



Rolls-Royce Enthusiasts' Club
A Supplement to Bulletin 226



Peking
to *Paris*



Lion dancing at the start in Beijing: Philip Young from the Classic Rally Association with Lord Montagu and his 1915 Vauxhall.

Peking to Paris

in a pink Rolls-Royce

*Written by John Stuttard,
who recently completed
this 10,000 mile challenge*

IT TAKES ten hours to fly from Beijing to Paris. The distance is approximately 6,000 miles as the crow, or perhaps a 747 Jumbo jet, flies. By land it is an altogether different story. On 6th September, 1997, ninety-four prewar and classic cars lined up in Beijing. Some forty-three days and 10,000 miles later, eighty-two vehicles drove triumphantly into the Place de la Concorde and wrote themselves into the history books.

The 'Peking to Paris Motor Challenge', as it was christened by the organisers, the UK based Classic Rally Association, was a competitive rally for some, but for many it was an opportunity to travel in an old vehicle through some of the world's most fascinating countries and over some of the world's worst roads. The only previous occasion on which a rally had successfully completed the journey from Peking to Paris was in 1907, when an Italian aristocrat, Prince Borghese, had finished first (out of five starters) in an Itala car. Why was it then that our 1934 20/25 Barker bodied sports saloon, affectionately known as 'Harrison' after the first owner Henry Harrison Stuttard, should have started every morning and not experienced a single mechanical hitch? The only problems encountered were eight punctures, a dented

Chinese Beijing jeep which refused to get over to his side of the road, one dead sheep in Western China and some dents to the bodywork as the road turned into a boulder-laden stream just short of the Tibetan-Nepalese border.

So why no hitch? This is a question which Rolls-Royce 20/25 owners will probably not find hard to answer. After all, the car was created by the greatest motor engineer of all time. Also, the roads in Europe in the 1930s were not all that good, resulting in the need for a sturdy chassis, robust springs and shock absorbers and a certain amount of over engineering, all of which proved invaluable on the roads of China, Tibet and Pakistan. Asian potholes, ruts, mud and streams proved too much for the Aston Martins, Bugattis, Buicks, Chevrolets, Citroëns, Marmons, Mercedes, Stutzes, Vauxhalls and Volvos, but not for the 20/25. Even the thin air at high altitudes in the Himalayas did not deter the carburettor from functioning perfectly. Harrison just kept on going.

But perhaps an added reason for the lack of problems was the amount of time spent in preparation. "Well begun is half done," quoted my cousin John Boothman, who is a Derby Bentley man. "I have to confess that when you first told me you were taking the 20/25, I thought you were slightly mad! It seemed to me that such a refined, complex piece of machinery would never stand up to the punishment meted out by maintaining high average speeds for day after day on unmade roads. The fact that I have been proved wrong is a fine testament to the quality of the car and the skill of its crew." Indeed, it was the preparation that was half the battle. Most of this comprised simply ensuring that the original parts were functioning correctly. Very few modifications were made to the original 1934 specification.

In 1990, Ristes Motor Company had totally overhauled Harrison's engine following an inspection by the RREC's Richard Barton soon after I had acquired the car at auction. To use Richard's words: "You've bought a very nice looking car, but it's totally clapped out." As a result, kingpins and shackle pins were replaced, a new exhaust system was fitted, the radiator core was renewed, the petrol tank was removed and cleaned, the brakes were taken apart, the steering box was overhauled and an overdrive was fitted — something which came into its own on the long flat stretches of asphalt in Iran when Harrison would reach 75 mph quite comfortably. To ensure the car was properly functioning and totally run in, I had driven it on four rallies in Europe between 1992 and 1995 — two Italia Classicas and two Rallyes Monte-Carlo des Voitures Anciennes.

Of course, more needed to be done and, at the beginning of 1997, our motor engineer, Roy O'Sullivan, who was to accompany us on the Challenge, started further restoration. The one-shot chassis lubrication was totally overhauled, a new engine vibration damper was installed, wheels and brakes came off and were scrupulously checked. Some modifications were introduced that might have put off a concours judge, but of which Henry Royce I am sure would have approved.

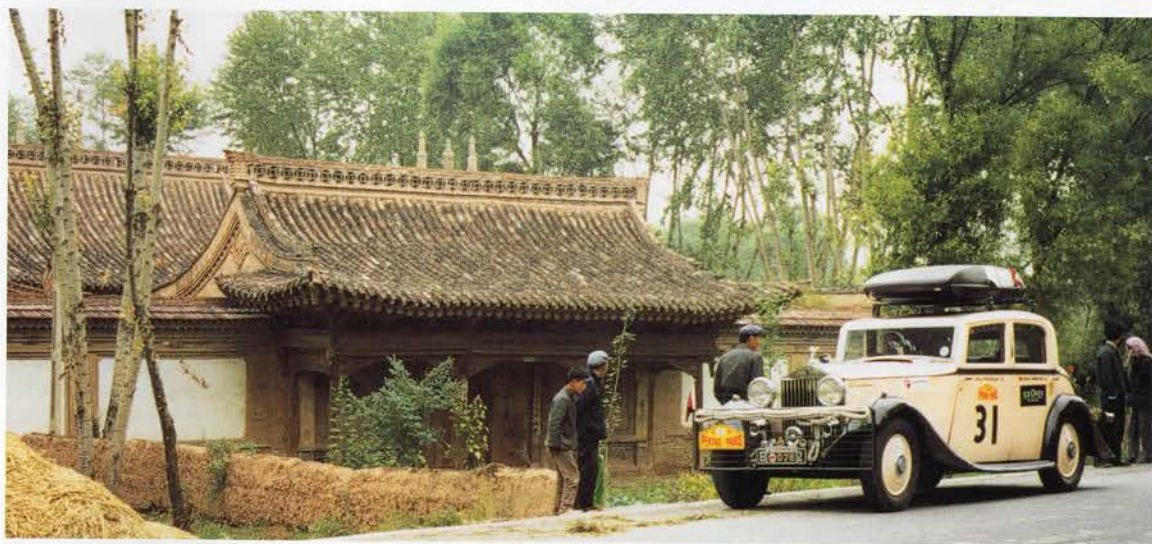
- A bull bar was specially made and attached to the front irons. This proved essential — for judging cattle and Beijing jeeps out of the way and for hanging rally plates, promotional material and, at one stage, a ram's head that just fell off the back of a lorry.
- The car had, on occasions, to be capable of travelling 300 miles without refuelling. To achieve this two five gallon tanks were fitted in the boot. Of necessity, the autovac had to be disconnected (but left in situ for emergencies) and a new petrol pump installed.
- A new oil filter was fitted.
- A roof rack was screwed to the ash framed roof and a container fixed to it to hold our tents, sleeping bags and holdalls — one each, to conserve weight and space.

By July, the car was ready to receive its coat of 'salmon pink' paint, at the request of the Weekend Financial Times, who featured Harrison's progress every Saturday in the motoring section of the Weekend Review. This pink was later to receive some flattering attention as well as some derogatory remarks, the latter typically from Australian entrants on the rally who questioned the gender of the car and its English occupants. Off then to Felixstowe and by container, care of Jeremy Barker of CARS UK, to Tianjin, a large city that acts as the port of Beijing on the east coast of China.

Harrison's crew assembled in Beijing a few days before the start. Apart from Roy, our engineer, the other three all came from international accountants Coopers & Lybrand — Simon Anderson, a long time Coopers man, who had served in Pakistan and Iran in the 1960s and who spoke Farsi; Gordon Barrass, who had worked at the British Embassy in Beijing in the 1970s and spoke mandarin; and me, currently working in Beijing as chairman of Coopers & Lybrand's business in China. Four people seems a lot for a 1930s saloon car on a rally and certainly with three tons fully laden we were conscious of trying not to take too much luggage. However, we wanted to share the enormous cost of the undertaking and also to have different companions in the car over such a long distance. This was to prove important as the rally entered its fourth week, when some of the drivers and co-drivers were no longer on speaking terms. With four there is never a problem, since if one gets grumpy the others will soon sort him out. It also helps share the responsibilities.

The organisers, the Classic Rally Association, had warned us that four in the car was too many and that we would probably not make it to Paris, a prediction that we were later delighted to prove wrong. A fifth member of our crew, David Colvin, the British Ambassador to Belgium, was to replace Gordon Barrass in Istanbul, as the linguistic needs of Europe replaced those of Asia.

*Top: Giving assistance to Lord Montagu's 1915 Vauxhall after radiator problems in China.
Middle: A Chinese temple in Qinghai Province.
Right: At the source of the mighty Yangtse River.*



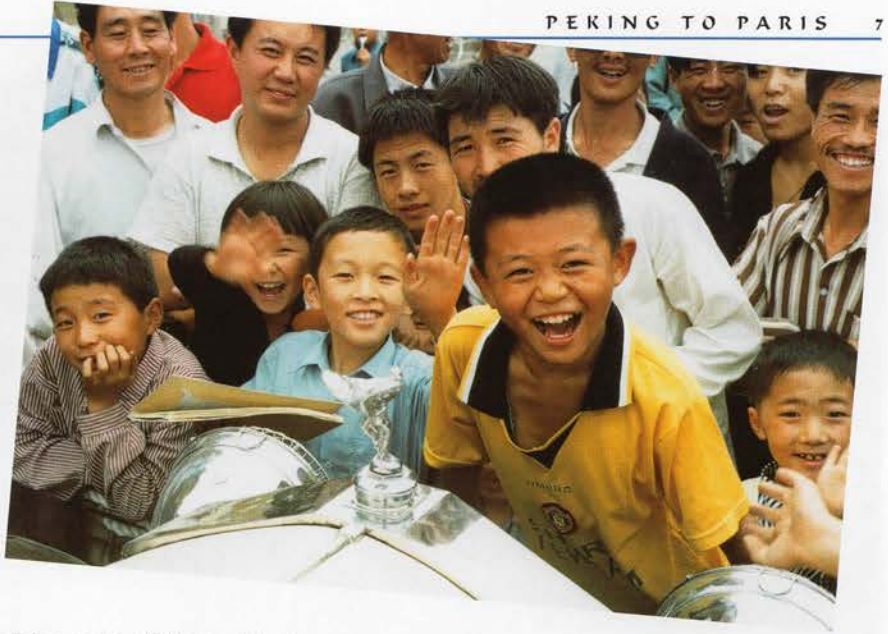


Above: Marmon with a broken half shaft, Lanzhou, China.

Right: Chinese camels take little notice of rally cars.

Below: Silver Cloud undergoing first aid in Lanzhou, Western China.





An admiring crowd in Western China.

To help defray some of the costs of the event, a number of sponsors had come forward: Eagle Star, H. R. Owen, Jardine Fleming, Ristes Motor Company and Standard Chartered. Separately, our crew decided to raise funds for the British Red Cross in support of a disaster relief programme in Nepal, in memory of Peter Walsh, a former partner and friend from Coopers & Lybrand in the UK. Peter, who sadly died of cancer in November 1996, was a great traveller and inspired others to broaden their outlook and horizons through travel. The Red Cross fund raising was a way of saying 'thank you'.

At the container port of Tianjin the cars were unloaded and given Chinese number plates. The short (70 mile) drive on the motorway to Beijing claimed its first casualty, a 1932 Ford Model B saloon, which started to lose its big end. Despite valiant efforts by the local Ford Motor Company in Beijing the car never officially started the rally — 1930s big ends are hard to come by in China.

Crossing China

The People's Republic of China is a huge and populous country, as we were to find out in the twelve days it took us to cross it. With 1.2 billion people, China has around 50 million in the police and the army. We reckoned we saw at least 100,000 of them lining the roads and cordoning off the huge crowds in the towns and villages through which we passed.

The rally began with a police escort for the 93 cars from the centre of Beijing to the Great Wall at Badaling, where there was an official ceremony with accompanying band and lion dancing. Each competitor was given a bronze plaque to commemorate the rally. The British Ambassador, Sir Len Appleyard, came to see the cars off, bowing deeply as the pink 20/25 purred past.

The first day was relatively easy, climbing into the hills

to the provincial capital of Zhangjiakou. However, it was not without incident. A second prewar Ford got into difficulties. This time a 1928 Model A Roadster broke down on the way to the Great Wall. Then, soon after the start, another tragedy occurred. The fan on Lord Montagu's 1915 Prince Henry Vauxhall came loose and tore chunks out of its radiator. With two skilled engineers to hand, Roy O'Sullivan and the Beaulieu Motor Museum's Doug Hill, the car was back on the road within three hours, but its heating system never recovered from the incident and the car was withdrawn two days later and shipped back to the UK. Lord Montagu hitched a lift in a 1967 Phantom V, which used to convey Queen Elizabeth on her visits to Australia, now owned and driven by Australians John Matheson and Jeanne Eve. This was later to break its main spring in a pothole in Western China, but after emergency repairs in Kathmandu drove successfully to Paris.

The next few days took the rally into the arid plains of Inner Mongolia, near the Gobi Desert, where the scenery varied between heavy industry and stunning landscapes dotted with yurts, the tents in which the nomadic Mongolian people live. We followed the mighty Yellow River, which floods from time to time, causing incalculable damage and loss of life. Then, surprisingly, we found ourselves on a 100 mile new motorway which had recently been completed and was opened especially for the rally cars. There was no one else on the road.

A feature of the rally in Northern China was the huge numbers of people and policemen who lined the route. In one city, Linhe, we estimated crowds of over 100,000, including waving schoolchildren who had been given time off school to watch the cars go by and who threw flowers and passed messages of support in very broken English through the car windows. During the China leg



Roy O'Sullivan brews up, Western China.

alone we reckoned that over one million people must have seen the rally, usually cheering or simply watching in sheer disbelief.

By day five the rally had reached Langzhou, a major city on the old silk route in Central China. As the cars approached the outskirts, the participants were met and escorted by police cars with lights flashing and sirens wailing. A rest day was necessary to prepare for the climb to the roof of the world.

The next five days were to prove the most challenging of the entire rally, as the roads got worse and the towns became scarcer. There were three nights camping, the highest at 16,000 feet, where it was so cold that one's breath froze on the inside of the tent. In many places the roads were being repaired, which resulted in off-road excursions through mud, over rocks and in conditions more suited to four wheel drive vehicles. During this stage of the rally the first few cars started to drop out — broken half shafts, damaged suspensions and engine failures were common causes. Many of these problems could have been avoided either through better pre-rally preparation or through more cautious driving. The German driver of a museum entered 1907 La France had to be invalidated out when he caught pneumonia after encountering sleet on the Tibetan plateau. A few Brighton runs might have prepared him better for the conditions.

We travelled on the highest road in the world — at 17,800 feet, the Tangula Pass sits on the border between

China and Tibet. The scenery was quite spectacular: the attractive Kunlun mountain range, white peaks, rushing rivers, yaks and people with beautiful costumes — and simply appalling roads.

It was therefore with some relief that the rally cars limped into Lhasa, the capital of Tibet, for a day's rest and much needed repair to broken cars. Much to the chagrin of other contestants, Harrison's crew went sight-seeing! But another onslaught was to follow.

From Lhasa the road runs west, on a rough metalled surface, to Xigaze, Tibet's second city and the traditional seat of the Panchen Lama at the 15th century Tashilumpo Monastery. Some 175 miles from Lhasa, this small, dusty, but attractive town is the last refuelling stop on the way to Kathmandu. From here the cars on the rally had to rely on bowsers (petrol tankers) arranged by the China International Sports Travel Group, who were the efficient organisers of the rally's progress through China.

After Xigaze the villages became less prosperous, but there were the remains of old fortifications dating from a time when Tibet was stronger, both politically and economically, and sought to protect itself from foreigners — unsuccessfully as it turned out from the expansionist British Empire in the 19th century. The road climbed to 16,000 feet until the cars reached their resting place for the night, close to Everest base camp, where the world's highest mountain can be seen — and what a sight it was, changing from white to orange as the sunset caught the



A minor diversion, Western China.

summit. A rare sight at the end of an exhausting day.

It is difficult to imagine a more barren place than the Tibetan plateau. Over 12,000 feet high, there is little to support human or animal life. The occasional herd of yaks brings some movement to an otherwise desolate part of the world. Yet it must also rank as one of the most spectacular places to visit. The awe-inspiring Himalayan mountain range with its jagged snow-capped peaks leaves one breathless with amazement. Few people, only mountaineers and intrepid trekkers, have

the privilege of seeing these extraordinary sights.

It was through this semi-lunar mountainous landscape that the cars took four days to travel a mere 400 miles from Lhasa, the capital of Tibet, to Kathmandu, the capital of Nepal. This road, which links the two great emerging nations of the 21st century, India and China, is currently more suited to four wheel drive vehicles. Perhaps in ten years' time there will be a four lane highway which will bring tourists in coaches to Everest base camp, but not yet. At present this 'high road' is not

A village full of haystacks, Western China





One of the blacker moments — Harrison needs pulling out of the sand by one of the rally support vehicles on an off the road diversion in Western China.

for the faint-hearted.

From Everest base camp to the Nepalese border, unbelievably, the road surface got worse, with rutted sections and huge potholes waiting to damage suspensions and shock absorbers. Of the ninety-four starters in Beijing there were then only eighty-two cars travelling under their own steam. Seven had officially retired and five were on flatbed trucks on their way to Kathmandu, either to be contained home or to visit the repair shops to try to mend broken limbs.

The support crew on the rally, in their Vauxhall Fronteras, were the heroes, pulling no fewer than thirty cars out of ditches and mud, stopping to provide emergency repairs and also giving roadside first aid. But it was on the rally's final day through China that the cars needed most help. In the last ten miles before the Nepalese border the road dropped from 10,000 feet to 3,000 feet, down an escarpment littered by landslides. During the previous week the road had been breached in two places and, after emergency repairs, was still only open to cars, with care.

The descent was terrifying. In places the mud was two feet thick. In other places the road was a stream, with boulders lurking to damage sumps and hole petrol tanks. The penalty for a failure — a 300 feet drop. Miraculously, Harrison survived the ordeal with little more than a dented front wing and buckled running boards. A 1929 Bentley, driven by a Dane, had a narrow escape when a slab of rock crashed down on the road shortly after he had passed under an overhang. The undercarriage of a second W. O. Bentley, driven by an American, became stuck on a boulder and had to be lifted off by other competitors, demonstrating the team spirit which was a feature of the entire rally.

The journey through Nepal and India

After the Chinese border town of Zhangmou, the frontier, in the form of Friendship Bridge, was a welcome sight. Perhaps as incredible as the descent from the Tibetan plateau was the warmth of the welcome from hundreds of schoolchildren lining the roadside, waving Red Cross flags.

As Kathmandu approached, the roadside greetings intensified. Garlands of flowers and written messages of support were showered on the cars and their occupants, who were made to feel like conquering heroes. One misspelt message seemed to capture the corporate spirit: 'Peking-Perish Old Timer Car Rally' (*sic*).

It was therefore something of a relief for the eighty-seven cars, battered and bruised, to reach Kathmandu — the first car rally to cross the Tibetan-Nepalese border. It was also something of a first for Harrison — the first prewar Rolls-Royce to enter Lhasa and the first Rolls-Royce to enter Nepal from Tibet. There followed two further days of rest, a reception at the British Residence and repairs to cars in Kathmandu before the rally continued to India. We also had time to visit the headquarters of the Nepalese Red Cross and to see for ourselves the efficient organisation which would be the recipient of our fund raising efforts — a warehouse full of blankets, jerry cans and emergency tents for the relief of disasters

Opposite top: 1967 Phantom V breaks its main spring on the Tibetan plateau. GSF29 gives first aid.
Middle: On the Tibetan plateau, with owner John Stuttard.
Right: GSF29 with crew at the highest road in the world — the Tangua Pass in Western China.





which that country is, from time to time, subjected to.

It was with a heavy heart that we left Nepal, but it was during this section of the rally that we were to have the first of our eight punctures, caused undoubtedly by the poor roads we had experienced in the previous fortnight, but also by the weight of the car.

Entering India in the north is like going back to the days of the Raj. The tiger survives in what are now game reserves. In this area you can also find hill stations with cool climates and lakes and scenery that are reminiscent of Wales and the English Lake District. But as one travels south the heat of the Punjab becomes overpowering, as does the traffic and the number of people, ox carts and 'holy' cows which wander in the road and represent an enormous hazard for old and new cars alike.

The munificent sights of New Delhi, with its imposing buildings designed by Lutyens, form a highly suitable

backdrop for photographing old cars, particularly Rolls-Royce. After all, India was the largest export market for the Derby manufacturer in the 1930s. The Indians know, and love, the Royce. Another reception followed at the British Embassy, courtesy of the Ambassador, Sir David Gore-Booth.

If the Tibetan roads had the worst road surfaces, then the Indian roads had the worst drivers. It is very discon-

Above: With prayer wheels at the Potala Palace, Lhasa, Tibet.

Opposite top: Phantom V on a track near Lhasa, Tibet, with Australian co-owner Jeanne Eve still inside.

Harrison bears lucky ram's head.

Opposite middle: Phantom I, on left, dropped out in India. Seen here with Harrison at a cold camp site on the Tibetan plateau. Silver Dawn in the background.

Opposite right: Winter comes early on the Tibetan plateau.

Below: In front of the Potala Palace, Lhasa, Tibet.









Tibetans discover M&Ms — Harrison with John Stuttard and Gordon Barrass.

certing to be driving on a dual carriageway, on the correct side of the road, only to find that there are two heavily laden trucks coming towards you and expecting you to give way.

Three Islamic countries

Entering India from Nepal had been a nightmare, with a six-hour wait (for some) at immigration and customs. By contrast, in Pakistan the efficiency of immigration, customs and local police made motor travel through the country easy. Less friendly, however, were the roads, which resulted in our awarding Pakistan first prize for being the best car tyre repairer of the countries visited thus far. Tyres which would fail the MoT in the UK are kept going with the same technology I used as a teenager on my Raleigh cycle.

The reception in Lahore, the venue for another rest day, was friendly, but our crew had to spend most of the day looking unsuccessfully for new tyres for our 20/25. Rolls-Royce owners appeared with the offer of spares, but unfortunately all were of a different size, typically from Shadows and Silver Spurs.

It was in Quetta, in southern Pakistan, that the rally had its first and, mercifully, only fatal accident. The

German driver of a Volkswagen Beetle cabriolet and his son were killed when their car went out of control and hit a bus. As a result the competitive rallying for the next twenty-hour hours was stopped as entrants recovered from the shock and realised the dangers which they were facing.

Further west, for two days before reaching the border with Iran, the rally passed through Baluchistan. We began to appreciate why this region had been ungovernable for over 200 years. Most of the area is sandy desert with very few people. Apart from the few signs of human life the other main sight is the occasional herd of camels. There were also the remains of former British fortifications along the border with Afghanistan and numerous check points with rather frightening looking characters with beards and turbans carrying old and, no doubt, defective rifles and shotguns. There was a flavour of being in bandit country.

These two days proved to be very arduous driving — and hot — on the road for sixteen hours and thirteen

Top: The welcome at the Nepalese border by the Red Cross.

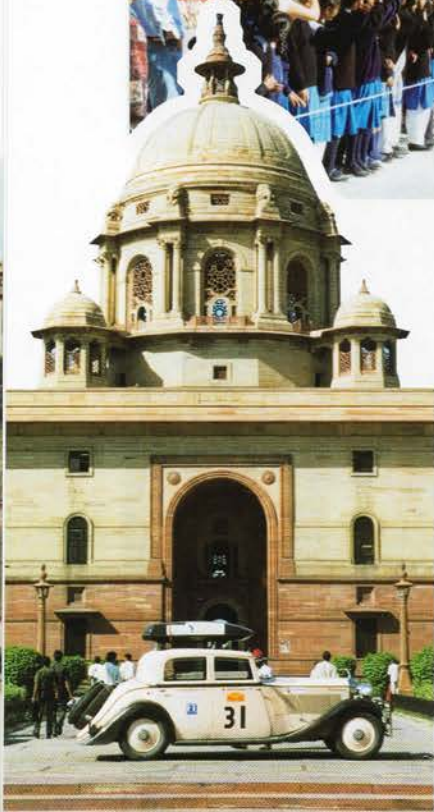
Middle: Red Cross headquarters in Kathmandu.

Right: In every village in Nepal there was a welcome from the Red Cross.





Top: Silver Cloud exits a car wash in Nepal.
Above: The official send off from Nainital, Northern India.
Left: In New Delhi.
Below: The team relaxes in New Delhi.





On some of the roads in Pakistan there was more sand than asphalt.

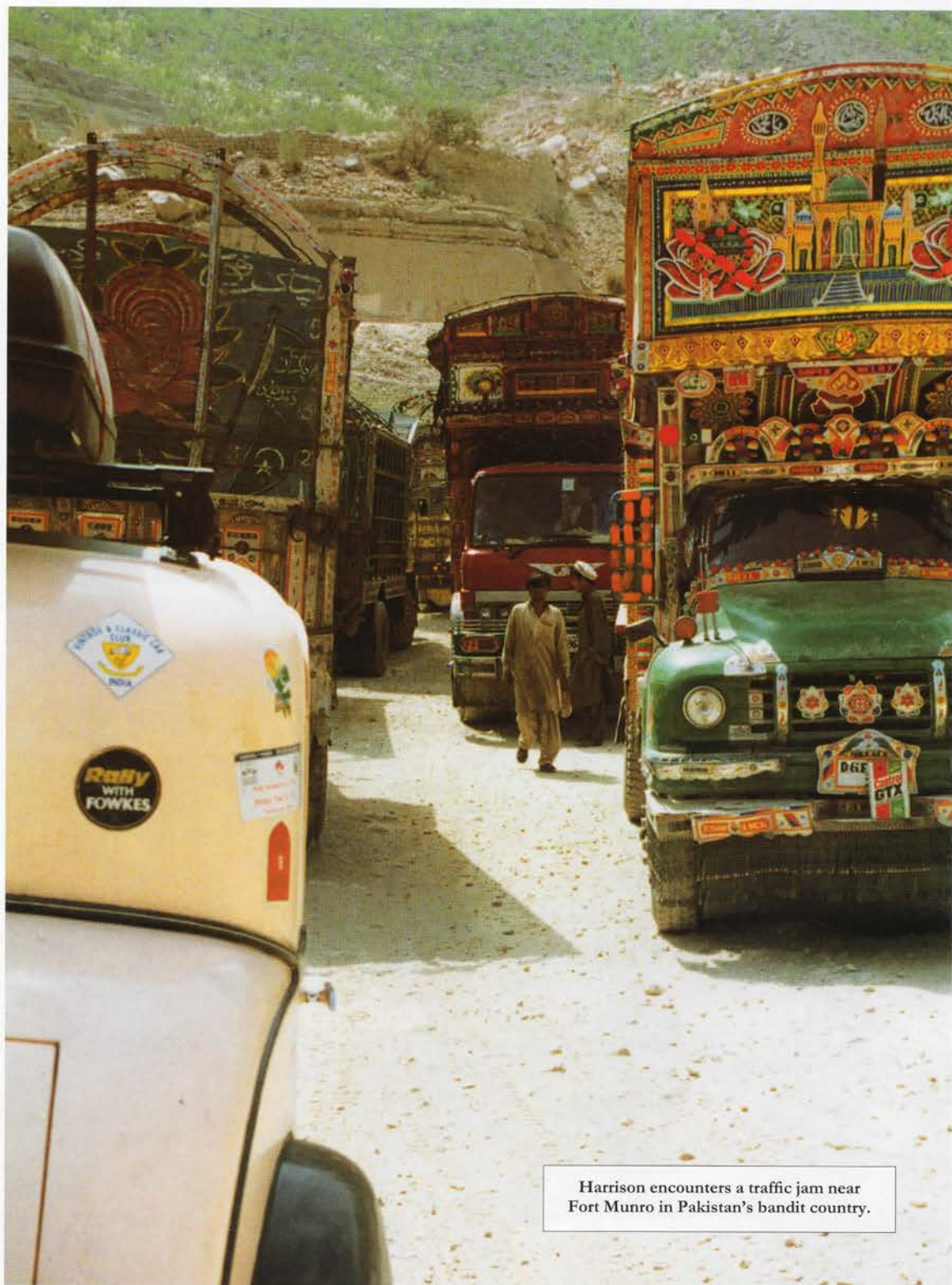
hours respectively and with temperatures in the Baluchistan desert which reached 40°C in the shade. Many cars struggled in the heat, but not Harrison, who cruised at between 70°C and 80°C. The only problem — two more punctures.

We entered Iran in the south-east, where the welcome matched that of Nepal, with efficient immigration and customs clearance. The rule of the religious Mullahs and

Imams in Iran has created a society which has not received good press in the West. As a result we saw few tourists, even at the famous historical and architectural sites. It is therefore in many respects an excellent time to visit Iran. However, the people we encountered en route were friendly and welcoming, which comes as a pleasant surprise compared to our international vision of a frenzied Islamic state. In almost every town and village we

Serenade for Harrison — Baluchistan, West Pakistan.





Harrison encounters a traffic jam near Fort Munro in Pakistan's bandit country.



The deserted city of Bam in southern Iran.

passed there were banners welcoming the rally participants, who were flatteringly described as 'athletes'. Life can, of course, be spartan — no alcohol, a strict dress code (even for foreigners), and hotel staff who do not understand the concept of 'service'. At one hotel the manager locked himself in his office rather than face some irate rally guests who were demanding their laundry before an early start the following morning.

However, this all pales into insignificance compared with the quite stunning sights. We had enough time during our four day crossing of Iran to see some memorable places. The deserted town of Arg-e Bam, which

dates from the 12th century and was a key resting point on the old silk route from China, is a Persian equivalent of Pompeii. Similar in many respects to a mediaeval European castle, it fell into disrepair over 100 years ago as borders closed and new trade routes by sea were opened up. Bam is also world famous for its black dates, which are the most succulent and nourishing I have ever tasted. We also had time to stop at the city of Yazd, the site of a Zoroastrian fire temple which houses a fire which is said to have been burning continuously since AD 470.

But the jewel for us in Iran was Isfahan, built largely

Isfahan, minus a wheel disc.





Spirit of Ecstasy and Mount Ararat — on the border between Iran and Turkey.

under the rule of Shah Abbas in the early 17th century. In his day it was said that if you have seen Isfahan you have seen 'half the world'. With the magnificent mosque and the seven-storey palace in Imam Square, laid out in 1612, and the 17th century double terraced bridges, it is easy to understand that it was quite stunning in its day. It is still a most attractive place to visit, particularly if one stays at the Hotel Abbasi, a former caravanserai which was converted into an hotel in the 1960s. With bedrooms and suites surrounding a main square filled with fountains and trees, it is a most delightful resting spot for the weary traveller and a convenient base from which to visit the sites.

Iran also has some excellent, albeit simple, dishes, including barley soup, fresh Iranian naan bread, kebabs and salads — yes, it is safe to eat in Iran. Surprisingly for a hot country, there is an abundance of dairy products and some of the best yoghurt; I have ever tasted. Tea taken sitting on large cushions on a mosaic floor, coupled with a mild smoke from a hubble-bubble, is also a must.

The cars on the rally voted Iran as having the best roads so far, a result of the large oil revenues from which the country has benefited.

The crossing from Iran to Turkey was memorable, not least because of the clear view of Mount Ararat (of Noah's Ark fame) some forty kilometres north of the border. To have crossed Asia and made it to Turkey was

quite an achievement, demonstrating the true grit of many of the participants.

Some cars disappeared for days on end, only to reappear with tales of suspensions being rebuilt in the early hours in back street garages. One competitor, Gerry Acher, in his 1932 Aston Martin, the smallest prewar car in the rally, was seriously delayed in western Pakistan, but finished up having tea and biscuits followed by dinner with the District Commissioner in his oasis garden in the middle of the desert. Still the most amusing incident of the rally so far is that of an Italian co-driver who was 'lost' early in the rally. At one rally control point he needed his route book stamped and asked a local policeman where he could get a 'stamp'. A kindly officer took him several miles in a police car to a post office in the nearest village to find a 'postage stamp', which caused his compatriot and the rally organisers great concern as they believed he might have been kidnapped. Such are the challenges and surprises of pan-continental motor rallying.

The easy bit

After a triumphal entry into Istanbul, the journey through Greece, Italy (including San Marino), Austria, Germany and France was like a Sunday afternoon outing. My wife, Lesley, had brought a new spare tyre by plane to Istanbul and we felt safe in the knowledge that further

punctures were unlikely to defeat us. After five weeks of tough road and weather conditions it was a relief to spend the last week on the rally travelling in Europe. We had time to stop for lunch and adjust to a more normal pace of life. Passing through Delphi, we stopped to ask the oracle if we would arrive safely in Paris. We journeyed along Lake Garda during the truffle season. Gewurztraminer and foie gras in Alsace were especially welcome after the culinary deprivations of Tibet.

But the entry into Paris proved to be a final challenge, since the rally route book bore no resemblance to the roads in the Parisian suburbs. Many cars got lost and tempers frayed almost at the moment of triumph. However, the finish at the Place de la Concorde with the accompanying champagne reception in Formula One style, was a magical moment after travelling over 16,000 kilometres in forty-three days.

The last week was not, however, without incident for many of the competitors. We had two more punctures. The car which had the closest escape was a Rover driven by a Yorkshireman, David Bull, and his accountant wife Angela, who lost a rear wheel and half shaft, which came loose and fell off while the car was crossing a bridge in the Austrian Alps. After numerous telephone calls by another competitor, David Drew, at around midnight, a replacement half shaft was located in Vienna on an enthusiast's car, which was dismantled overnight and flown by special plane to Lake Constance, thus enabling the Rover to continue, arriving in Reims at 3.30 in the morning, before a triumphal entry into Paris.

There was also talk of sabotage to the leading car, a 1942 Willys Jeep, driven by Phil Surtees. It was also

reported to him that someone 'in a position of authority' had been bemoaning the fact that the rally might be won by a four wheel drive jeep rather than a 'proper' rally car. Since sabotage was feared, the jeep was locked up overnight in a champagne cellar in Reims. On a happier note, and demonstrating the true spirit of the rally, when the jeep had clutch problems in Italy, Ted Thomas, who was driving a 1950 Ford in second place, helped to repair the clutch — showing the chivalry and camaraderie which had been features of this extraordinary event. The overall winner of the rally was the Willys Jeep.

Harrison finished well down the order, but this was due to the fact that we were in the touring category, having changed our crew at Istanbul, and also because of our decision to stop and take photographs, enjoy the countryside and have the occasional lunch stop. Out of the ninety-four cars which started in Beijing, eighty-two reached Paris, demonstrating the determination and true grit of the participants.

Our 20/25 Rolls-Royce car, as might be expected, did not break down once, except for the punctures which delayed progress from time to time. The fact that it came through unscathed, apart from dents picked up on the journey, is a tribute to Sir Henry Royce, but also to Ristes Motor Company, who renovated the engine in 1990, and to our motor engineer, Roy O'Sullivan, who prepared the car exceptionally well.

The other Rolls-Royce cars on the rally fared reasonably well. An Austrian-entered 1950 Silver Dawn, driven by Kurt Dichtl, and a 1965 Silver Cloud III, owned by Dane Erik Christiansen, had no difficulty. Peter Noble's 1955 Bentley Continental paved its own way across Asia,

Harrison and crew in front of the 6th century Ayasophia in Istanbul, Turkey.





Lord Montagu found his W.O. Bentley more reliable than the 1915 Vauxhall.

ever dependable.

On the other hand, those who modified original Rolls-Royce parts experienced problems. The Australian-entered 1967 Phantom V was lucky to rise again from the ashes after its main leaf spring was replaced, the original break caused partly by the addition of new 'heavier duty' modern springs. A similar problem befell an attractive 1928 boat-tail Phantom I, whose German owner, Gerhard Weissenbach, had unfortunately removed the autovac in favour of an electric pump that proved faulty and then experienced difficulties with the electrical system, again as a consequence of modern modifications. He was less fortunate and had to retire from the rally in India. But the message is clear — don't tamper with something that the master engineer spent many man years perfecting. Leave the original design and renovate the original parts, if you can.

Our thanks also go to the initiators of the Peking to Paris Motor Challenge, the Classic Rally Association, headed by Philip Young, and the marshals and officials who were efficient in their organisation and became great friends. They made the rally possible — after a gap of some ninety years.

For each of the participants, life can never be the same again. The countryside has been spectacular, the Kunlun mountains in China, the Tibetan plateau, Mount Everest at dusk, the Baluchistan desert in west Pakistan, Mount Ararat on the Iran/Turkey border, the welcome from schoolchildren waving Red Cross flags in Nepal, the thousands of people and policemen who lined the route in China and the friendliness of the Iranian welcome will also stand out.

And what about the record books?

For the rally:

1. The first motor rally to cross China using this route.
2. The first motor rally to cross from Tibet to Nepal.
3. The first motor rally through Iran for twenty years.

For Harrison:

1. The first prewar Rolls-Royce to enter Tibet from China.
2. The first Rolls-Royce to enter Nepal from Tibet.
3. The first Rolls-Royce to cross Tibet.
4. The oldest Rolls-Royce to drive from Peking to Paris.

These will enter the record books. However, in summary, it is difficult to match the words of Prince Borghese, who won the rally in 1907. He is quoted as saying:

"By driving from Peking to Paris, I have proved it is quite impossible to drive from Peking to Paris."

All eighty-two cars which finished the 1997 Motor Challenge would echo that sentiment.

Opposite top: 'Old and new' — GSF29 with a friend at the British Chancery in Paris at the end of the Peking to Paris Motor Challenge. John Stuttard with David Colvin, British Ambassador to Belgium.

Middle: Celebrating the arrival of GSF29 in the Place de la Concorde, after 10,000 miles.

Bottom: Champagne in Paris.



