London to Casablanca in a Tiger Owain Lloyd

Owain with navigator friend Adrian O'Neill did rather well in their first long distance rally - a massive baptism of fire over 8000 kms to Casablanca...& back. Here's his tale.



Leafing through the little magazine supplement, a picture of a ratty Morgan amongst snow capped peaks caught my eye, and it was here, reading David Spurling's account of his adventures in Mongolia that I first heard of the Peking to Paris Rally. The first event, held in 1907 was a legendary early test of automobile endurance, planning and navigation, but it wasn't until 1997 that the Endurance Rally Association was able to repeat the iconic trip for the first time since Prince Borghese won it in his 7 litre Itala. contacted the ERA with a view to running in the next Peking event and this was how, in December 2008 the London to Casablanca brochure dropped on my doormat. Glancing at the stunning pictures of classic cars against jaw dropping scenery, I immediately thought how the Tiger could easily handle an event Within a week, I'd sent off the like this. application form and entry fee and locked myself into the event with 10 months to prepare.

The initial enthusiasm saw me reinforce the rear spring mounts and front crossmember tube nuts in January followed by the fabrication of a skid panel to protect the rare aluminum LAT sump. A roll cage was bought and installed but then the weather got better and I started just enjoying the tiger until the end of the summer. I had replaced and



reinforced pretty much all the suspension, steering, bearings and brakes recently so I knew the car was strong but there was still a very long list of modifications and preparation jobs to finish by November. It was now late August and as the weeks ticked by, I was working almost every day on the car.

Preparation

Those less inclined to know the details of the car preparation may skip this section to the report of the event proper.

The most obvious problem with the car were my 16" alloys and fat low profile track The gravel, pot holes and broken tvres. tarmac we would encounter would require deep profile tyres and wheels that could be bent back into shape. Stock tiger steel wheels are not of the beefiest construction and I was worried that 300hp might well tear the wheel centres out, so I acquired five Ford Escort van wheels for 12 guid on eBay. They are 13x5.5" and have the correct bolt pattern. The rears were fitted onto the existing 1" bolt on spacers I use for my Panasport alloys, but the fronts required a little more work. My big brakes would never fit and would be frowned upon by the organizers, so I switched back to stock tiger hubs and brakes, switched the master cylinder to match, swapped my Minx dropped spindles for stock ones to increase ground clearance and fitted Eibach 25mm bolt on spacers, designed for a Ford Ka! I left the tyre choice for later and moved on to fitting the essential equipment for a rally.

A trip meter for accurate distance measuring was fitted on a custom made centre console driven by a magnetic sender on the front hub and a backup sender on the speedo cable. It turned out we needed both - the front one overheated and



stopped working on test sections but the rear one lost a little accuracy every time the wheels spun. A large fire extinguisher, powerful air horns to shift cattle, children and local cars, foot rests for driver and co-driver, and strip lights for the interior and boot were added.

So that we could record some of interesting parts of the trip. I installed a small lipstick size video camera on the roll bar with a digital video recorder wired into the boot and a switch for the co-driver to start and stop videoing. This worked until things starting getting interesting and we forgot to turn it on. Interestingly, electrics are historically the biggest source of problems on these sort of events so this area required particular The car already had a new loom attention. but virtually nothing is fused in a tiger and many switches carry too much load. installed two new fuse boxes and fused every electrical device. Relays were installed for the headlights, driving lights, fuel pump and horns. New headlight wiring looms went in together with left hand drive headlights. Extra driving lights were fitted for night time visibility and a centre console made up to hold all the new switches and gauges. I had added a fuel pressure gauge to help detect blockages, an oil temp gauge and a fancy air/fuel ratio gauge driven by a wideband lambda sensor.

I was worried about the affects of thinner air at 8000ft in the Atlas Mountains and wanted to monitor Every electrical it. connection outside the interior - lights,



engine bay, boot - was sealed with silicon sealant to prevent water getting in.

To stop cold water being sucked into the hot axle during deep river crossings, the breather hole in the axle was tapped and a pipe fitted that ran up into the boot. The car already had stainless brake and fuel lines routed mostly through the car but a short section of rubber fuel hose was replaced by braided stainless section. New high grade bolts were used in all places that hadn't received them in the last couple of vears and lots of bolts Loctited and marked with a line of yellow paint. This made the nightly checks much auicker. One last minute addition that turned out to be essential was to hash up a coolant recovery bottle using a cycle drink bottle. lt prevented any water loss on stopping and altitude changes and made it a breeze to add water on the one occasion we boiled over.

Lastly, all obvious consumables such as plugs, leads, rotor arm and cap were renewed and the old ones taken as spares.

With only a couple of weeks to go, I settled on my choice of tyre which would need to be tough and durable and provide grip on both mud and tarmac. I ended up using the medium compound Dunlop SP82 closed pattern gravel rally tyre with a 70 profile and 195 width. little and we finished the day in 17th. That night in Le Mans was the first time we got to know some of our fellow competitors a little more - never have I met such an interesting and diverse group. You could write a book about these characters! The next two days were uncompetitive, just requiring us to make the hotel each night in northern and southern Spain respectively.

The first day started with us tearing down the empty Mulsanne straight at dawn,



Across Europe

The first day from London to Le Mans took us through two forest stages in Kent. We took the first very easily, it being the first time I'd driven the car off the tarmac and finished 10 seconds over the bogey time in 5^{th} place overall out of 49 cars including eight modern endurance cars.

Bolstered by the apparent ease of rally driving, I drove a little faster on the next stage and failed to make a tight turn, understeering into some mud. The navigator got plastered as he pushed and we lost a lot of time getting out and finished 32^{nd} . Next up was a surprise deviation to Belgium where we raced around two laps of a village. Sadly the bogey was so generous that almost all the cars made it and our 7th place time counted for

driving the length of France in pouring rain and arriving in a nice hotel in Burgos in the afternoon. The weather cleared up for the next day and we had a wonderful run along beautiful empty roads towards Portugal, through Salamanca, Seville and on to the hilltop Parador in Ronda. We stopped four or five times for fuel and food and still averaged 88mph over the distance with the engine spending much of day with an uncomfortably high oil temperature. Α quick oil change in the hotel garage put my mind at rest for the upcoming week in At dawn, we descended the Morocco. mountain to the port; following the awesome ex-Peking 1933 Alvis as its driver exploited the low light to expertly sweep past trucks on blind corners.



The last full day of rallving took us south with three timed mountain climbs. Most Tiger owners have had kind of some overheating issues but not many conditions are as testing as one of these climbs. Starting at near sea level with an ambient temp of 50 Celsius we climbed to over 2400 metres at 4000-6000 rpm and had to stop

Into Africa

Entering Morocco, the event started in earnest. The first test section was not reached until after nightfall and consisted of a climb up nineteen hairpins. The tiger was flying but half way up I didn't see some gravel and locked a wheel going into a turn. We overshot and came to rest on the sump guard with the wheels hanging over the ditch. Fortunately we could dig a hole under the rear wheels and rock the car out, but we'd lost four minutes again and slipped down to 22nd.

The next two days in the heart of the middle Atlas, allowed us to climb to 17th and 5th in class from steady times with no mistakes. We lost the front bumper from a nose dive into a huge pothole and sheared a fuel fitting from excessive engine movement. The checker plate sump guard was by now torn to shreds and we had to be very cautious over bumps for the rest of the event. By now we had arrived in the dusty, run down town of Midelt and were digesting the tragic news of a fatal accident of one of the other entrants. We decided it was safest to continue with the event and were relived to hear that all time controls were removed from the next day. It was a pleasant drive about 600km through the spectacular Todra gorge and over some high altitude plains to the movie-making town of Ouarzazate on the edge of the Sahara.

dead at the top while we waited for the rest of the cars before we could descend down the same route. Needless to say, this proved too much and we ejected two litres of coolant from the overflow after stopping. After ten minutes I was able to remove the coolant recovery bottle top and pour two litres of water in which was sucked back into the cooling engine without having to depressurize the system. By dusk we were climbing the stunning yet notorious Tizi-n-Test pass over the high Atlas and on our way into Marrakech. A couple of 8th place tests took us up to 15th overall.

Only two tests were on the schedule for the final half-day and we were able to leave all our luggage and spares in the hotel resulting in a transformation in the car's handling. With four minutes before the start of the last stage I noticed we had our first puncture of the event in one of the nearly bald rear tyres. Luckily the spare was the only item left in the boot and we narrowly made the start after a hurried swap. This last stage saw us sideways through most of the 12 minutes and setting an incredible 3rd fastest overall with only the two modern ex-works Peugeot 205s quicker.

Returning to the hotel, we crossed the finish line, 15^{th} overall and won a trophy for 3^{rd} in class. Timing is everything - and as I turned the car around in the car park the rear wheel fell off with all four studs snapped. Thirty minutes earlier would have had needed a parachute to survive.

Closing Thoughts

An endurance rally can be mentally and physically exhausting and yet offers unrivalled exhilaration and a unique way to see the world. I'm not sure I'd do another but if I did. I would be more aware of the extreme risks involved. Using a car without a full cage, modern seats and harnesses is too dangerous and the use of helmets on test sections would be advisable. The Tiger was well prepared and survived both the rally and the return trip without hiccup but was far too heavy with the mobile workshop I carried in the boot. I wanted to make sure I could fix almost any failure but to be competitive you need to ditch as much weight as possible and if needed fly parts in overnight. The thick and strong sump guard is a necessity - ours was inadequate. The engine would have performed better with a road camshaft giving more torgue and less top end power and the tyres at 195 were wider than needed. A 185 width, more suited for tarmac would have been more nimble and put less strain on the studs and bearings.



Owain Lloyd January 2010

Day and Date			Depart	Destination	Kms
Day 1	7th Nov	Sat	Kent	Le Mans	498
Day 2	8th Nov	Sun	Le Mans	Burgos	872
Day 3	9th Nov	Mon	Burgos	Ronda	833
Day 4	10th Nov	Tue	Ronda	Meknes	435
Day 5	11th Nov	Wed	Meknes	Meknes	419
Day 6	12th Nov	Thu	Meknes	Midelt	356
Day 7	13th Nov	Fri	Midelt	Ouarzazate	519
Day 8	14th Nov	Sat	Ouarzazate	Marrakech	528
Day 9	15th Nov	Sun	Marrakech	Marrakech	206
Day 10	16th Nov	Mon	Marrakech	Rest and Re-fit	
Total = 4666 kms					

Route Itinerary – with overly optimistic distances

A quote from Owain's rally blog "Just read blog and really enjoyed it. We all had a fantastic time on the rally and meeting you guys was a bonus. As the 'babies' of the event and newcomers to rallying you had a lot to learn, but learn you did. Great the way you pulled up the field. Can't believe your luck with the wheel. Wouldn't have been much fun when sideways on gravel on one of the scary unfenced roads where a parachute would have been more use than a roll cage. Looking forward to meeting you both again in Jan." www.casablancachallenge.com for more info?