



To Hel & Back



BEFORE BEGINNING this month we would like to thank those who contributed to help us get on the road – parents, girlfriends, sponsors and all our friends – all concerned know who you are, so thank you. Without your generosity we couldn't have even got this far.

When we last wrote we had just finished the crossmember and, as always, since then we have been busy little bees.

Our delayed departure meant our Egyptian visas would be invalid so with the ferry booked these now had to be run up to London in double quick time. A few days later Tom went to collect both passports only to be told that he was not allowed to collect both of the visas, only his own. This was strange considering one of us had consistently dropped off/collected passports at all previous embassies – including the Egyptian one. After a lot of re-jigging with other commitments we collected Carl's passport three days before the off – a bit nerve-racking and possibly a good taster of the red tape to come.

On the car front, the lovely chaps at Ring Automotive sent down some

40 countries, 30,000 miles, 2 continents, 1 trip!

FROM EUROPEAN SNOW TO AFRICAN SAND

The boys have been on a steep learning curve on their hellish preparation schedule, but now the 110's wheels are rolling and African soil has been touched

Words and Photos by: Carl James and Tom Picton

of their latest bits for us to trial through Africa. We wired in an extra two Ring air-horns which operate simultaneously with the existing air-horn we have – it is fair to say that we have more than been holding our own in the cities. Additionally we are loving the cordless (and corded) worklights, making working on the car and day to day jobs that much easier.

hitting the road

Following the crossmember catastrophe, we felt the need to dawd the back end of the car in underseal to help prevent the inevitable rot. We also had to repair a faulty handbrake, replace the diff-lock switch, replace a couple of persistently leaking oil seals and re-fit our Dixon Bate rear tow point to accommodate our shiny new Bradley Doublelock pin-hitch. Needless to say, a lot of hours have been spent under the car and the Draper impact socket set has once again proved its worth in dealing with rusty bolts.

In among this time we also had to make decisions on which bits of recovery kit to take as we have quite a few items which weigh a fair bit

and, ultimately, perform the same role. Cue a day at a muddy but deserted motorway service road to test, practice, learn and take our minds off ongoing mechanical gremlins. Within a few minutes we had the car up on three wheels, then two wheels using the air jack and hi-lift.

The air-jack works by pumping gas from the exhaust into a tough rubber bag, which is then placed under the car and lifts it as it inflates. Thanks once again to the guys from the Land Rover Experience for lending us this for the duration of the trip.

imparting a wealth of knowledge

Once we had ticked off the last of the jobs above, we embarked upon a week of talks in local schools to help the fundraising after it had stagnated a little following our delayed departure. The response we received from so many children and teachers alike was fantastic and re-invigorated us to get going following many disheartening moments with a faulty car and empty wallets.

As well as hoping that doing some publicity would result in more fundraising for the charities, we

Main:
Stunning alpine vistas in
Morzine, France.

also wanted to bring some focus back to the other aspects of our trip. Our original idea of completing an expedition through some of the most amazing countries on the planet while raising money for two important causes had been hijacked by the car and was now almost purely mechanical related.

While we have undoubtedly learned very useful mechanical skills, we always wanted the trip to be about more than simply a year long mechanics lesson – we wanted to enjoy and savour the experience of driving a Land Rover in Africa, not dread it. With this in mind it was great to do some fundraising and discuss some of the wider issues with the trip and the countries which we shall be going to.

The Saturday before we left, a small leaving party was organised in the pub down the road. A really nice crowd turned out to wish us well and buy us a beer. To be polite, we drank as much as we could. A lot of thank yous were said and our only regret was not having enough time with each person. A small raffle was organised and thanks go to P&O, Bradt Travel





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guides and the Waggon and Horses in Chalfont St Peter for generously providing prizes. In total, almost £500 was raised for the charities and, as we awoke with very sore heads on Sunday, we felt a lot better about having had a chance to say goodbye to so many people.

However, no matter how much we wanted to leave all mechanical musings behind us in the final week, the old girl wasn't finished with us yet. Due to changes with the fuel line caused when we replaced the crossmember, the car wouldn't start properly. This was put down to a poor fitting on the fuel pipe coming out of the diesel tank allowing air into the fuel line.

A simple swap of the pipe wasn't possible and every garage seemed

Top left:
Time spent in the Mont Blanc tunnel.
Above right:
Bonnet up in central Amsterdam

and exhausted, so a new tank was ordered a week before departure. With this done, the car started first time, every time, so problem solved we thought until we found a puddle of diesel on the drive on Thursday, with us booked on a ferry for Sunday.

Cue panicked phonecalls on Friday morning and a trip to Wimbledon for Tom to collect a Bearmach tank. Closer inspection of the vehicle showed the first new tank had been dented in transit, buckling the required flush surface which the sender hooks into. By Friday night we were sorted. Job done. Finished, but we (and Phil, Carl's Dad) were carrying a few less hairs and fingernails. Thanks to Adrian at Bearmach for organising everything at such short notice.

As P&O had helped us out with

affair into a 'bung it in, we'll sort it out later' job.

A very understated departure from home, waved off by parents, and we were finally on the road. A moment or two of silence, before we both admitted to being sodding nervous about the whole thing. Having had a good laugh at ourselves for being so highly stressed, we made OK time to Dover and checked in to P&O with seven minutes to spare. Some would say we were six minutes too early.

taking stock on the sea

It was a very strange ferry crossing with nothing much to do for a couple of hours but try to rationalise the million and one things going through our minds. We were sad to be leaving behind loving families and lovely girlfriends and slightly nervous about undertaking such a trip in a car which seemed determined to smoke more and leak more oil every day.

This aside, we were very excited about the first week in familiar Europe with friends along the way. We made plans for the first leg of the journey, a relatively straightforward trip to the suburbs of Amsterdam, to meet Carl's relatives.

After our first big drive, we rocked up in Utrecht late on the Sunday night to be met by a small and excited group of very friendly, very drunk Netherlands and following a lot of hellos, we got a good night's

We arrived in Utrecht late on Sunday to be met by a small and excited group of friendly and drunk Netherlands

to have a four-week delay when ordering a new pipe from Land Rover. Additionally we had to hammer and glue the sender unit into position in order to stay in the badly rusted hole – a one time deal that if ever needed replacing would necessitate a new tank. This further inhibited working in the area.

All other options were explored

the ferry crossing, we had decided to take our time, make our departure day a leisurely affair and had planned to stroll down to Dover for the 3.15pm ferry.

However, despite 'the best laid plans of mice and men' and all that, we were running late and we had to concede that our packing would have to move on from a carefully placed

raising money for



Alzheimer's
Research Trust

and



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sleep, after which we were taken for a tour round Amsterdam by Rob, Carl's cousin.

Amsterdam is a very different sight by daylight and male British tourists may be surprised to know that it extends for quite some way outside of the Red Light District. Needless to say Tom saw little else, but had his horizons broadened by Carl and Rob.

The following day, we traversed the beautiful waterways to see Carl's aunt and uncle, Tom and Barbara. It was lovely to know that the trip had now started, and here we were, clocking up the miles on the smooth continental roads. As this was the first stop, we took time to repack the truck, making loads of space after the hurried packing on Sunday.

Forty-eight hours in and we were already fed up with emptying huge camping bags each time we wanted new clothes, so we re-jigged the cupboards and now have a clothes shelf each, at the expense of food storage which has moved to a box. At the end of the day it was boxers or biscuits and boxers won.

From Utrecht we burned some late night miles to break up the 11-hour drive to the Alps. After a lovely supper by Rob, it was decided that Tom would drive so Carl had a beer and bashed out a blog on the laptop as Tom listened to the football on 5-live – who says life on the road is hard?

After an overnight stop in Liege

among the lorries we headed on down to Luxembourg and brimmed the tank, jerrycans and our pockets with cheap as chips diesel – it was so cheap we even treated the old girl to V-power.

beer and football

We arrived in Morzine at a sociable 7pm, parked up in town and had a beer as we waited for our good friend and host Paul – the kind chap who made our wonderful website – to arrive back from the airport. After watching some football we fired up the car to shoot up to Paul's, only to find that the headlights didn't work. Great. So using the spotlights we drove through town hoping we wouldn't blind a copper en route to Riders Retreat HQ.

A thousand miles down and we decided it was time to give the car a little TLC so our plans to climb a mountain or have a half-day skiing were put on hold until we had done a few bits.

Firstly the tent was aired after having been packed away wet a few days prior. Engine levels were checked and topped up as necessary and then the focus moved firmly to the headlights. Five hours later and we knew that the battery was fine, fuses all fine, earths all fine, bulbs fine, wiring fine and relay below the fusebox fine. We were baffled to say the least until further tracing of the wiring

Above left:

As the snow falls in the mountains, the drying tents comes down sharpish.

Above right:

Under the bridge in Port Genoa waiting for the ferry.

took us to another relay, a bright pink one. This bad-boy had seven spade connectors and looked badly corroded. When bypassed, the lights worked immediately.

After a lot of expensive phonecalls and trying various garages we realised we wouldn't be able to source a new one so decided to bodge the wiring and try to get one sent out later. Unfortunately by this point it was too late to do anything active, so we set about updating the blogs, Facebook, Mapvivo and Twitter while also e-mailing the family to say hi.

The next morning we filled up the water container and jerrycans with fresh (and free) mountain water and shot out of the mountains heading for Italy. Through the Mt Blanc tunnel and back on the motorway we made great time, save for one nerve-racking stop to try and identify a loud whirring, bearing type noise which





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had appeared as the car became very hot on the way up a steep hill to the tunnel. After a few minutes stop the noise seemed to disappear – we figured it might be overheating in the gearbox or t-box so decided to check levels the next day.

We arrived late in the beautiful traditional city of Genoa to be met by prostitutes and loads of them. Tom counted 45 until Carl insisted he was to focus on his driving. While trying to find our way out of the city to find a quiet area to sleep we saw a huge Unimog, followed by an overland equipped Land Cruiser roar past only to pull up in the middle of the road by what we thought was the down-

Above left:
Children pour around the 110 as we visited schools before our departure.

Above right:
Draper proved to be a very generous sponsor.

Below:
The 110 surveying the Tunisian coastline on our first day in Africa.



back at 1am we debated whether we really wanted to stay here as we felt the area was a complete hole and weren't happy with putting the tent up.

Eventually, when more truckers and overlanders arrived in the vicinity we decided to stay and got into bed at 2am. Broken sleep followed with the constant clatter of starting and stopping diesel engines and the obligatory horn beeping, as anywhere in Italy. At 6am the noise escalated to the ridiculous and we poked our heads out of the tent to find we were the only ones still parked in the middle of the street – and there was now a lot of moving traffic. Where previously there had been the best



without luck and then dodged the torrential rain on our way back to the car.

Aboard the ferry we instantly scouted the apparently only usable electric socket and got the laptop going, watching back to back episodes of Sharpe. If by some small chance Sean Bean owns a Land Rover and reads this magazine, we both want to have your babies.

Many hours of broken sleep later and we were ushered off the ferry and into the bright sunshine. The first inches on African soil. A slightly surreal experience, disturbed abruptly by pushy customs guards who held us up for the majority of the next hour.

A few return trips to the same small officer with the VO5 and the passports, and we were done. From the port, the route into Tunis was easy and we drove round everywhere looking for an overland-friendly hotel, only to find it now closed. With every cloud though, there is a silver lining and so here we find ourselves in a free beach-side car park, the surf washing gently up the beach and the sun setting over the Med and with it, our last glimpse of Europe for the next year.

We are but 1/30th of the way round, but finally, thankfully, we are rolling rubber in Africa. **LRM**

While trying to find our way, we saw a huge Unimog and an overland prepped Land Cruiser

ramp to an underground carpark. We introduced ourselves and it turned out that this was actually the ferry port entrance (which we had found entirely by mistake) and pretty much the only safe place in town to sleep.

a town bathed in red light

So we tucked the car up close in front of the Unimog and went for a wander to check out the area. Now there's not many ways you can explain a late night walk around a prostitute filled town but please believe us we simply wanted to see a bit more of where we were – for this was the first truly unknown place of the trip. Arriving

part of 100 vehicles, now only we remained. A speedy pack-up followed and we headed into the newly open ferry gate to find somewhere to continue our sleep.

On the day of the sailing we had time to kill so cooked up a feast of food for breakfast, as well as some to be taken onto the boat to keep us topped up for the next 22 hours. We searched around for internet cafes in Genoa

