

worked on the cars the first day and then went sightseeing on day two. Chris Simons the new navigator was waiting for us on arrival in Esfahan having had a day reminiscing over his return to the city after 35 years. Not much appeared to have changed besides the Polo Pitch used by the Shah being turned into a park with fountains.

The great mosques are all as they have been for hundreds of years and truly magnificent when viewed either close up or from a distance. Shopping is cheap here, although the currency sufficiently confusing that you generally haggle and then pay too much when it comes to handing over the money!

The list of work for the car was modest but included the welding up of the boot hinge, as well as repairing a puncture we had the day before. We changed the oil, greased the steering and inspected the engine, and all seemed well.

We also needed to adjust the handbrake, but left this for another day. The welding of the boot lid was done in Mechanics Alley, a street full of car shops, work shops and welding shops capable of building a car never mind repairing one. In just two hours we had completed our entire job list and were on the way back to the hotel. We had found it difficult to pay anyone as they insisted they did not want our money at least five times before finally taking it.

Back at the hotel, the wives had returned ready for a trip around the town, visiting mosques, bridges, gardens and more bazaars.

At the end of a well earned two days rest, Myra departed for the UK leaving Chris and I to navigate our way to Pakistan.

The traffic in Iran is very heavy and erratic, so much so that I bought a huge set of worry beads to keep with us on the trip. The locals thought this hilarious and several took photos of the beads in action before I dumped them as we left





Esfahan- too much extra weight!

After Esfahan we headed south to Shiraz which is famous for its gardens, and proximity to Persepolis. We travelled fast to try and reach Persepolis before lunch. We arrived to be met with this amazing sight; a city that has been buried for hundreds of years and only dug out 80 years ago. It is sufficiently well preserved that one can get a real feel for what it must have been like 2000 years ago. Friezes of people bringing gifts to the king are incredibly well preserved and much more graphic than the surreal Egyptian drawings.

After two hours we press on to Shiraz and the city of gardens. The town is in a valley beside a river and more or less surrounded by desert. A night stop here is uneventful and we leave for Kerman early the next morning to avoid the worst of the day's heat, anticipated to reach 40 Centigrade.

The drive to Kerman is uneventful. Early in the day we see two major lakes that have receded significantly in the drought, but stretch for miles. They are purported to be the home of many Flamingos but we are not close enough to verify this. We then pass through very pretty and twisty passes to the high desert at 6,000 feet above sea level. The desert stretches for miles in all directions and the temperature soars. However there are signs of water from time to time, and the desert is scrub rather than the barren dunes of Saudi Arabia.

A days rest at Kerman allows us to check over the car and to open up the selector box on the gear change to see why 5th gear continues to be sticky, and, on one occasion, to jam. We find a badly damaged grommet for which we had no spare. So we modified the linkage to temporarily get over the problem until a new grommet can reach us with the new crew arriving from England.

Testing this suggests we had solved the problem. The rest of the day we relaxed before the next three very heavy days getting out of Iran, and passing through Baluchistan, the





most dangerous part of this rally, where we will have a full army escort.

We continued on from Kerman to Zahedan close to the border with Pakistan. The day was unbelievably hot touching 47 degrees in the shade during our passage through the desert between Bam and Zahedan.

We detoured into Bam having decided that we should go and see how things were a year or so after the earthquake, to offer a donation, and to show the residents that the world was aware of their plight.

What a staggering eye opener. The people were set against adversity and making the best they could of the situation. There are no houses - just 40 foot containers and tents. There are no shops - just more containers and carts. There are no facilities, the infrastructure having been swept away. However the people are friendly and resilient. The children cheerful and happy, and the town bustling with activity as the residents try to rebuild their homes. We go to visit the ancient fort and old town. It is flattened, with not a tower remaining but the guide is still there, this time selling a book recording Bam before and after the earthquake. I bought one of these to put in the Youth Café in Bovey Tracey to illustrate how lucky we are in Europe.

The kids ride motor scooters from the age of nine, something I am sure the young in Bovey Tracey would love to copy! Four up on a Honda moped is the norm, two when racing!

We leave Bam behind us and head out into the dry barren desert. After 4 hours of hard driving we enter the foothills on the edge of the desert through which we had to pass to reach the town of Zahedan on the other side.

The city is flat and dusty, and petrol is rationed here to twelve litres a car as there is massive smuggling of fuel across the border into Pakistan. However after some persuasion we manage to acquire 80 litres to fill our tanks before the next days drive to





the border.

The food here is totally different. We leave behind the endless kebabs and yogurt, and start to see more interesting use of rice and dishes made of meat and eggs etc. We are close to Pakistan, and the people here have a more eastern appearance. Clothing has changed to more Arab dress of long robes and dish dashes. This part of Iran is a far cry from Tehran.

Whilst in Iran it has not been wise to comment on the culture but as this dispatch is coming from Pakistan we can now make a comment or two. The young in Iran are pushing back the Islamic taboos everywhere. We have seen girls barely covering their heads, showing tight jeans under carefully cut dresses, high heels, make up and many other risqué clothes. More importantly, having been told not to display affection in public even with our wives, we have seen couples openly holding hands and kissing. Iran must be changing, there seems much less religious fervour than we were expecting - even in the key towns.

We are frequently questioned about Tony Blair and George Bush, mainly out of curiosity. We have seen NO aggression towards any member of the rally; indeed I cannot remember a friendlier nation on my recent travels.

But where has the money gone? 'Not to the people' as one old man said to me. Here is one of the richest oil countries on earth but with one of the poorest populations. Where has it gone indeed?

We have really enjoyed the people and places we have visited in Iran. And although the slightly over zealous guiding and protection from our hosts has driven us wild with frustration on occasions, it has more than made up for by the friendliness of the people.

Leaving Iran behind us, we travel to Quetta in Baluchistan. This is a journey of 600 km through one of the most dangerous places on earth. Bandits and tribal militia rule this









area of Pakistan and we move in a close convoy behind the Baluchistan Levie, the pro government militia. We have no problems or even potential problems as we cross the barren 'Sandy Desert'. Temperatures are as high as our tempers as we drive late into the night arriving at midnight in Quetta. In rallying we usually avoid night driving like the plague. With poor lights, a third world attitude to traffic and poor roads, it is always best avoided. However here we cannot move fast enough and indeed some cars are in difficulty with the roads. Stuart Woodhead in a Healey destroys his gearbox and has to be towed the last 100 km in the pitch dark at 40 kph through the final pass into Quetta.

This town has a really good hotel, the Serena, and we arrive here exhausted but with our first curry in sight. We have become bored with kebabs in Iran and sit down to a superb buffet curry, even though it is so late at night.

The following day we are slow to move and do not depart until 1100 for Sukkur. We have been warned that the hotel there will be ghastly and not somewhere we will want to stay too long. They are right, after a drive taking us south to join the Indus river we arrive at this poor little hotel. However the welcome is expansive and we are met by the Deputy District Co-ordinating Officer of the region who invites us out to dinner in the open beside the river and the Indus Barrage.

I discover that real beer can be obtained here so order a load for the group who are two hours behind us. As they arrive we order more and more until we have all had our first beer in two weeks. The spontaneous pre dinner party is a great success and we go on to enjoy our second good curry before taking tea at the District Co-ordinators home; a house built by the British for the Barrage Engineer.

Next day we head back north again to Multan. We have done a large dog leg to avoid the worse of the bandit country, and the worse of the roads. The trip north is broadly along the banks of the Indus and is of little note. Chris and I are stopped at the Punjab border by the police as we had escaped from the usual convoy and gone on our own.









It was a good run whilst it lasted but for the rest of the day we followed a police car which changed regularly as we travelled through each cantonment on the way. The Toyota trucks range from new fast ones to slow, diesel belching wrecks but are always manned by AK47 wielding policemen.

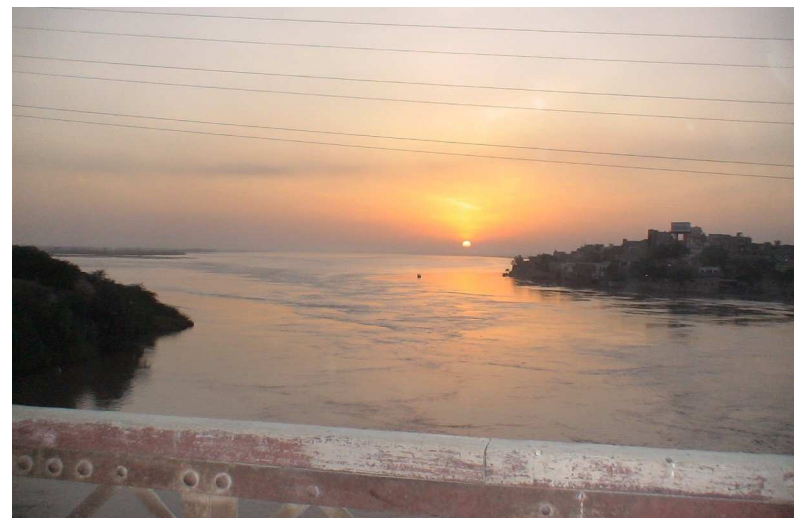
When you travel here you understand why George Bush thinks Kyoto is a waste of time. He is right. There is no way that countries such as Pakistan are going to clean up their emissions. Indeed they will not be held back because the West wants to reverse the damage they have done in the last two hundred years. Time for us to wake up to reality and stop wasting time and energy sorting rubbish to make us feel we are helping. If there is global warming, we are going to have to solve it with technology not wind power and recycling.

We arrive in Multan having had numerous brushes with death as we negotiate the impossible traffic. I used to think India was bad in the 80's. Well...they have perfected dangerous driving since then!

Multan is not a very encouraging city; it is stifling hot and dusty. But the Holiday Inn welcomes us in style and we pass an uneventful evening.

The car has been running fantastically now that our initial problems have been solved. We do have an on-going screw loosening issue but generally we spot these before anything falls off. Our IPOD ready radio has packed up. I think the amplifier has blown due to the heat, but as we could never hear the music clearly it is no great loss. We will be servicing the car in Lahore.

We leave Multan behind us and drive to Lahore. I have laid down my position on convoys and we are largely left to our own devices today. We stop at Harappa which is one of only two sites that give us an insight into the ancient people who populated the Indus valley. Like the Egyptians, they were a very ordered race and had built tidy and organised cities along the Indus. We stopped to look at the site and the









accompanying museum, but there is little left besides pots to get a real feeling for who they were.

Continuing on we are met with camels and carts, horses and carts, lorries heading towards us on our side of the dual carriageway, along with a thousand pedestrians crossing the motorway. Amid all this we are stopped by the Highway Patrol Police and remonstrated with for not, wait for it, using our indicators! Having picked ourselves up from the floor, we give the coppers a rally sticker and carry on up the road.

We arrive in Lahore in record time, with Chris navigating us through one of the most difficult cities on this rally faultlessly to bring us to our hotel, one of the best and oldest in Lahore.

We are here for three days, so the first day was a time for relaxation. Day two we headed for a garage with a pit to service the Mercedes. This went without a hitch although our battery isolator seemed to have given up the ghost so we have bypassed it. We took the car to a cleaner who specialise in the total wash, i.e. outside, inside, underneath and the engine ALL with a high pressure hose. The two cars and a motor bike in front of us all failed to restart after this treatment and so were dismantled as we watched in order to get the water out of the fuel, electrics and foot wells ! We opted for the exterior wash only and an air clean inside; much safer and we were able to move afterwards. However just as we were finishing a van ran into our passenger rear light breaking the lens. Bad enough that we had to duck tape it over but they were just about the single most expensive part I had bought in preparation for the rally. I was well p\*\*\*\*d off, the perpetrator did not stop and would have had to give me his wreck as compensation!

We made it back to the hotel without further incident, and tomorrow we go sightseeing.









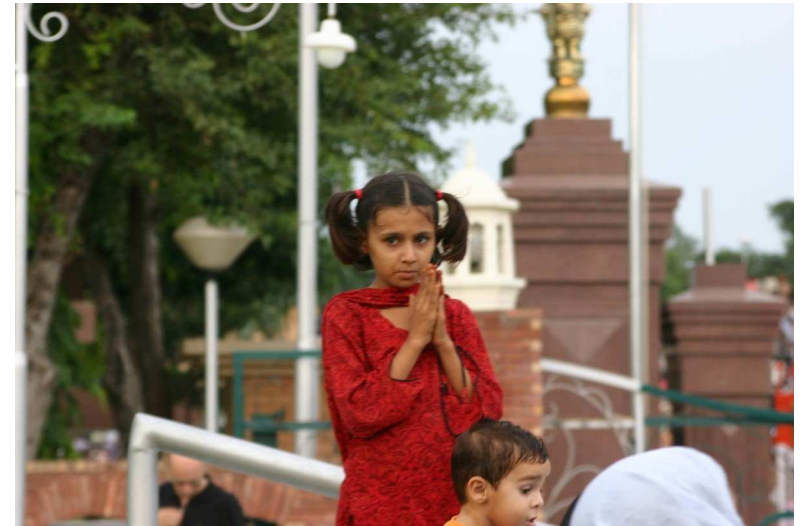
Lahore was pretty interesting. We went on a sightseeing tour to see the largest Mosque in the world (at least the third one purporting to be this). It was most interesting but one cannot help feeling that once you have seen one .....

More interesting was a trip to the border with India to see the closing ceremony of the only open border between the two countries. The army guards on each side have developed a ritual closing of the gates and lowering of the flags which has to be seen if you are travelling in these parts. The two sides put on an orchestrated, aggressive parade display that lasts about 30 minutes and is intended to show spectators that, whilst both countries live side by side, there are both tensions and co-operation in equal measure. It was really quite fun and we enjoyed tea with our side once it was all over.

The following day we were off to Islamabad. It is as well that we have left Pakistan now as this city epitomises all that is wrong in the world between governments and their people. A golden gilded city open only to politicians, diplomats and the rich, along with their servants, it is glaringly obvious where all the money goes in Pakistan. They will need to leave their air-conditioned offices and move out into townships before they will sort Pakistan's problems out.

We were welcomed by the Minister for Tourism who is keen to develop their tourist trade. Nothing I can say will be positive so best leave the subject well alone, suffice to say there are a thousand issues facing him.

Believe it or not, we were then invited to meet the Prime Minister of Pakistan at his residence. Extraordinary, quite frankly, until we found out that he had been a top man in Citibank for 30 years and had lived all over the Far East before becoming an MP. He even knew Peter Sutch fairly well. He was very interesting but his speech banded on about how Pakistan condemned the attacks in the USA and Europe but could not be













blamed for homebred terrorists in England.

Nevertheless it was kind of him to take an interest in our cars, and the Pakistan government went to all sorts of extremes to ensure our safety and comfort. Having toured each car, he drove the Corvette across his drive before seeing us off on our way.

From here on the rally really gets into exciting territory. We head off up the mountains to Murree, a town at 9,000 feet north of Islamabad. The roads are great but as we are enveloped by fog, and with ice rink like damp roads, we realise that the day is not going to be a doddle. After a couple of four wheel skids we finally reach the peak in time to see nothing but fog! However the view on the way up, and the subsequent descent, more than make up for slippery roads and poor visibility. We arrive safely in Besham, ready to scale the Karakorum Highway, locally known as the KKH, the day after.

Unlike Palin, who we believe flew into Gilgit, we are driving there up some of the most dangerous roads in the world. The suddenness of rock falls is notorious and we leave Besham with a certain amount of trepidation. However, this falls away in an instant as we start to see hills turn to mountains, mountains turn to snowy peaks and we pass Nanga Parbat, which is 26,660 feet high!

The car zooms up the relatively easy incline as we pass up the gorge. We are not to stay in Gilgit as there is major unrest between Sunnis and Shiites leading to the use of medium calibre weapons the day before we get there. Instead we are going straight past and staying in Karimabad which is further up the KKH.

In fact, we are the first to arrive on the outskirts of Gilgit to be met by a heavy Army and Police presence. The senior officer asks us what we would like to do. We did not come all this way to be gazumped by Palin, so we said we would like to visit the town before moving on.

