

Distance Drivers

This article reflects the status at the time of its publication. The content may since have become outdated.

02/05/2017 The British travel writer Bruce Chatwin once wrote, “Man’s real home is not a house, but the Road.” Indeed, there are countless reasons why so many of us are drawn to the road.

What is it exactly that inspires people to attempt the extraordinary? To take uncalculated risks? To test—or even exceed—their limits? Are they moved by restlessness or a desire to set new records? Do they want to prove to the world what they can achieve? Or is their motivation simply the adrenaline rush from extreme situations?

“All of that applies to a certain extent—or at least it applies to me,” says Jan Kalmar. For the Denmark native, long-distance drives are part of a journey named “The Longest Drive,” a quest to test limits, break records, and, of course, to escape from daily routine. In the heart of Africa, Kalmar’s expedition has led to some perilous situations, which he brushes aside with a mischievous smile. “I’d be more anxious about having to spend my vacation sitting around on a beach for a week.”

Three teams, three routes, across half the world

Modern psychology describes personalities such as Jan Kalmar's as "high sensation seekers"—people in search of a thrill. Studies have shown that the desire for extreme stimuli and experiences outweighs any fear of the attendant risks. A sensation seeker's pulse remains comparatively calm in stressful situations. Scientists debate whether this special trait is hereditary, as well as what motivates this behavior. After all, these motives vary as much as the people who seek adventure.

For long-distance drivers, the fascination begins with selecting the route. For some, it is the pure pleasure of driving a classic Porsche from Beijing to Paris. Others may see a tour through the Himalayas as proof of what a woman's dedication can accomplish. And for a man like Jan Kalmar? His love of adventure draws him to the long route that winds its way from the North Cape down to the southern tip of Africa.

A relaxed Charbel Habib is sitting in his office in Beirut. The forty-six-year-old engineer, founder and CEO of a successful construction holding company in the Middle East and Africa, shows every sign of being a happy man. "People here are proud of our achievement," he says. Habib and his codriver, Walid Samaha, drove a faithfully restored 1964 Porsche 356 C for the almost 8,510 miles of the Beijing to Paris rally. They were not only the first Lebanese team to participate, but the first Middle Eastern team as well.

"A classic car fan like me views the Beijing to Paris endurance rally as the ultimate challenge," Habib confesses. For the sixth edition of the vintage car rally, more than one hundred teams from twenty-five nations lined up at the starting line last year. Habib and Samaha, who had never ventured to enter a long-distance race of this caliber before, scored an outstanding result: twenty-fourth place in the overall standings and second place in the category for vehicles in the under-two-liter engine class that were built between 1945 and 1965. Habib notes contentedly, "We didn't miss a single one of the more than one hundred time controls and we were awarded a gold medal for this success." And what makes him even happier: "Not one of the Ford Mustangs in the field managed to beat us to the finish on Place Vendôme."

Why did you decide on a Porsche 356 for this rally?

We wanted to use a special classic vehicle – even if this gorgeous Porsche is not exactly the most powerful. It originally had a top speed of around 110 miles per hour. However, during the rally we drove a maximum of 62 miles per hour. That's partly because of the weight of the equipment – the car was very loaded down with everything from tents and clothing to water.

Do you recall any particularly odd incidents?

The race was about half over, and we were in the middle of nowhere, somewhere in Russia. We had to work on our car late into the night to have it ready for the next stage. We were so exhausted the next

day that we didn't pay much attention to the roadbook but simply followed in the tracks of a competitor. It wasn't until he made a sudden turn that we checked the roadbook and realized that we had left the route far behind. We switched on the GPS, but it wasn't working. So we overtook the other car, stopped it, and asked the driver if he was sticking to the roadbook. "Nope," was his answer. "I'm not headed for that destination, I'm driving somewhere else." That caused us to lose an incredible amount of time, but we still made it past the time control with thirty seconds to spare.

What was your greatest challenge?

In Mongolia, we had to contend with pouring rain, but the dust was even worse. Our 356 was fitted with the original air filters. The extreme vibrations on the uneven roads – including 1,864.11 miles of off-road driving – caused the filters to become loose. As a result, an unbelievable amount of dust entered the car interior, with an even more serious aftermath. That's because after we changed the filters, the engine suddenly developed problems. Fortunately, a transfer passage enabled us to take a longer break. And after two nights of working on it, we were able to get the engine up and running properly again.

Did you ever consider quitting?

Definitely – right at the beginning, in fact. Thanks to our utter inexperience in navigating through a desert, we had already completely lost our way. Then we were tempted again near the end of the rally because we were so exhausted. If we hadn't been so close to the finish line, I'm sure we would have given up. But Paris was almost in view by that time, so there was no way we were going to quit.

Nidhi Tiwari can hardly contain herself and bursts out: "Just try to picture it: there they are, the twelve cabbies I passed on the road up to Khardung La. They're marveling at the Cayenne and seriously asking me if I can show them how to drive such a fast car. These are the very same men who were giving me dirty looks earlier on – all of a sudden, they're as docile as can be."

At 18,392 feet – according to the locals – Khardung La (la is the Tibetan word for "pass") is the world's highest mountain pass that is accessible by motor vehicles. It was part of the Himalayan XOL that Tiwari completed in eighteen days in the summer of 2016: 2,485.49 miles in a Porsche Cayenne through these high-altitude mountains shrouded in myth.

The thirty-six-year-old mother of two sons lives in New Delhi and embarks on extreme driving tours such as this one under the auspices of the organization she founded, Women Beyond Boundaries. She is committed to improving the social circumstances of women in India, and mobility is a key factor in realizing this change. Half of the Indian population is female, and yet women rarely sit behind the wheel of a car. "If a woman cannot move freely, she will not be able to realize her potential," says Tiwari. "And extreme overland drives are a good way to raise public awareness of this imbalance."

Women who undertake extreme driving are still few and far between– and not just in India. What motivates you?

It may sound surprising, but it all began for completely pragmatic reasons. Before I became a mother, I spent a lot of time in nature as an outdoor guide. And that wasn't something I wanted to give up when my children were born. So I thought about how I could travel with my sons to the Himalayas, for example. 2007 was the first year I set off for the Himalayas in a 4 × 4 vehicle – with my mother, her sister, and the kids. My younger son was barely a year old at the time. The experience of making this trip counts as one of the major turning points in my life.

In what way?

Since then, I have repeated this tour at least once a year, including on my own, without my family. On one occasion, I got stuck in the snow high up in the mountains – that was before I had the Cayenne. There I was in sub-zero weather and had to spend the night in the car before I could get help the next day. And the thought that ran through my mind was: "If you can make it through something like this, you can overcome other challenges too." And that is how I got started with extreme overland drives and Women Beyond Boundaries.

How many fellow campaigners did you have to start with?

None. It was just me. But I wanted to give other women in India the tools that would help them to fulfill their drive for freedom and adventure. I wanted to enable them to tackle extreme tours on their own without having to rely on a man. And it's working: our numbers are growing.

Now that you have several 2,485.49-mile Himalaya tours behind you, your next goal is a long-distance record for your organization, which is still relatively new.

That's right. This year, I plan to set off with five other women on the first Indian Arctic expedition: 21,747.99 miles in eighty days – that should be quite exciting!

"Preparation?" Jan Kalmar flashes a grin on this sunny day in Copenhagen. "Forget it." Kalmar knows all too well from previous trips with his team on The Longest Drive that unpredictable events are par for the course – keeping as fit as possible is the most he can do. One preparation worth mentioning, however, involves sleep: for any long-distance event, such as the North to South 2.0, you don't want every team member to be on the same sleeping schedule. According to Kalmar: "The more tired you are at the start of the drive, the better. It is very important not to have all three drivers nodding off at the same time – that's a recipe for failure. There's an advantage in falling asleep sooner."

Kalmar and his team members, Shaun Neill and Vitoldas Milius, know from personal experience how even a minor incident can jeopardize an entire endeavor. While planning the long route from the North Cape to South Africa, the team located a gas station in Ethiopia where they could refuel with high-quality diesel. En route, however, tire damage caused them to run out of time. They forgot about the gas station, refueled somewhere else, and ran into significant difficulties with the lower-grade diesel. They could see their dream of achieving a record time slipping further and further away.

You don't take breaks on your record-setting journeys. How does that work, and above all, how and where do you sleep?

There were three of us on our two North to South trips. While one of us drove, the second team member would relax or doze on the front-passenger seat. The third driver slept in a bed that we put in by removing the backseat of our Porsche Cayenne. When you're dealing with such great distances, you have to be able to lie down rather than just sleep in an upright position.

You opted for a shortcut during North to South 2.0– why was that?

The ongoing war in Syria prevented us from taking a route through there. Instead, we flew from Istanbul to Egypt, where we took a mandatory break for around nineteen hours, which is how long it would have taken driving at an average speed of roughly 56 miles per hour on the Syria route. From Egypt, we continued our drive.

And then there was trouble in Tanzania ...

Oh, right. Well, someone gave us the wrong directions there, which unfortunately took us on a 186.41-mile detour. That made us fall so far behind schedule that we had to take the car to its limit. But the Cayenne didn't let us down: when we reached South Africa a few thousand miles later, we were only eleven minutes off the record.

What is the actual tank capacity of your Cayenne?

Strictly speaking, there are two tanks: a 13.2-gallon tank for washing and emergency drinking water and a 56.8-gallon diesel tank that gives us a range of 1,553.43 miles. This tank is comprised of several subunits, which enabled us to mix an ideal proportion of high-quality and lower-grade fuel. And that kept the engine happy.

When do you start your next attempt to break a record?

This year, five of us will be setting off in two Porsche Cayennes from Prudhoe Bay in northern Alaska to take on a legend: the Panamericana. That's 14,291.54 miles nonstop to Tierra del Fuego, with just one set of tires. Two thousand hours were involved in planning this tour. The Panamericana record is eleven days, seventeen hours, and twenty-two minutes. So we'll just have to do better than that.

Link Collection

Link to this article
https://newsroom.porsche.com/en/christophorus/porsche-christophorus-distance-drivers-three-teams-routes-13417.html

Media Package
https://pmdb.porsche.de/newsroomzips/b646ca81-4706-4272-8119-f8dd5e6a6c98.zip

External Links
http://www.porsche.com/germany/aboutporsche/christophorusmagazine/
www.porsche.com/museum/en

Dr. Ing. h.c. F. Porsche Aktiengesellschaft
Porscheplatz 1
70435 Stuttgart