

RED-LINED
Motoring Adventure

THE DIARY

of a dream-chasing
South African team
taking on the
international stage



china

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The Team:





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Graeme

Albert

Fanwell

Wade





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The Team:

Our Chinas!





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The Team:





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The Team:

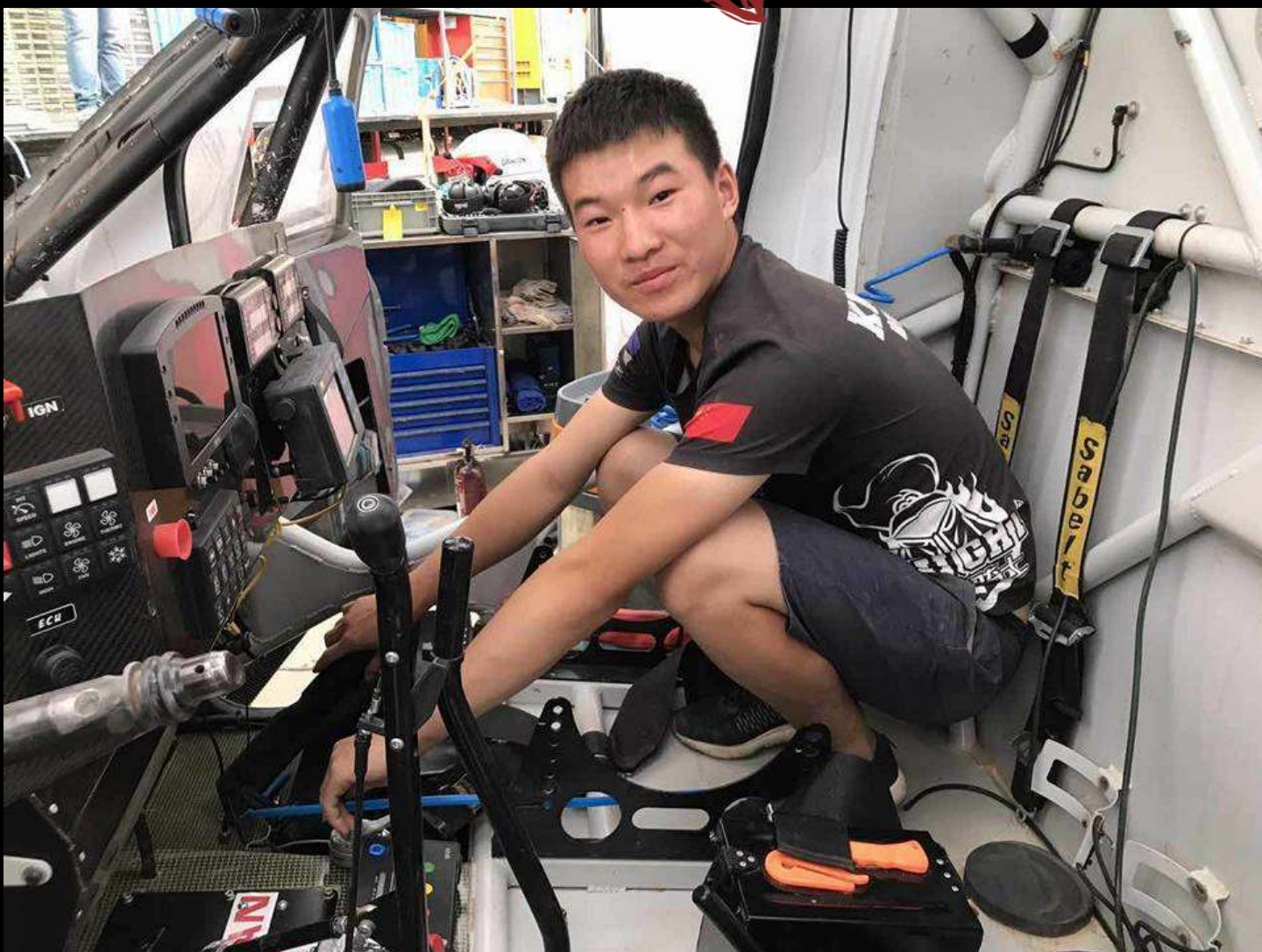




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The Team:

Terence???





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The Team:





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The Team:





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The Office:

Gear lever for the 6 speed sequential gearbox together with the cut brake.....control panel for the Motec electronics and the brake bias (big yellow dial)





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The Office:

**A broader view of the
cockpit as seen by the
navigator.....**





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The Office:

Main Motec display giving every bit of information we require on the race car at any given time....below is the control panel and top left is the main red kill switch which has to be accessible to both driver and navigator.





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The Office:

Driver display.....which
gives the driver the critical
information he may require
at any given stage!





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The Race:

- 3** Also called the **Oriental Dakar Rally**
- 3** The world's second largest shifting sand desert
- 3** Since 2005
- 3** 13 days and **6000km** across the north west region of China
- 3** There were **113** entries in the car category alone
- 3** Taklimakan Desert has an area of 330,000 square km's with the highest temperature of 67.2 degrees recorded

Can't get better than this!



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In China the technical regulations allow for **no engine restrictors** which basically means your engine gets the **maximum amount of air available to it at all times** - we however had decided to run with a 38mm restrictor as per the FIA and Dakar regulations in order for us to gather as much technical data as we possibly could during the event...as much as we were down on power versus the bigger teams **we would rather replicate the FIA and Dakar technical regulations** to learn as much as we could about our race cars within these performance parameters.

As much as the **tyre regulations** were open we had decided to run **standard BFGoodrich KM2 tyres**.... these tyres cost approx. R4 000 per tyre versus R10 000 per tyre for the BFGoodrich racing tyres which the bigger teams were running....

Our tyre budget per race car for the event was approx. **R100 000** versus the bigger teams who were spending around R250 000 per race car.



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During the event you were only **allowed to carry two spare wheels at all times** - no more and no less as per the Chinese regulations....finish the day with less than two spares and you were penalised with time penalties. This makes it extremely tough during the longer stages as you really need to manage your tyres....**a double puncture earlier on in a 500km stage and your back is against the wall!**

Navigation was going to be a mother of a challenge for us as not only was the road book in Chinese but you were also **not allowed to have GPS** and furthermore there were no markers on the route....you only had your **road book and odometer available** to you which means your navigator really needs to know his shit!

All we can say is that we are horribly spoilt in our South African Cross Country Series with all the navigational assistance we get!!



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The Scenery:





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The Scenery:





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The Scenery:





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The Scenery:

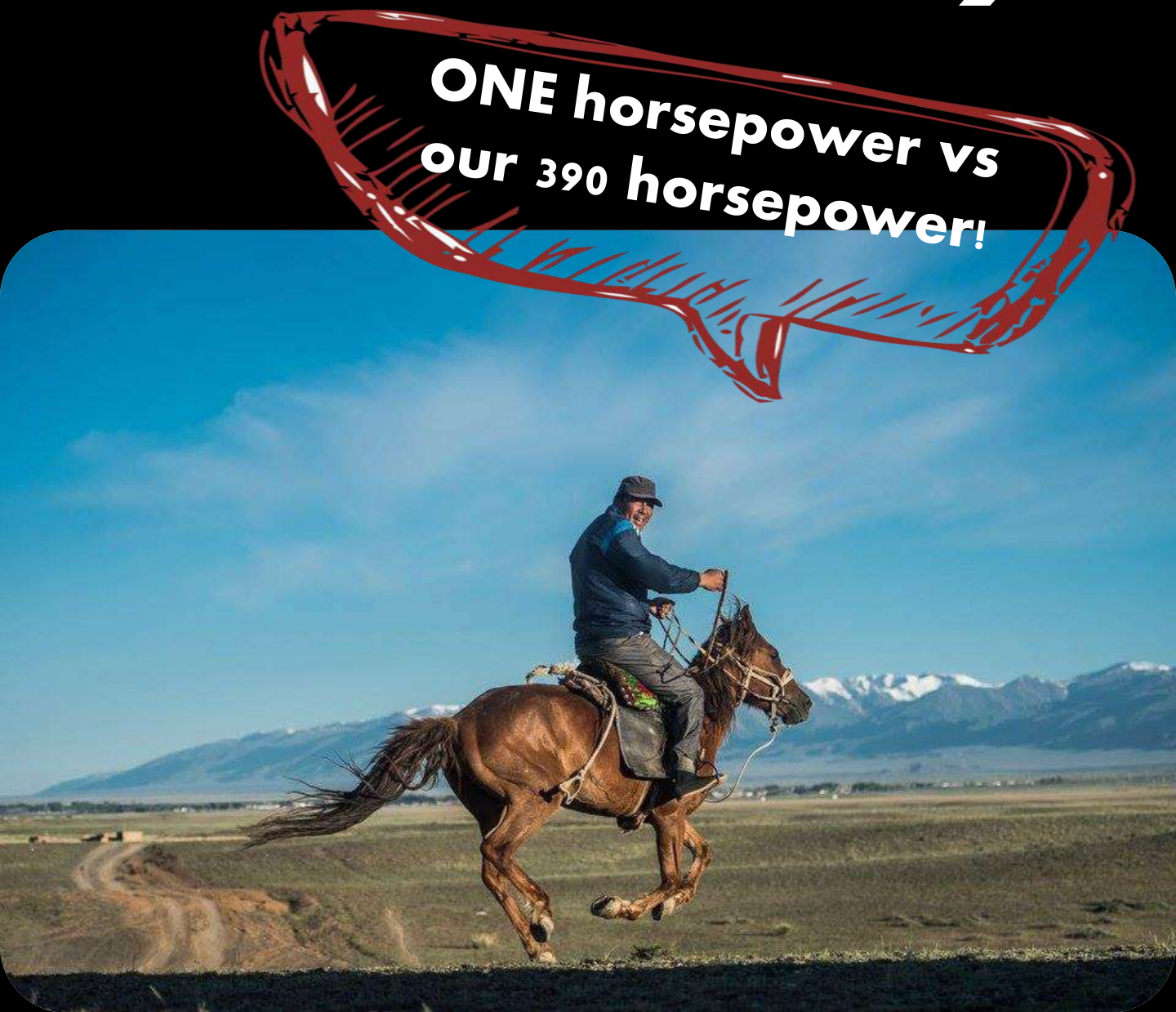




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The Scenery:

**ONE horsepower vs
our 390 horsepower!**





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The Culture:

- The people are absolutely fantastic and their **hospitality is second to none** as they really go out of their way to ensure you have everything you need
- They are hungry to learn and embrace everything with this objective in mind...**there is no arrogance to be found and they 'listen to learn'**....definitely something I think a lot of us could learn from!
- Their **food** is generally very good and predominantly spicy....just about everything you eat is boiled in water or grilled on a braai/barbeque which is really healthy if you think about it...**nothing is fried!**
- You generally eat **rice or noodles** with every meal and we have not seen an obese Chinese person.....We were seriously starting to question that whole 'too many carbs' theory!
- You definitely need to be a little **open minded** when it comes to the food as they their menu can be somewhat different....**and boy can they eat**....no small portions over here...



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The Culture:

- You eat everything with chopsticks....**knives and forks, like ice are nowhere to be seen!**
- What goes in obviously needs to come out and this is where it gets a little more tricky because the old traditional porcelain throne is not standard issue over there....which means you need to assume the old 'boskak' position each time you want to download!
- **Slurping, burping, farting and spitting** is standard procedure there and is a kind of an acknowledgment of a good meal...as a team we managed to settle in with this one pretty quickly which made life a bit tricky for us when we eventually get back home!
- As much as the average temperatures have been around **40 degrees celsius** during our trip...you honestly could not find a cold drink or ice anywhere....
- **Just about everybody smokes...** we have never seen so many people smoke. Take into account their population is around 1.4 billion – this will give you an idea of the magnitude of this problem....and for generations to come that is!

- They have a specific wine which they serve at dinner on special occasions which kicks like a mule....just ask our normally quiet and reserved technician, **Wade Harris, who became a Chinese singing and dirty dancing sensation overnight!!**
- The majority of the population commutes on either **bicycles or scooters** which are predominantly electric scooters which require no drivers licence and can basically travel anywhere with whatever amount of passengers you can carry.....scary but true!

Wade was so popular, he
had his own police
chaperones!





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In preparation for the race:

[Testing the Cars - a short clip](#)

[Testing the Cars - another short clip](#)





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Just in case you wondered what type of **engine oil** we use in our V8 powered Nissan Navara's.....only the best for the best as they say!!!





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...and tyres, what else but
BFGOODRICH of course!



BFGoodrich
Tires



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TESTING





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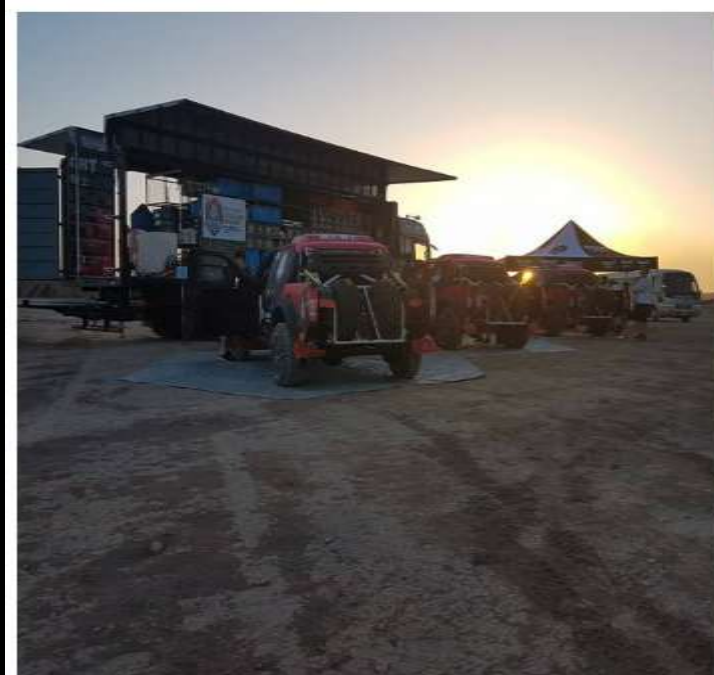
TESTING





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TESTING





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TESTING

When Power and
Torque of a V8 comes
into play!



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TESTING

The Chinese dunes.....nothing simple about these dunes as they are very technical and the sand is extremely soft....



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A few photos to show you our T5 support truck which is basically from where our technical operation will run from during the Taklimakan Rally in China....all our necessary tools as well as spare parts and components are kept in this mobile workshop.

This is one seriously expensive mobile workshop....





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***We had some
good days:***

breaking the language barriers!

**The beauty of technology.....our two Crew Chiefs
using their cell phones together with some
translation apps to get on the same page.....**

What language barriers we ask you!!!





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*...and
some
"not-so-
good"
days*





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...eating is an Olympic sport over there!





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...eating is an Olympic sport over there!





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...eating is an Olympic sport over there!





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*...every
sport has
its **injuries!***

challenges
are what make
life interesting and
overcoming
them is what makes
life
meaningful





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...sleep? What sleep?
Power-naps keep our
engines charged!





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...some interesting encounters





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*...and some
uncomfortable ones too*



They don't
cater for tall
okes like us
in China

They also didn't
warn us to stretch
our hamstring before our
trip!





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*...and some
uncomfortable ones too*

To our knowledge, Terence
visited China about a year
ago...mmm





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*...but most of all,
WE HAD THE
ADVENTURE OF A LIFETIME!*



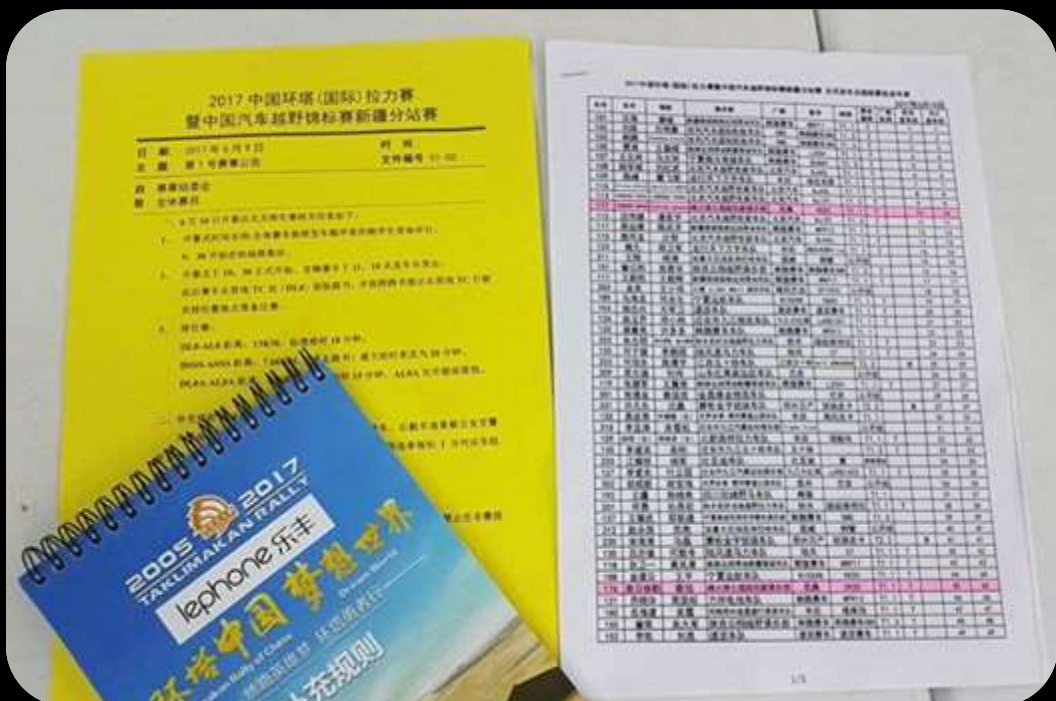


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The moment Gerhard realised his back is against the wall

Navigators briefing...





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Walk down Pit Lane





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Walk down Pit Lane





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Walk down Pit Lane





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Three, Two, One...





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Three, Two, One...

The Calm Before The STORM!





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BLAST OFF!

Our very own celebrities...

Terence Marsh and
Gerhard Schutte!





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Opening Ceremony

A short video clip of the
opening ceremony at the
Taklimakan Rally in China...





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DAY 1:



DAY 1

POSITION 10th

THE STORY

A nice clean and strategic start to the event for us with a 10th overall in the T1 four wheel drive category and 21st overall out of the 113 competitors.....tomorrow we have a further 243km of adventure ahead of us!!

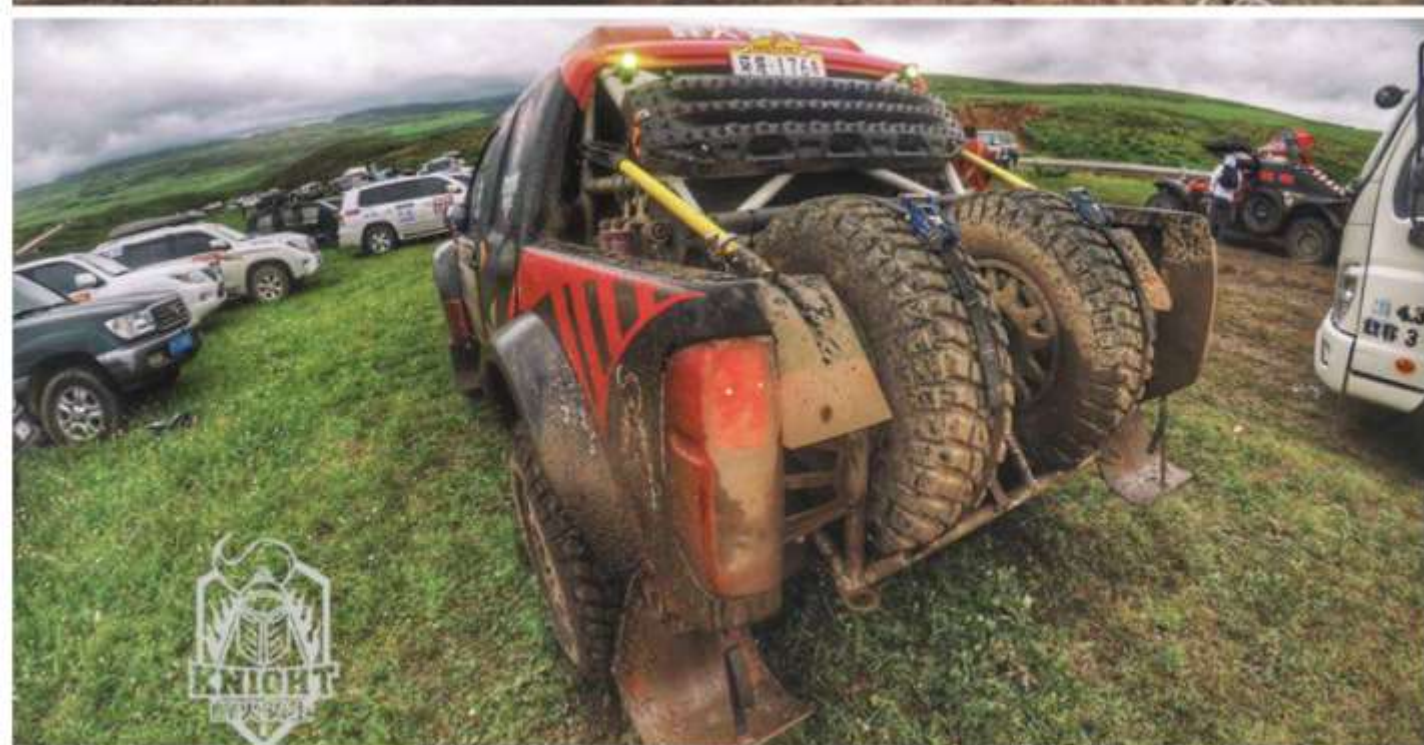




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DAY 2:



DAY 2

POSITION 8th

THE STORY

a really tough stage today in what was difficult conditions as it **rained throughout the stage** making the terrain extremely slippery and traction difficult!

After a really fast start this morning which saw us make up a few positions early on we started to experience electrical problems with our engine management system shutting down on us intermittently....eventually we stopped to try and identify and solve the problem which ended up been a faulty external kill/ignition switch....after bridging the connection we got going again but obviously not after losing time as well as several positions.

The route thereafter was **pretty rough and navigation was tricky**....the stage finished with us racing over a mountain covered in fog with limited to no visibility which kept us honest....anyway **nobody said it was going to be easy!**

Big day tomorrow for us as we have more than 500km to cover as we race our way across China to a new overnight bivouac....the adventure continues!



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DAY 3:



DAY 3

POSITION 5th

THE STORY

What an incredible stage it was...comfortably the best racing stage we have ever had the pleasure of driving...the landscape and the varied terrain was just **AWESOME!**

We had to do **503km today** of which 291km was a special stage or for ease of reference, a racing stage....the **navigation was once again tricky** and we battled a bit in the beginning but then settled in nicely and successfully managed to find all 33 of the way points that we were required to find today! **Our top speed recorded during the stage was 173km per hour....**

Yesterday we had to find 12 way points and today 33 and Gerhard has managed to find all of them....one of only a few navigators to have achieved this in a field of 113 competitors....**seriously impressive stuff from my wingman!!**



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DAY 4:



DAY 4

POSITION 8th

THE STORY

It was one of the toughest days we have ever had in a race car!

Today's racing stage was 434km which included varied and challenging terrain....due to our good 5th place stage result on the previous day we had to start 5th on the road this morning which is a whole new ball game....

quite simply a navigational nightmare!

Within 20kms we had moved into 4th on the road and then it all went south....we got lost several times losing plenty of time and more importantly road positions. With no markers and no GPS and no tracks to follow it is extremely challenging to say the least....at one stage we weren't sure if we would ever see man or beast again!!!

To add further turmoil to our day we had many moments where our day could have ended really badly....at one stage we missed a caution 3 at over 150km per hour....how we lived to tell this story I honestly don't know.... Interesting enough our top speed during the stage today was 184km!

Anyway the Taklimakan Rally gave us a good working over today....after yesterday's great result and managing to move up to 8th place in the overall standings we were literally brought down to our knees today but we will dust ourselves off and come out fighting again tomorrow!!!



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DAY 5:



DAY 5

POSITION 12th

THE STORY

A day of mixed fortunes!!!

Due to yesterday's tough and disappointing stage **we were 21st on the road this morning** which meant we were going to be **stuck in a lot of dust.....we had managed to keep our 8th place overall in the event** but we were now part of a bunch of cars that were within 2 mins of each other so the fight was on!!

We came out the starting blocks quite aggressively in the morning and **made our way up to 15th by km100....**we then proceeded into the desert and dunes section of the stage where we made a strategic decision not to get out the car and deflate our tyres while others did....this proved to be a great decision as we made up several positions during this difficult part of the stage and had moved back **into the top 10 by km300!**

With just 73km left of the stage we were **stuck in the dust** of another competitor for about 10kms before eventually pulling off an aggressive move to pass him....that was the good news....the bad news however was that we missed a critical turn at that exact point and then proceeded to follow the wrong tracks for another 20kms before realising we had missed the way point! So back we had to go for another 20kms to find the right track and get our way point....basically we had undone all our good work from earlier in the stage....it is amazing how much hotter it gets in the cockpit during this time! **In the end we did more than 410kms of what was a 373km stage....**

DAY 5

POSITION 12th

THE STORY

While we have managed to find all the required way points each day the navigation is exceptionally difficult for us newbies...while we have only made a few mistakes these mistakes have unfortunately been very expensive....anyway it is **all part of the adventure and will provide plenty of good stories around the dinner table in the future!!**

We eventually finished the stage in **19th place** and now drop out of the top 10 to 12th overall.....**we are however ranked no.1 in distance covered to date as we have done more mileage than any of the other competitors....at this rate it looks like we are going to have to increase our tyre and fuel budget if we are to finish this event!!**

To date we have completed **5 days and just over 2000kms** of the Taklimakan Rally....**8 days and 4000kms still to be done** but for now tomorrow is a rest day so our technical team will give the race cars a good once over while the drivers and navigators will do absolutely nothing!!!

The adventure continues.....



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DAY 6:



DAY 6

POSITION 10th

THE STORY

.....over 9 hours in the cockpit today as we headed 722km south towards the city of Shanshan.

The racing stage was made up of two halves for us as **we were held up for more than 180km in dust** with very limited visibility during the beginning of the stage....you literally cannot get within 800m of the race car in front of you.....**We will never moan about South African racing conditions ever again.....I promise!**

Once we got past some of the slower traffic and got some clean air we pushed hard for the latter part of the stage which suited us as it was rough and technical....We really enjoyed this section of the stage as we literally did not see much of the first 180km.

From a navigational point of view it was really challenging but Gerhard brought his A game today so we managed to find all 27 way points while not losing any unnecessary time getting lost.....

Here is a scary thought....it is 01h20 here in China and the results of today's stage have been delayed as there are still 20 race cars that have not come out of the stage as yet!

We will be leaving for the start of the next stage at 06h50



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DAY 7:



DAY 1

POSITION 4th

THE STORY

Total distance covered today was 562km which included a 403km racing stage which was extremely tough from a navigational point of view!

There were a total of 37 way points that we needed to get during the 403km stage which took place in extremely hot and dry conditions with little or no tracks to follow throughout the stage....today was purely about navigation as speed meant absolutely nothing if you were going the wrong way!

Provisional results give us an impressive 4th place for the stage which allows us to retain our 10th place overall for the event...all credit here must be given to my wingman and navigator Gerhard Schutte who did an incredible job under the circumstances as many of the more experienced teams got lost on several occasions during the stage! As much as he might have taken a few days off earlier in the week....he has bounced back BIG time over the last two days....he obviously prefers working on weekends!!

DAY 1

POSITION 4th

THE STORY

Outside temperatures during the stage reached 50 degrees Celsius while the maximum temperature reached inside our race car was just over 51 degrees.....very much like sitting in a sauna for over 4 hours while sipping on tea as our drinking water within the cockpit was just short of hot water!

Anyway that stage is now behind us and we now need to focus on tomorrow's 128km stage in the dunes.....as much as we have had plenty of training in the dunes this will be our first time actually racing and navigating in these conditions...and 128km in the dunes is a long way with plenty of potential pitfalls!

7 racing days completed.....

4 days remaining...

113 competitors entered.....

89 remaining...

the adventure continues!



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DAY 8:



DAY 8

POSITION 9th

THE STORY

A 128km stage in the dunes in and around the area of Shanshan in China!

It was our first competitive stage in the dunes so we were pretty apprehensive this morning but in the end we managed a 12th place in the stage and moved up to 9th place in the overall standings....there is no doubt that all our base training with Don Niewoudt in the dunes of Namibia together with our race training with our Chinese team mate contributed to this debut result as the dunes are extremely difficult to drive never mind navigate at the best of times....the intensity in the cockpit is insane!!

Going into tomorrow's rest day there are just 76 of the original 113 starters remaining.....we have now completed

**8 stages and
4 800km and have
3 stages and
1 200km to go.**



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DAY 9:





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DAY 9:



DAY 9

POSITION 10th

THE STORY

532km in total for the day including a 391km racing stage!

It was by no means one of our better stages as it was really **fast and extremely rough**....we also struggled with some really tricky navigation today so we decided to rather **back off and look after the race car** for the remaining 2 stages of the rally....**our top speed recorded in the stage today was 185km per hour** which borders on insanity if you ask me!

And to put things into further perspective...while we were doing 185km in the dirt **we were getting passed by the unrestricted 700hp 2 wheel drive buggies that were doing in excess of 200km per hour**....now that is absolute **MADNESS!**

We are well aware that in the world of motorsport there is **still plenty that can go wrong over the next two days** and 630km so the whole team is staying focused on covering all bases until the job is done!!



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DAY 10:



DAY 10

THE STORY

Day 10 and the penultimate day of the Taklimakan Rally completed....but ONLY just we might add!

We unfortunately went **head over heels at km156 of the stage** after exiting what was a fast dune and desert section....*just a mere 50kms from the end of the racing stage*....we literally **crashed off the last dune of the stage!** We can give you a few good reasons of why it happened but let's just go with 'We eventually ran out of talent....'

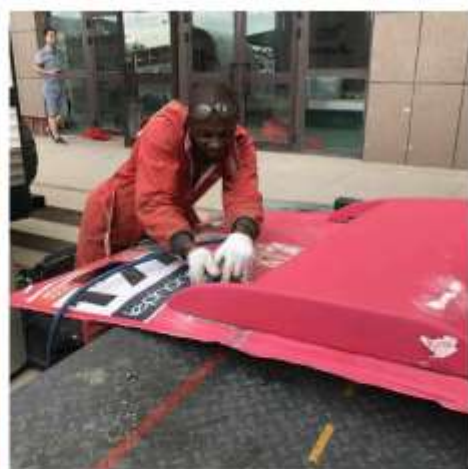
In the end we had to wait about 25 mins for our team mates to arrive and pull us back onto our wheels.....thereafter we needed to do some repair work before trying to complete the stage. For obvious reasons **we had a very difficult last 50km as we had limited visibility due to the shattered windscreen**....we had to manage engine temperatures as we had damaged the roof scoop which provides fresh air to our rear mounted radiator....we also had to stop to change an alternator belt after that also broke and therefore stopped charging the alternator!



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DAY 10:



DAY 10

THE STORY

In the end **we lost about an 01h30mins** but more importantly **we managed to finish the stage**....now we need to hope that our guys can do the necessary work tonight to enable us to start the last and final stage tomorrow! With us having completed 10 days and 5 790km of this event and then not finish the final day and 210kms tomorrow would be a cruel blow!

Anyway.....**IT IS WHAT IT IS**.....there is nothing we can do to change it so we need to focus on what we can influence and change....and that is **trying to get on that starting line tomorrow morning!** Motor racing is very much like life....it doesn't always go according to script so you need to learn to **adapt quickly** and **move on** because time waits for nobody!!

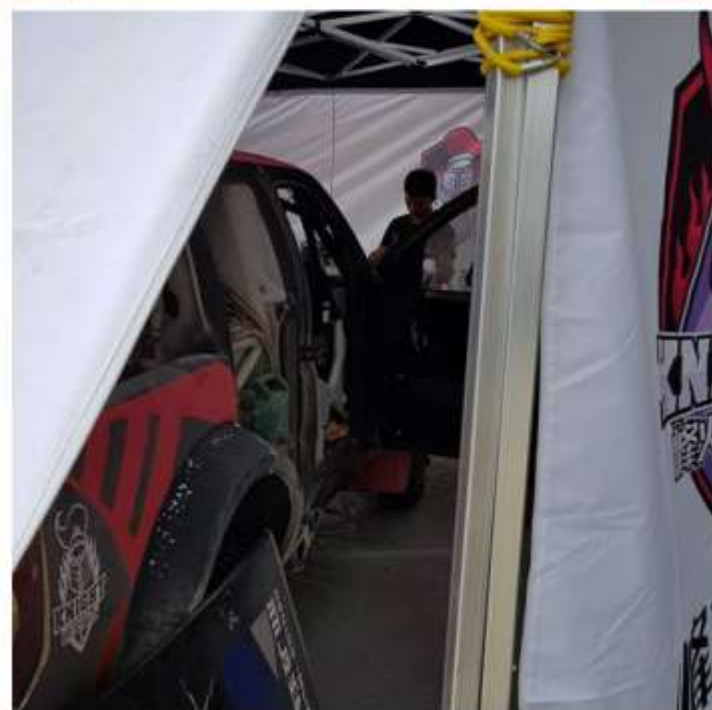
A potential top 10 result is unfortunately now something of the past for us....but taking into account how it all could of ended today...**as a team we will now bust our balls to just finish this damn thing!** The adventure continues.....



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ER!!!





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Final Day!





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Final Day!



Final day!

POSITION 12th

THE STORY

That's 11 days and more than 6000km of racing across the Taklimakan desert in the north west region of China!

What a journey and what an incredible adventure.... 12th overall and 5th in the T1.1 (4wd) category on our international debut....there were 133 entries and just 62 finishers!

This overall result however is a direct result of some great teamwork....firstly by my wingman and navigator Gerhard Schutte who did an incredible job under very difficult and challenging conditions....and then more importantly to our technical crew of Graeme Thornton, Wade Harris, Albert Geel and Fanwell Murapa who no matter what the circumstances produced well prepared race cars each day!!

Final day!

POSITION 12th

THE STORY

Our Chinese partners were exceptional and while we arrived as associates...**we will be leaving as family!** As a team all three of our proudly South African built Nissan Navara's **finished the event with our lead car finishing an incredible 3rd overall while our other team mates finished 15th overall....that's all 3 cars in the top 15!**

As a team we are **incredibly PROUD** of this result...no matter how tough the conditions were we overcame them....no matter how difficult the communication was, we got around it....

WHY???

Because we all had a **common goal** and as long as you have a common goal and you all **pull together** in this same direction...there isn't too much you can't achieve as a team!!

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环塔拉力赛
TAKLIMAKAN RALLY

let your
be bigger **DREAMS**
than your fears
and your
louder than **ACTIONS**
your words

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环塔拉力赛
TAKLIMAKAN RALLY

jobs fill our pocket

ad
ven
ture fill your soul



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