

HIGH LIFE

Nothing beats waking up in a high vaulted bedroom, in a castle, on a hill and walking through its ancient stone corridors to a thoroughly modern coffee machine and a good Spanish breakfast. Such was the situation this morning for the Carrera Iberia crews who were preparing themselves for another epic day on the road.

As befits the season it was cool (but dry) this morning as we set a south westerly course through a dramatic landscape of canyons and tunnels alongside a vivid turquoise lake feeding into, and running out of the lazy Rio Guadalupe.

The road had been cut into deep folds of sedimentary rock and it was in a valley such as this that the first Regularity was run. The “road that time forgot” had long been bypassed by its wider and smoother sibling, but for us it was perfect and the 5km of intermittent broken tarmac gave the crews a great ride.

The finish of this section then led the rally to a “hidden” Passage Control - for a bit of fun - and thence to an altogether more serious Time Control in a cafe Cantavieja with impressive coffee and views to match.

The following long and fast road section was, thanks to an ongoing program of roadworks in the region, much improved since the recce and the straightened and well metalled surface fairly expedited our passage over a very misty Sierra de Gudar to the Masia la Torre, the lunch Time Control where the establishment had laid on a great spread of salad, lamb and fish.

Sadly Gavin and Diana Henderson never made it this far as their Bentley developed a magneto failure. They finished the day on a grua and are this evening looking at their options. Repair, retire, rent. We all hope it's the former.

Roy and Rachel Stephenson did make it into lunch however but were slightly delayed into the night halt because their Mustang broke down soon after lunch. The sweep team of Jamie Turner and Jack Amies however were quickly at their side just after we crossed into the beautiful ‘Province of Valencia’.



Otakar Chládek & Jindřiška Žemličková, 1971 Mercedes-Benz 350SL Cabrio



Christof Ley and Len Treeter, 1958 Mercedes-Benz Ponton

Photos: gerardbrown.co.uk



Bertie and Charlotte Van Houtte, 1925 Bentley 3-4 1/2



Charles and Nicola Stuart-Menteth, 1962 MGA MK2

Sadly as the engine had thrown a valve they'll be continuing in a hire car and for a Roy, this is his first DNF in 27 rallies!

Roadworks, which had been our friend this morning, proved to be our undoing this afternoon with a long section of the original route designated impassible. But, thanks to the good offices and expert attention, of Dick Appleton and Paul Heal in the advance car, John Spiller was able to produce a workaround and still deliver two amazing Regularities as per the schedule.

Sholto Gilbertson and Caspar Killick survived a minor scare in a fuel station right at the end of the Regularity when their (usually) faithful family Jaguar E Type failed to start and had to be pushed into life for the final furlong.

We were out of the woods though and onto the main roads by this time, so the crossing into the region of Castilla LaMancha, at the 1302m Puerto de Hontonar, presented few problems for anyone, so long as you kept the engine running.

A Passage Control in the village of Salvacenet gave the crews a short break before the final push into the Parador de Cuenca and another well deserved night halt in what has been described as one of Spain's "most gravity-defying hill towns".

Cuenca clings to steep limestone cliffs above two ravines and the UNESCO town still has a medieval Moorish character,

Dinner was another grand affair in another 'great hall' and it was good to see Edmund Peel and Sara MacDonald, who joined us for dinner this evening and will also be joining us in Africa next year. Suffice to say we're all looking forward to it.

Gerardus Mercator

Gerardus Mercator, Dispatch reporter