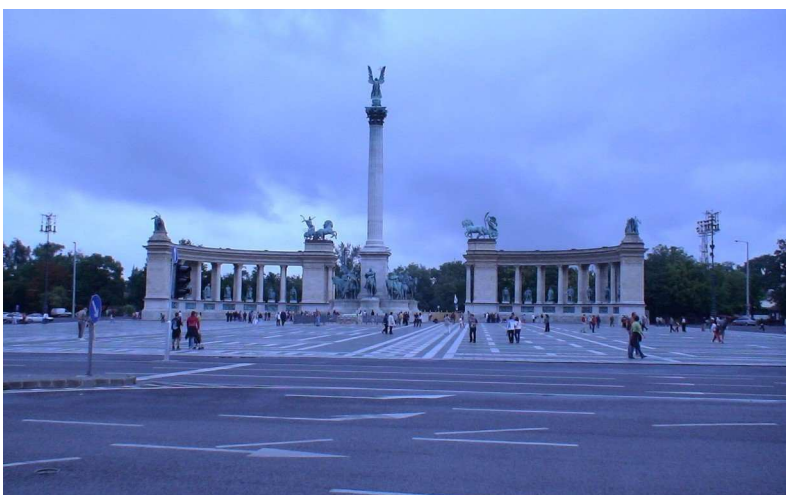
rather lean road book and finding the hotel on the first attempt. Having a mechanic for a navigator is a great help as will become clear later in this report. For now, his main task is getting the beers in!

Day 2 sees us departing from Metz in the pouring rain. We have elected to continue with the roof down; a decision we soon regret as the rain pours in every time we slow down. The new Quba Sail jackets come into their own in this foul, cold weather, and we are already pleased we have them. By mid morning we have an inch of water in the car and every time we slow down the puddle on the tonneau behind us blows forward and drenches us from the back in addition to the rain from the front. In the end, as we climb into an empty Black Forest, we give in and stop to put the roof up. We turn on the heater and start to dry out. We are now totally misted up and really pleased we did not remove the heater entirely.



The Black Forest is closed. There is nowhere to have a hot coffee, so we end up in a Shell Garage which sells the full range of Carix products (the company of which I am chairman). Stocked up with Rainex and coffee we head for the road again.

As we arrive tired and wet in Salzburg, I notice that there is a small vibration in the clutch pedal and a squeak from the clutch housing. Oh heavens! Not more problems! Steve confirms the change in the clutch as we arrive in the underground garage of the hotel. We um and ah whilst talking to Brian Gunney on the phone as to what might be happening and eventually come up with a couple of unpalatable causes. However as the evening wears on, and we discuss it further, we decide to do nothing for the time being. We have a spare clutch, but to be on the safe side, we arrange for Chris Simons in England to collect more bits and pieces and get these to Myra to bring out to Istanbul in case we do go ahead between now and then and open up the clutch.



After a sleepless night of ceaseless rain, we set off early in the morning for the 600KM leg to Budapest. The weather is foul. We narrowly escape being caught up in an accident within 10 km of the hotel and have a short four wheel skid on what we think





was a patch of wet diesel. We are averaging 110 km, 60 mph, in the inside lane; roof up, wipers off, as we traverse Austria through to Hungary. We see none of the obviously lovely scenery until the rain eases as we approach Budapest. We arrive at the hotel with all the foot wells an inch deep in water but otherwise dry. The Rainex and internal screen treatment have worked like a dream. We avoided over heating ourselves through having to have the heater on full blast to clear the windows. No more problems with the clutch, but the vibration re-appears as we arrive in Budapest. It is less severe than yesterday, so we are going to put the problem down to a new clutch, and my paranoia after our troubles last week.



Budapest is lovely as expected. Steve is met by one of his 2CV friends, Holly Boros, who arrives with her husband Lou to welcome us in. Having offered to take the two of us out to a Goulash supper, Holly and Lou end up with the whole rally as guests at the restaurant. It was a marvelous evening of Hungarian Food, wine and music, and many thanks Holly and Lou, not to mention Steve for being the 'Duck' secretary.

The following day, 17th August, is a rest day and Steve has arranged with Holly to take us around the city. We have a great morning visiting the key sites before I return to the hotel to run over the car, send the rally reports, and write this note.

Tomorrow – 800 km through 2 borders, Serbia and Bulgaria, to Sofia. This will test both the clutch and our patience. We cannot wait.



Departing Budapest before daybreak on the M5 south-east to the Serbian border, we pass through a huge fertile plain before rising into the hills that separate the two countries. Unexpectedly, passing though the border goes without a hitch or hold-up and we are soon driving on a new road to the capital, Belgrade. We were surprised by how pretty the countryside was as one gets the impression from the recent wartime footage that it was badly damaged by the troubles and the resultant aftermath. However the roads are good and we soon pass, at speed, through the centre of Belgrade and onto the Bulgarian border.





Here things are not so simple. But we are lucky that in the previous week there was a two day wait to cross due to the weight of traffic, and a real third world mentality to border formalities. However, the place was quiet and after an hour and a half we pass through straight into the two day queue approaching from the other side. The road is jammed with cars and lorries all trying to push in, worsened by a major road accident forcing us onto a cobbled road barely wide enough for two vehicles to pass. We are stuck in the jam until we pass the accident. We then followed a group of cars across the fields to another road in the hope of cutting back onto the main road. This fails and all the cars return apart from us! We spot a car a few kilometres away going along a track parallel to the main road. Let's try it, Steve says, and we head off up this wet and bumpy lane for about 8 kilometres slipping and sliding in the mud until we join a road that takes us back onto the main road ahead of an astonished queue of cars and people who have been held up for hours. We radio back to our group and give them directions before pushing hard on to Sofia some 100 kilometres away.



On entering Sofia, we refuel at a Shell station and are met by the full range of Carifil car care products which are made and marketed by the Carix Group. We take photos with the staff for sending back to London before pressing on to the hotel for a beer at the end of an 800 Km day with two borders.

From Sofia we leave early the following morning through the southern plains of Bulgaria with the ski resort mountains to our West. The road is great for a time but full of donkey and cart combinations which gradually get more numerous until we are weaving in and out of them as we approach the border. The border to Turkey is easy as far as departing Bulgaria but then we hit the Turkish side. No traffic, and yet still two hours to get through the complete chaos that meets us. However the officials are all very friendly and, with much shaking of hands and photographs being taken, we finally are into Turkey and on our way to Istanbul. The queue for Bulgaria, two days long, has been protesting for hours by keeping hundreds of horns pressed all the time.





No one at the border cares!

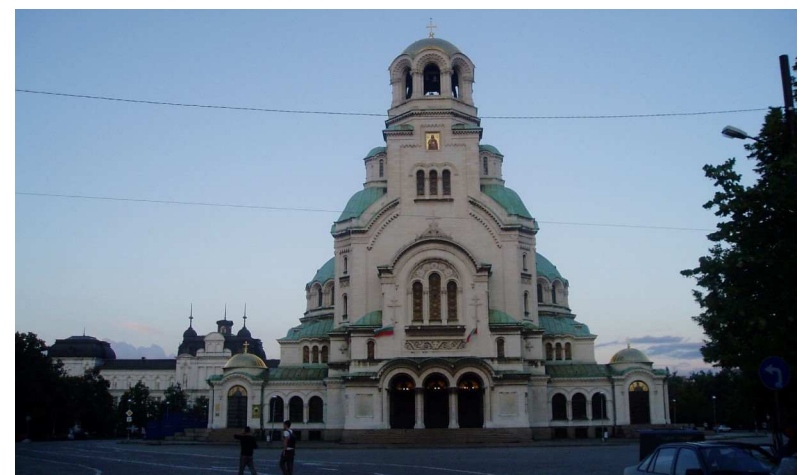
We arrive in Istanbul along a superb new road, the E80. E means we paid for it I think. As we enter the city, the traffic gets worse and worse, as does the driving. It is like dodgems only we are all going the same way, well most of us anyway. We see the Bosphorus as we drive through the western approaches to our hotel which is located in a suburb.

It is Steve's last job as navigator, and we decide to celebrate at the Kempinski Palace with Myra and Edite who arrived the day before from London. We have a wonderful meal on the balcony of the palace with views out over the Bosphorus Bridge to Asia. Fireworks seem to have been laid on for us as well as for a number of Formula 1 teams staying there for the Grand Prix on Sunday. In getting to the Hotel we had to use the Metro, Tram and finally a ferry. It was remarkable that the first two were very comfortable, clean and air conditioned. Most unexpected!

Many thanks to Steve Hill for a job well done. He was an excellent navigator as well as a great help with the clutch and other problems. He will be writing his own report shortly.

On Saturday, Myra and Edite go shopping and sight seeing at the Grand Bazaar whilst Steve and I work on the car. We have had no further concerns about the clutch and, although Myra has bravely carried a complete assembly out with her along with parts for several other cars, we are not going to change it unless forced to. Otherwise the car is more or less fine. A support strut for the big spot lights has vibrated off, and the high beam fuses have blown, probably due to all the water we have had. The car has dried out at last, so we can replace the carpet and items under the seat and finally check wheels, tyres and greasing points underneath.

In the afternoon we are escorted to the Topkapi Palace for a news conference with the local media on behalf of Mars. This is fun, and we get to see the palace in style before











retiring to dinner nearer our hotel.

Sunday, at a very early 0530, we depart Istanbul to avoid the rush to the Grand Prix which is on our route. However, Myra is now in charge of navigation and soon has her cap on. Luckily we have no problems and roar south to Ankara without encountering a hold-up. We are across the Bosphorus and now in Asia.

After Ankara, we load up with fuel and continue to Goreme. The car up to this point has been fine, but it suddenly starts spluttering and banging from time to time - getting worse when we are at traffic lights and crossings. We saw this problem once in Northern Spain and put it down to bad fuel, but this time that seems an unlikely cause although we have just filled up. We push on to Goreme to arrive at 1400 by which time the spluttering is bad enough for us to get stuck on the hill to the hotel. We get in though, and gratefully stop at our Flintstones cave cut into the side of the hills by the Hittites in 1800 BC. The entire town is like this: totally amazing.



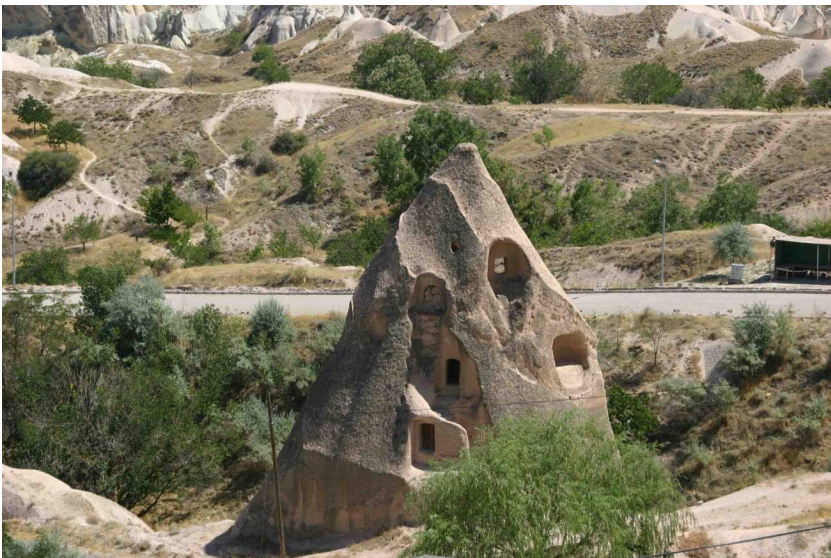
In the evening I take the car out to test it, and it is still very bad. I briefly try changing over to our reserve tank which still has UK fuel in it and this seems to solve the problem. Changing back I head for the nearest petrol station to fill the tank and dilute the questionable petrol. Returning to the hotel with a full tank, things seem better but not perfect.



On the next day, we go out and start the car, and all is running perfectly. Myra and I jump in and drive to an underground city, again built by the Hittites, to test the car and see the sights. What amazing scenery this part of Cappadocia has. We are in awe at the tunnels and caves these people have carved out of the soft pumice stone hills to hide from their enemies.

Travelling East through Turkey we stop at Diyarbakir with its walled city and proximity to the Tigris river, and we cross the Euphrates. The day is marred by further problems with the fuel system. We struggled on until eventually the car ceased to run at all and







we are stuck by the road. We change over to the UK fuel in desperation and this seems to do the trick. In the meantime the Jaguar with Neil and David has caught up with us and they stay behind as we continue on to a major town. However after about 20 minutes the problem returns, this time it seems terminal and we collapse in a petrol station unable to move. I am in despair, and just cannot fathom out why this problem is so intermittent and seems to occur immediately after some refuelling stops.

Stuart and Jenny Woodhead in the Healey catch up and we have a small conference by the road. A call to Brian Gunney in England suggests that we should go back to basics and check the system from end to end. This seems obvious but having had this problem spasmodically for three months we have developed several complex theories. Back to basics suggest that we are not getting the correct pressure at the Injection Manifold and hence are pumping vapour or air in the system which is compressible. We open the fuel pump box and find a little fuel around, there is clearly air/vapour in the inlet pipes. Then we shut the return line and pressurise the system using two pumps in series, and petrol spews out of the marine filter inlet. We decide immediately to bypass the filter and retest. This does the trick, the air/vapour from the fuel lines disappears instantly and we are pumping pure petrol. With great trepidation we try starting the car and it bursts into life, sweet as a nut! Problem solved, we box everything up and get under way again.

The rest of the day, and the days after, prove that we have finally found the problem and cured it. Much thanks to Neil and David, Stuart and Jenny for staying with us and helping to solve the problem. With the clutch now stabilized and the fuel flowing smoothly we look forward to an easy ride. Hope springs eternal! The roads are gravel in places and worst still it was the diabolical washboard stuff that vibrates the car constantly. By dusk, the driver's side sunblind has dropped on my lap, both door mechanism clasps are loose, and, worst of all, one of the boot opening brackets had snapped in half.

Late in the afternoon we see Mount Ararat in the distance as we approach Diyarbakir.







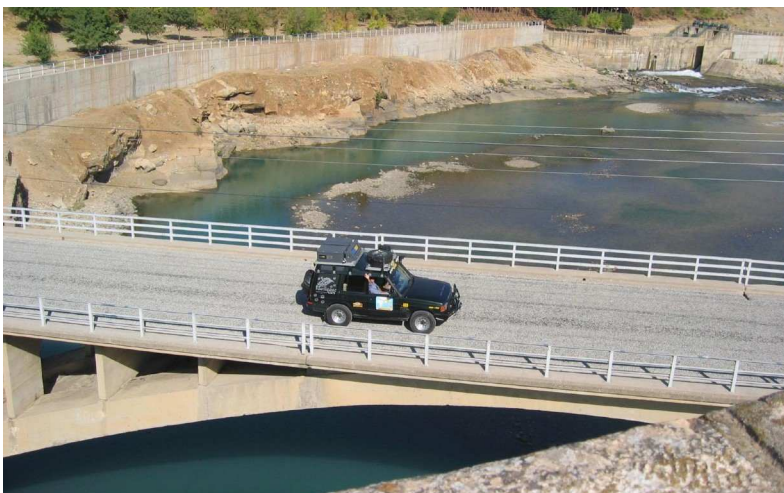
This is a magic sight with its snow covered peak and biblical history. We stop to take photos from the top of the pass before descending to the town in the valley below the mountain.

The following morning we are last to leave with Robin and Charlotte in the Aston and Paul and Dr Nikki in the Discovery. Robin leads us into the old city for photos and a view over the Tigris from the oldest bridge in this part of Turkey.

We then set off for Dogubeyazit (Dog Biscuit). After 10 minutes Robin has a small problem with his Aston. It starts revving madly and we stop in a panic to see what is wrong. The previous night he has been fiddling with the fuel hose coupling and in tightening one of these up has rotated it into the way of the throttle linkage, locking it open. This takes seconds to fix but when we return to the Merc, I cannot find reverse gear. Oh hell! What now? I guess that one of the gear linkages has slipped off the selector, so I remove the panelling over the tunnel to get a clear view. Sure enough one rod has come off, the circlip having sprung off. There has always been a little interference on 5th and I think the circlip has been catching on the tunnel. When I leapt out of 5th to stop and help Robin, it must have been too much for the clip and off it came.



By now Paul Marsh, the rally mechanic, is on the scene and in two secs has the linkage back together. However we will need to look at it in the evening and find a more long term solution.



We go past a most wonderful old bridge where we stop for tea at a roadside shack and take photos. From here we travel to Van along the banks of the largest lake in Turkey, and catching up with another group of cars, we stop for photos and water. Rick has been in for a swim and Jenny for a walk along the lake. We are all sorry that we do not have time to take the ferry out to a small outlying island on which there are several old monasteries. Instead we must push on for Dog Biscuit. Lunch is in a horrible looking petrol station, but is surprisingly pleasant consisting of a Turkish Stew, bread



and tea.

We arrive in Dog Biscuit after an uneventful afternoon's travelling in time to work on the gear selector, and to enjoy our last beers for some weeks, as tomorrow we enter Iran.

Early in the morning we depart Dogubeyazit for the border 30 kilometres away. Arriving early we hope to avoid delay and pass through quickly. The girls are all dressed in their 'bat' outfits ready for the border crossing

The Turkish side is empty, but chaotic. The group is left standing around whilst a 'guide' does the rounds of the various officials. This is a disaster and takes twice as long as doing it ourselves. Four hours later we finally emerge onto the Iranian side where things are much quicker. Both customs and passport control are expecting us and we have a relatively swift passage through the border.

However, with sixteen cars, it takes time and we do not get away from the border until lunchtime. The traffic is very heavy and somewhat erratic as we weave our way behind a police escort to Tabriz. It is immediately obvious that the Iranian people are delighted to see us and everywhere we look there are waves and smiling faces. This does lead to a little over enthusiasm in regard to their driving and it is not long before we are caught up in the melee of cars trying to get alongside us (on a single lane road!) or in front of us, to see our cars. The drive is therefore not without its moments.

We reach Tabriz in late afternoon to be met by a first class hotel perched on a hill overlooking the town. Our first supper in Iran is excellent, chicken kebabs, in a revolving restaurant atop the hotel. Most of the car problems were solved with a screwdriver and Locktite at the border whilst waiting. However the broken boot hinge had by now snapped clean off, and will require welding

The following morning is the Sabbath in Iran and we are very slow to get started,





finally leaving the hotel at 0930. A long drive of 600 km was in front of us and we had already experienced the extreme heat of the desert the day before. Temperatures soon soared to 40 degrees and more, and the cars were red hot by the time we stopped for lunch at a cavernous restaurant serving local delicacies. We had an amazing lamb stew which was both light and refreshing before heading on into the sunset to get to Hamadan. However, by the time the convoy had reached the city, it was getting dark and the traffic was beyond belief. It was a special day in Iran and everyone was out on the streets. By 8 pm we were edging our way through the throng to our hotel. Once again the welcome was friendly and kids and adults alike were trying to get close enough to try their English, a favourite saying seemed to be 'I love you'. However many of the younger adults can speak a little English, and the youngsters quite a bit.



We see little of Hamadan as it is only just light when we leave the next day. However the hotel was clean and comfortable and the food was excellent.

A word on Iranian petrol...it is cheap! 60 litres costs just £3.00! And an oil change in England costs me £35.00 in oil; here, 10 litres was just £2.00.

The next day we drive to Esfahan, which was a highlight of the trip. We pass through rolling hills and cultivated land in temperatures approaching 43 Centigrade. The roads are excellent compared with Turkey, and we make good time to the town of Khomeyn where Imam Khomeini was born. We visit his birth place, and Myra has tea in his house with our escort police. We move on after an hour to have lunch at a fort in the small town of Googed. From here, it is pedal to the metal back down a motorway to arrive in Esfahan before dusk. This city is bustling with activity but has a much simpler road system to navigate than we experienced in Hamadan the night before. We are soon garaged at our hotel and enjoying a Near Beer to celebrate our arrival.



Esfahan was a great stop over. There are no tourists due to the current political situation and hence everywhere we went we were welcomed as long lost friends. The bazaars kept the ladies on the rally fully occupied, including Myra, whilst us men

