

Diary Notes on the 5th World Cup Rally September 28 –October 8 2003

Since our last adventure with Zippy, our 1974 2CV, I had spent the spring preparing the car with particular attention again to the suspension and the engine. The engine was a remanufactured unit from Germany, which had taken 18 months and a lot of personal grief to obtain. Sometimes the illusion of German efficiency wore very thin! The engine had to be run in over 3000kms and we were only up and running in late July and starting our race in late September.

We spent many hours on our local rolling road experimenting with various carburettor, air filter and exhaust cross box combinations. This garage were so fascinated with what we were doing that they arranged through Castrol for the supply free of charge of 20 litres of racing synthetic oil worth £200! Ultra Seal again provided free of charge their excellent tyre sealant product, which was so successful the previous year. We felt almost professional with this level of sponsorship!

The Rally organisers had struggled this year to get anywhere near the number of entrants of previous events. This led to some uncertainty over whether we would actually start the Rally. We had little information on the event until mid September including not knowing the route or distance involved.

Big changes this year as the start had been moved from the UK to Aix Le Bains in the French Alps. This meant that we would have to trail over to the start from our home in Devon.

We started out at 04-30 on the 26 September and had an easy drive up to Poole to catch our ferry to Cherbourg. Off the ferry and a leisurely run down to Cour Cheverny on the south side of the Loire for our first hotel. Up early and long and uneventful run across to Culoz to the west of Aix le Bains. We are the only people checked into the hotel and expect to have a quiet secluded dinner and early night as we lose a night's sleep tomorrow. When we come down the restaurant is unexpectedly overflowing with people who have all arrived by boat.

28/29 September 900 kms Aix le Bains to Marseille

We have a leisurely breakfast at 8.30 then leave for Aix le Bains and scrutineering. We arrive in heavy rain and find the start, which is opposite one of the central spas. We eventually find our way into the car park, which is cordoned off for the cars. We spend the next 5 hours queueing for the scrutineering and chatting with old friends and new friends. Seems to be much easier to get to know everybody when there are half the number that normally compete. Already there are some casualties just getting here! The Volvo Amazon is re-routing his recently modified brake lines. The Series 1 land Rover is changing a cylinder head gasket and the Mercedes 280 has arrived late having had an alternator failure. With it being a Sunday the only solution for them was to buy 5 batteries! At 15.30 we have a drivers briefing that lays out the conditions for the route tonight and some last minute changes. The main message is that we must make Marseille by 12 tomorrow or the rest of the rally will not happen for us. This is because the boat to Tunis only sails twice a week at this time of year. We now have the route book, which is a first as we usually have it at least 10 days before the start. We realise now that the route tonight from Aix le Bains to Marseille is over

900km's long! If you drove it directly it would be about 400kms but as we are doing 11 tests that take you into the Alps and drop you back down again. This adds 500kms to the trip. The conditions are still heavy rain and some fog and low cloud so 11 trips up into the mountains doesn't feel like much fun to us. Anyway we go into the town for a light meal and to get snacks for the night ahead and return to the start line for 16-45. Our start time is 17-24 as we are car number 24. We line up with the others in the rain waiting for our time. Liz reminds the car in front that they have to check out-its their first time and we remember how kind people were to us when we didn't understand what was going on.

Time comes and off we go through the wet streets out onto the motorway. We make a navigational error within 2 miles but recover. We progress up into the mountains but the main route is diverted due to roadworks so causes us some delays. We progress to a small Col and overshoot the track where we are supposed to go off road. We turn back up the hill and head down a track and coming around the corner in the opposite direction are 5 rally cars! They all say this is the wrong way but my trusty navigator says differently so we carry on. Some turn round and follow us and eventually overtake including one who overtakes on a corner whilst checking directions with Liz through the window! We carry on and eventually come to a Time Control (TC) so we were right! We then start a test in the dark, low cloud and rain and across some gravel tacks with active washaways. We eventually finish the test with only one car overtaking us. The route then takes us back down the mountains to Albertville. On the way down we are followed by a car, which keeps disappearing! Eventually it overtakes and it's the Mercedes preserving its battery by turning the lights on and off.

We refuel in Albertville and decide to cut out test 2 as we are a long way behind our allotted time and the TC will be shut by the time we get there. We go straight to test 3 and are surprised at how few competitors we see. We arrive at test start 3 and are surprised to be overtaken by car 12 whilst on the test. They must be very late we think and we pass others en route with punctures. On the whole test we see 4 cars but press on and decide to pass on tests 4 and 5 and go straight to Briancon via the Col du Galibier. Climbing up the Col we encounter more low cloud and sleet. The Number 2 car overtakes us. When we arrive at the Briancon TC we are told we are the 3rd car in!! Brief moment of glory but it transpires that there has been a fair amount of mayhem so far. Lots of cars have got badly lost-some even in Italy! So our strategy of only doing those tests we thought we could manage paid off and we made the TC within our time. We have to wait an hour for our restart time 02-24, and we have coffee and I look round the car-horror one of the new drive shafts I fitted before we left has shredded its inner boot-never seen a damaged inner boot on our rallies. We decide we are pretty tired, the going up and down mountain passes is hard on Zippy and hard for the driver and now with the boot we should press on for Marseille to try and find a boot. We will not be penalised too badly if we make the TC near Marseille and compared to some of the other competitors we are standing pretty well. We set off and have a fairly steady drive and stop in a lay-by and try and sleep. Off again and reach the TC in a motorway services so have some breakfast. Off into the outskirts of Marseille and find a scrapyard but nothing for a 2CV but they point me to a Citroen dealer near the Airport. We find this

and although very helpful they don't have a boot or driveshaft. Earliest would be tomorrow which is no good as we have to be on boat. We give up as we only have 1 hour before we queue for the boat. We go into the old town area and have coffee with some of the other competitors. All sharing stories of the night's adventures-food poisoning, breakdowns, crashes and news that one competitor is so upset about getting lost 5 times that he has pulled out-already! That puts us up at least one place.

We arrive for the ferry queue, 4 hours before departure, as required. We park behind a factory entered Rover who cannot believe we are in the rally and actually serious. I think he felt we were demeaning the value of the Rally with our little car! After a lot of paper checks we route around the port past all the large luxurious cruise liners to find a small 1960's cross channel ferry which of course is our ship. We were led to believe it would be like a cruise and something to look forward to but we are not that impressed. We are given a cabin which has a flooded toilet but apparently they have no others and ours are the First class cabins. Throughout the night I had to ask the information desk to turn on the ships vacuum system to flush the toilets. We learn that we are lucky as some are having arguments about double booking and sharing. We retire to the bar and book supper-this is done by paying for 3 meals in advance and enjoying a local set menu which is pretty good but very simple. Requesting wine with food seems to be difficult but eventually we are allowed some very good red Tunisian wine. Quiet night on ship and catch up on lost sleep from night before.

30 September – Tunis to Sousse 180kms 16th place

Restful time on ship in sun-very relaxing. Off ship at 16-00 to be met by various uniformed bureaucrats wanting various bits of paper. We then have to queue outside the port to wait for our police escort to the city limits. They arrive and we drive at great speed from the port to the city and then to the outskirts where we see a row of scrap yards. We pull out of the convoy and I run up and down asking for the Citroen area. People are very helpful and escort me down the rows to someone who will have something. I try and describe the inner drive shaft and eventually one of the men says why are you speaking French! He is an ex taxi driver from Washington DC and speaks good English. He instructs one of the youngsters and he runs off to find a 2CV. He returns and there is a great discussion in Tunisian. Eventually the English speaker chases and kicks the youngster and tells me to follow. I follow and look into the yard where he has gone. It is about 2 feet deep in water. They have had very heavy rain in the north of Tunisia and this is the result. The boy wades through the water to a Dyane on top of a pile of cars. I leave him to it. He comes out 10 minutes later with a rough looking but sound inner drive shaft. The boot is damaged but I think I can bodge that up later. We haggle the price to £10 and are asked to return there on our way back. We agree that if we drive back into Tunis along this road we will call in for a beer. We progress about 1 km down the road to find the road blocked by floods. We turn round and try and find a way round and fail. We are lost without our escort! We ring the Mazda crew and ask if they drove through and they tell us they did. We ask them to let the organisers know that we are going to be late in. We drive out of the town and pass some of the fantastic roman ruins, which are just lying around. As it gets dark we pass through some very rural and bleak areas and pass a boy breaking rocks. He of course tries out

his rocks and throws one at us as we drive by-brings back bad memories of Morocco.

I feel a little nervous driving the first day in the dark without our lovely sweep crew behind us. Anyway as if to answer my concerns we pass the sweep crew who are attending to the factory Rover. The road is one with a lot of washaways to allow for the flash floods and we assume that he has gone too fast into the dip and broken the sump. Not wanting to gloat but we think back to their driver's comments about Zippy.

We eventually arrive at the next TC which is adjacent to a yet to be completed industrial estate. We have to run a timed test around the road network that is laid out in anticipation of the estate. Second gear and full throttle and we finish. At the finish there are 2 cars being repaired-seems like people are really going for it if they damage their cars on something as tame as this! Off to the hotel. We park and I proceed to seal and tape up the scrapyard driveshaft boot. My plan is to repair it tonight and fit it before we start in the morning. It is very very humid here and uncomfortable to work in.

In for a very civilised dinner and the stories are already building. The Rover crew have over revved their engine and have to get a new engine from the UK. This is what they plan but they will be stuck in Sousse for at least 2 days. Another place for us!

1 October – Sousse to Tozeur 574kms 14th place

Up at 5-30 to fit drive shaft. Breakfast then a rush for the start as somehow we are late. We navigate well and proceed to the first test across sand and mud. It is quite smooth and fast. We go through a gully that is full of mud so I decide to keep my foot down and plough through-wrong! We plough into the bank but keep going and on the exit I stop as the front wing is rubbing on the tyre. I pull the wing off the tyre, straighten the headlight and carry on. At the end of the test and whilst queuing for the second test I inspect further and straighten and tighten. Very hot now especially as we wait around. Another similar test. After last year these tests are a pleasure as they generally are on wide open spaces which allows for mistakes and we were really having some fun. The day progresses with more tests including a very steep hill climb on deep gravel and more heat and more and more dust. This hill is so steep we decide to pull out of the queue and move onto next TC. A few others follow realising that with the queue delay and the steepness of the hill they will probably be beyond their time. The last test of the day is a long one of 24kms and very sandy, dusty and some cars get in our way and we can't see them. The old land rover crews are very polite and always get out of our way. Newer cars overtake and cause a major hazard with the dust. We get to the end quite elated and help one of the old Mercedes move away from the finish line. Their gearbox has seized in top gear yet they have driven at high speed over the last 24kms. Our steering is damaged as the straight ahead position has moved by 90 degrees.

We drive on then to the nicest hotel of the whole rally decorated in Islamic style and with a lovely aspect over the town of Tozeur. The Police in Tunisia have been fantastic both directing and pulling over slower traffic. We don't speed through the towns but the Police seem to encourage us! I remove both front wings to find that the left hand track rod adjuster sleeve has bent (same as last year). I remove it and having bought 2 spares this year fit a new one.

Nothing else to do except check all the suspension bolts for tightness etc.
Lovely dinner and early night.

2 October - Tozeur to Matmata 415kms 10th place

Up early to find route today has changed due to the recent rains. We were supposed to do the route onto the dried salt lakes around the location of Luke Skywalker's house (Star Wars). The route cuts out the circuit around the house and has a lot of "clearly" marked routes across the lakes. We venture out of the town and line up for the start. We start and drive 14kms across the very slippery salt lake. No real problem but it is flat and fast and you have to take care with the slippery conditions. The modern Land Rover answers a call to help one of the leading cars that failed to read the change in route and has got bogged down in the salty mud.

When we reach the tarmac we progress on a very lonely long drive all along the Algerian border for 170kms on a tarmac wind and sand swept road. The temperature reaches 135 degrees and the wind is also hot-almost like sitting in a fan oven. Liz insists on opening the roof as we are not competing-we soak our hats in water and take pictures of the many camels along the route. We arrive at El Jerid for the next test, which runs into Douz. We have to queue in the open in the intense heat which is very waring. We start and the route runs across very ridged salt and sand. One car comes up behind and takes forever to overtake as we pull over into the soft sand. At the end of the test we have to make our feelings known to the driver. We are very adept at pulling over and are known for being very understanding of the faster cars. They understand completely and apologise and promise to be quicker at overtaking. Makes us feel kind of grouchy but it could become dangerous for us.

We lunch at Douz and have a proper lunch and a swim in the pool-such luxury! This is needed as this afternoon we have the highlight of the rally- a test of 85kms-the longest ever planned in international rallying-allegedly We are parked under an awning and on reversing out I concentrate too much on some locals who won't move from the rear of the car. I hit the steel upright structure and inflict more damage on poor old Zippy.

We trundle out to the start. We drive along a new tarmac road through a small town and are amazed when the road stops about 5 metres outside of the main street. We proceed out of town through the rubbish tip to the start line. The temperature is now 145 degrees and we have to wait 50 minutes to start as they have increased the time between each competitor to 3 minutes to reduce the effect of the dust. We start and progress in a fast sand and rock track route across the desert. It has a lot of hidden washaways which catch a few drivers out but we have a more manageable speed so can stop in time. A few of the bigger cars behind pass us creating a lot of dust but luckily there is a crosswind driving the dust away. We pass the Suzuki Ignis which has had a wheel assembly fall off, the Suzuki Swift has broken a driveshaft and the Vauxhall Astra has rolled end to end but luckily everybody is outside and looking fit. After about 50kms the track looks to approach a house and there is

a double bend whereupon the track reduces to 1 foot deep sand and we have lost momentum but we keep Zippy moving in 1st gear and reach a TC. At the TC is a 4x4, which was pulling people through the sand but has now burnt out its clutch. Lucky we didn't need it. We carry on and pass a Peugeot 206, which is going slowly. We take a wrong turn at the finish but recover by driving across the open ground. Our time on this test amazes some people. We are only 2 minutes slower than a modern Land Rover and a 1.4 litre Ford Focus! We are very very excited. The hotel is a troglodyte hotel right on the edge of the desert. After arrival I have a few repairs to do under the car. The exhaust collector guard has been badly damaged and pushed into the collector. I remove it and straighten it on a rock. Other than that Zippy looks in remarkably good shape. The room is basic and interesting. We go down for dinner and get clapped on entry for our results today and our 10th place. We feel like champions!

3 October - Matmata to Matmata 235kms 11th place

Today is a circular starting and finishing at the same place. We are away at a cooler 7-30 and progress out to the first test which no longer has a time against it because of damage caused by rain. It is very rough and most take it fairly fast despite the warnings. We criss cross over several dried up river beds which are covered in small rocks and it is difficult to see the route either from the previous cars or from any navigational points. We progress at a steady pace and hit quite a few large obstructions and crevices. When we reached the tarmac we hear a loud banging from under the car and I have to stop late or not. The front right shock absorber mount plate pin has sheared off leaving the shock absorber loose and knocking on the underside of the car. I remove the shock absorber which with all the treatment they have had doesn't seem to make much difference! We arrive at the next TC on time and ask the garage owner where the nearest scrap yard is. He says they are about 20 miles to the east. I search my spares and find a bolt which could be cut and welded in. We go into town to find a welder and decide to miss out the rest of the tests. We find a gate manufacturer in the main street and he agrees to cut out the old pin and weld in my bolt. He cuts the bolt too short and we look for another bolt. Luckily we find another and this time he gets it right. We pay up and head back to the hotel to fit the part and again repair the exhaust guard. The part fits OK, the guard straightened and we retire for lunch and a swim in the pool. Very welcome. We are however told off for not telling the marshals that we were not competing in the last 3 tests. They have been worrying about us apparently yet the marshals at the hotel knew where we were so a little perplexed.

In the evening we are treated to a local barbecue and some local musicians. Very good food and the flute (?) player had the biggest cheeks we have ever seen.

4 October - Matmata to Kairouan 517kms 13th place

Another early start and we make a wrong turn within 2 kms. We retrace our steps and find the right track. We start a short test which in the cool of the morning is quite pleasant. It involves more trips along riverbeds.

The next test is across wide open spaces with vague tracks and proves to be the most difficult for all competitors. We start OK and let get overtaken by some of the cars that should have started before us. They start coming at us from every direction! We eventually think we know the way and plough on. We come into a gully and find the 2nd place Peugeot embedded in the back of one of the old Mercedes. They are OK so we press on. We reach the end within our time which is better than a lot. The Mercedes with the gearbox problem is stuck again. We offer help and press on not realising that the time between the TC's is hard to make with our car. After about 170kms we find the track which is deep sand and very busy with horse and carts. We struggle to keep going but manage to reach the TC only 5 minutes late. We then had a fast test through some olive groves which again were sand but not too deep. At the end of the test we set off for El Jem which must rank as the best preserved Roman ruin ever. We have some time here so after a coffee we go into the Coliseum which is largely intact, looks as big as Rome's and has about 4 people visiting! We have lunch with some other competitors which is very civilised. 3 Navigators there all agreed about the start time. We walk around the Coliseum to find cars that should be starting after us already going! We are 9 minutes late starting. I am furious because we will never make that up. I don't speak to Liz and drive as fast as I can and again the Police are wonderful at directing but I find the throttle cable is sticking which causes some embarrassment as we pass the Police-lots of squealing, revs and noise!

We reach the next TC with 8 minutes to spare so I set about changing the throttle cable. One of the Peugeot 206 crews comes over and says they had a job catching us on the road since El Jem which is nice but doesn't make up our lost 9 minutes.

One more test through some riverbeds and cliff roads. Not too bad but a girl shepherding her goats came onto the track so held us up a little.

Off to the hotel which was built in an old Foreign Legion fort. Our shock absorbers are badly worn now and I ask the policeman on guard for a Citroen garage. He says wait 5 minutes. A Police jeep arrives and I am told to get in and they take me around to 3 different parts shops with no luck. So so helpful but for the shopkeepers it must have looked frightening with this westerner being escorted by 2 plain clothes policemen! They drove wherever they wanted including the wrong way down one way streets shouting at all the other motorists as if they had done something wrong-real attitude!

They took me back to the hotel by which time I had to pack everything away because of the Parc Ferme time approaching. We went in and had a bath. I asked Liz what she had done with the phone. She didn't know. I went out to the car, rang the phone with another phone but nothing. I had left it in the Police Jeep. I went to see the Policeman on guard and he called them up and they came back, looked for the phone and there it was. They could not have been more helpful including some interested students who did wonderful translation.

Bed early and still miffed about our 9 minutes.

5 October - Kairouan to Tabarka 403 kms 14th place

Heading north into greener cooler part of Tunisia. After the first 2 tests the left hand steering rod has bent and also the actual arm. We complete the next 2 tests before we stop at the Roman ruins at Dougga. While the others sightsee I have to put a strap rod along the steering arm after straightening the arm with what was probably a roman relic. The film crew take great delight in filming this sort of event and sure enough they turn up.

After the re-start we progress to a hill climb which we make in only 4 seconds under the maximum time. We have seen that tomorrow we do this hill climb twice more so my navigator is already planning her strategy!

We arrive at hotel by beach and have a lovely meal and feeling is almost like the end of the rally already.

6 October - Tabarka to Tabarka 352 kms 13th place

Dreadful night with food poisoning-ironic considering the places we had already stayed and here we were in a very western hotel.

Circular route today including doing the same hill climb of yesterday twice in succession. We did it once and then veered off track to cut out the second run which meant we could make the next test on time. For the next test we were second to start so were in amongst the big boys. They caught us up and we very rapidly pulled over and off the track to let them by. We were thanked a lot for this but we did manage to keep up with one of the Peugeots for about 1 km. At the next TC we were on time and my navigator was universally praised for her strategy in missing one test which meant we were one of 5 cars not to be late! We watched as car after car sped down the road realising they were late. One more test then trek back to the hotel. The Focus crew asked to go in front as they didn't want to be held up-I said I'd pull over if needed. Felt really chuffed as we got to the top and end of the test and he didn't even catch us! A few repairs to car as the left hand rear tyre is now rubbing on the bump stop.

Quite a lot of controversy in the evening from some crews about our strategy of deliberately missing tests but the experienced crews and marshals all said we had done the right thing-so there!

7 October - Tabarka to Carthage and Tunis 214 kms 13th place

Another night of food poisoning but much worse. Very little sleep but not much further to go.

The first TC proves difficult to meet but we do with about 30 seconds to spare. The next and final test is on slippery mud tracks and most people take it easy. We go along quite carefully and then around a corner find our good friends in their Mazda on their side in a ditch-they didn't take it easy and now they are waiting for a tow. They are OK. We press on a complete the test. Unbeknown to us when the Mazda is pulled out and then repaired on the run into Tunis a truck runs into the side of them again without any injury.

On the outskirts of Tunis we encounter very western levels of traffic and wind our way up to Carthage. Upon arrival we have pictures taken and then over for a drink and tour of Museum. That's it then another year over and 13th

place-our best ever. I am feeling dreadful and just lie in the sun to try and recuperate.

After an hour we go off in convoy to the Ambassadors residence to receive our finisher's medals which is very posh. Off to hotel for a well earned sleep. Prize giving dinner at 19-30 which a very nice affair. We receive our cup for finishing first in class (sub 1000cc). If we kept going we would get this anyway because no one else dared entered in our class!

Lots to drink then off to bed for an early start to catch the ferry.

7/8 October - Tunis to Marseille

Down to ferry at 07-00 for an 11-00 departure. No one will change our Tunisian Dinars officially so we end up changing them with the street sellers on the quay. We queue and queue and wait and go through 3 paper checks and 2 car checks. Onto ferry at 10. Very nice ferry this time. Still loading cars at 11-30 so it seems we are the only people there on time.

Very rough crossing so ship goes east of Sardinia and Corsica which adds 4 hours to crossing. Fairly sombre mood on board as you realise the fun is over. Say lots of goodbyes and off ship at 16-30. Waiting on quayside are people waiting to board from a rival rally. We know a lot of them and we all cheer together so that's a nice welcome. We have roof open but not for long as the dreaded mistral winds are really blowing and I feel a bit precarious.

We find a hotel northwest of Nimes in the Cevennes area of France and have a lovely French meal and good nights rest.

8/9 October Nimes to Caen

We have a lovely drive through France to our first night on the Loire and then onto Trouville sur Mer near Caen. When we were about 60kms from Caen the car started to vibrate badly on deceleration. We carried on as I couldn't see anything obvious. On the quayside at Trouville, much to the amusement of the passing locals we removed our scrap yard inner driveshaft to find the bearing cage was cracked and was seizing as it rotated-hence the vibration. Still this £10 item had lasted much better than the new one fitted before departure. We only had another 140kms to get home so the original was refitted.

10 October Caen to Exeter

Good ferry crossing and quick drive home-at last!!

Footnote

Is the 2cv the right car to do this Rally with? "With the knowledge we now have and with minor improvements and less weight I believe we could finish in the top 20" is what we said last year and we proved that we could even if there were less entrants.

Would we do it again? We are already planning our next which is as this stage very vague but is from London to Dakar and starts on 1 January 2005.

Would we recommend it? Yes. And it would be nice to have someone share the spares as this seems to be the biggest problem is trying to get spares anywhere we go.

Does it affect you personally? Yes I am becoming a rally bore. My aim in all of this is to be prepared to compete in the next Peking to Paris rally in 2007 and once I have done that I will give up and allow Zippy the retirement he richly deserves.

Zippy? Is now completely stripped for some serious modification. The body is being modified to allow for a bigger fuel tank and the chassis modified for larger springs. The engine worked very well but I have to modify the exhaust to get more ground clearance.

Finally, there was no official photographer this year so I apologise for the quality of the pictures. There is however for those of you with satellite television and who are allowed to watch the Men and Motors channel extensive coverage of the rally starting on the 19 January 2004.