



Cougar Motorsport Pvt. Ltd.
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The Desert Dash 09

Preparations April 7, 2009 – Nov 26, 2009

The idea originated in the Delhi Gymkhana Bar – to organize an Indian Gumball. A few coffee sessions at Costa followed and the team was formed. The concept was defined further as well.

Next was the branding of the club and the event, incorporation of the company, registration of the club with FMSCI, drafting of the supplementary regulations, organising permit for the event from FMSCI, finalizing of the route, booking of hotels, brochure design and distribution, getting the website up, obtaining Rajasthan Government and police approvals, putting in place critical partnerships with Aman Resorts and Fortis Healthcare.

This was followed by marketing to potential sponsors, print and electronic media partners, automobile companies for service tie-ups as well as to potential participants. The event execution planning continued in parallel and included four complete route reconnaissance trips to finalise the road books, tie-up tractors, alert police stations and villagers etc. The participants documentation, insurances and FMSCI license applications, medical briefing of all officials, procurement of radios, GPS units, stationery, tow ropes, and hundreds of pieces of other equipment, printing of stickers, road books, time cards, scrutiny cards, merchandise, trophies, momentos kept us on our toes all along.

It all fell into place by the 26th of Nov. We had Swarovski as our Associate Sponsor, Aman Resorts, Fortis Healthcare, Guardian Pharmacy, Andpersand, Outlook Traveller and AutoXchange as our event partners. We also had 17 entries cleared for scrutiny – less than the 30 we had targeted but incomplete paperwork, other social and business commitments led to some attrition even before it all began. The 17 entries included 9 ladies in the crew, 2 of whom also drove in the rally. Most participants were seeking to experience the thrill of motorsport for the first time and included senior executives, business owners, partners from law and private equity firms as well as business consultants.

Pre-event Scrutiny Nov 27 and 28, 2009

The scrutiny was in the level 1 basement parking of The Aman, New Delhi. 14 cars showed up and cleared the scrutiny on the first day. 2 other vehicles cleared scrutiny on the second day – this included the Mitsubishi Outlander that had been driven down all the way from Kolkatta to participate in the rally. Car #2, a BMW X5 did not report for scrutiny and was excluded.



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It was different from any scrutiny for any motorsport event ever held in India. All the paperwork had already been checked (it was all in our possession as we did the medical insurances, vehicle rally insurances as well as the FMSCI rally licenses). We had an expert to paste all the stickers and competition numbers on participants and officials vehicles. We gave first aid boxes, helmets and fire extinguishers to all participants at the scrutiny bay. Red triangles were available as well for cars missing their original equipment. 3 cases of mineral water to last the event were also loaded in each vehicle. The participants kit bags had calculators, note pads, pens, identity cards, caps and jackets. And GPS units were available for purchase courtesy the Garmin dealer.

Stewards Meeting Nov 28, 2009 1230 hrs

The first stewards meeting was held at The Aman, New Delhi. Mr. Ravi Singhania (Chief Steward), Mr. Bhaskar Patwardhan (Chief Scrutineer, Mr. Nikhil Jaspal (Steward) were the FMSCI nominated officials for the event. Their valuable guidance went a long way in making our event successful and we sincerely thank them for the same.

Drivers Briefing Nov 28, 2009 1330 hrs

The Drivers briefing was held at the Tapas, the bar at The Aman, New Delhi. It was another first for a motorsport event. All the participants interacted with the organizers and officials over an informal lunch. The drivers briefing presentation addressed most issues and stressed on the safety aspects. We thank The Aman, New Delhi for their hospitality and for making everyone feel so comfortable.

Ceremonial Flag-off Nov 28, 2009, 1600 hrs

All 16 vehicles cleared at scrutiny lined up at The Aman, New Delhi for the ceremonial flag-off. These were the Porsche Cayenne (#1); Honda CRV (#3); Nissan X-Trail (#4); VW Touareg (#5); Mercedes E240 (#6); Toyota Land Cruiser Prado (#7); Mercedes M Class (#8); Ford Endeavour (#9); Mitsubishi Montero (#10); Ford Endeavour (#11); Mitsubishi Pajero (#12); Porsche Cayenne (#13), Mitsubishi Outlander (#14); Toyota Land Cruiser (#15); Honda CRV (#16); and the Mahindra Scorpio (#17). The 2WD vehicle category was merged with the 4WD category due to the limited number of 2WD vehicles. They got an exemption for the off-road stretches which they did not complete by collecting the maximum penalties for such stretches earned by any 4WD vehicle.

The flag-off was attended in large numbers by families of participants as well as members of the media. The vehicles were flagged-off by Mr. Henry Gray, GM of The Aman.



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Leg 1: Nov 29, 2009 1000 hrs Mount Shivalik Behror – Kuchaman Fort

The start of Leg 1 was on schedule at 1000 hrs from the Mount Shivalik Brewery just ahead of Behror. Parc Ferme was from 0830 hrs to 0930 hrs. Most participants drove the 125 odd kms from New Delhi to Behror and arrived in Parc Ferme on time except the VW Touareg (#5) and Mercedes E 240 (#6) who arrived late and earned the appropriate penalties.



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The arrangements at The Mount Shivalik brewery were outstanding. We would like to place on record our sincere appreciation for Col. Mongia, CEO of the brewery who took personal interest in the set-up. He was presented the Patron shield on behalf of Cougar Motorsport by Mr. Sandeep Bansal from Swarovski. All participants and officials enjoyed a hot sumptuous breakfast in the lawns of the brewery before flag-off.

Leg 1 took the participants from Behror to Kuchaman Fort, approximately 100 kms ahead of Jaipur. The total distance of the Leg was approx. 270 kms. All participants received dry rations at the first Time Control which included fruits, juices, energy bars, peanuts etc. – this became a daily feature. The vehicles passed through Samode and Chomu enroute. The leg also included an off-road stretch across the Sambhar salt lake bed. It was another first for any motorsport event in India to see premium SUVs charging down Sambhar lake – it was also perhaps the first time ever that a Mercedes E Class has been driven through the lake! Only 7 participants managed to find the Passage Control – some covered more of the lake than we had planned and got a bigger bang for their buck! The Porsche Cayenne (#1) was the fastest car across Sambhar Lake.





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Leg 1 ended with the much experienced crew of the X-Trail (#4) in the lead, followed by the first time entrants in the Toyota Land Cruiser Prado (#7) and Porsche Cayenne (#1). The cars were greeted at the fort with traditional shehanais and tilaks. All participants and their baggage were transported up to the fort over the steep inclines in jeeps – which reversed up on some slopes as the hairpins are too tight for them to turn! The drinks and dinner on the ramparts of the fort were followed by a fireworks display announcing the arrival of the rally at Kuchaman.

Leg 2: Nov 30, 2009 0900 hrs Kuchaman Fort – Lallgarh Palace, Bikaner

The start of Leg 2 was on schedule at 0900 hrs from the Kuchaman Fort. Parc Ferme was from 0730 hrs to 0830 hrs. All participants reported on time for the Parc Ferme and flag-off.

Leg 2 took the participants to Lallgarh Palace at Bikaner. The total distance of the Leg was approx. 325 kms. The vehicles passed by the Tal Chappar black buck sanctuary enroute. This leg also included two off-road stretches in the sand near Bikaner. A number of participants lost their way in the first stretch and most of the 2WD vehicles which attempted the stage got stuck and claimed the exemption. The Mahindra Scorpio (#17) driven by the team from AutoXchange was buried deep in the sand and ended up testing the horse power of the tractor on the scene. The second off-road stretch was longer and all the 4WD vehicles managed to pass through without any problems. Three vehicles did not manage to come to a dead halt in front of the Time Control and were penalized as per the supplementary regulations on the basis of the report filed by the



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Chief Marshall present on the scene. A team of officials while on TC duty was confronted by some locals – and accused of being “smugglers bringing in gold from Pakistan”. Guns we would have understood but gold and in Pakistan took the cake!





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Leg 2 ended with the Toyota Land Cruiser Prado (#7) in the lead followed by the X-Trail (#4) and the Porsche Cayenne (#1). The Ford Endeavour (#9) withdrew from the event as the crew had to return to Delhi. The participants enjoyed high tea at the Lallgarh Palace followed by drinks and dinner. There was also a night drive organized for participants through the desert near Bikaner. This was not part of the competition and participation was voluntary.

Leg 3: Dec 1, 2009 1000 hrs Lallgarh Palace, Bikaner – Khimsar Dunes Village

The start of Leg 3 was delayed by an hour through a notice put up the previous night and it started at 1100 hrs from the Lallgarh Palace. Parc Ferme was from 0930 hrs to 1030 hrs. All participants reported on time for the Parc Ferme and flag-off.

Leg 3 took the remaining 15 participants to the Khimsar Dunes Village, approximately a 100 kms short of Jodhpur. The total distance of the Leg was approx. 175 kms. This leg also included one off-road stretch in the sand near Nokha. All the 2WD vehicles claimed the exemption and the 4WD vehicles managed to pass through without any problems. A Porsche Cayenne (#13) skidded on the gravel along the tarmac on the approach to the last Time Control and hit the boundary fence, damaging the front windscreen and some paintwork. The crew was safe and continued to finish the rally.





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Leg 3 ended with the Toyota Land Cruiser Prado (#7) in the lead followed by the X-Trail (#4) and the Porsche Cayenne (#1). The participants enjoyed high tea at the scenic Khimsar Dunes Village and then moved to Khimsar Fort for the night stay. The drinks and dinner at Khimsar Fort were in the ruins of the fort. Participants were joined by Sh. Gajender Singh, the Raja of Khimsar whose love for automobiles is evident from his collection of vintage and classic cars that line the driveway of the fort. He was presented the Patron shield on behalf of Cougar Motorsport by Mr. Murad Ali Baig, a participant in The Desert Dash 09.

Leg 4: Dec 2, 2009 0700 hrs Khimsar Fort – AmanBagh

The start of Leg 4 was on schedule at 0700 hrs from the Khimsar Fort. The early morning Parc Ferme was from 0530 hrs to 0630 hrs. All participants reported on time for the Parc Ferme and flag-off.

Leg 4 took the participants to Kishangarh, on the outskirts of the holy city of Pushkar. The total distance of the Leg was approx. 203 kms. The competitive part of the rally ended here. The participants had to drive an additional 200 kms to reach AmanBagh to qualify as finishers of the rally.

The rally ended with no change to the previous days results and was won by the Toyota Land Cruiser Prado (#7) followed by the X-Trail (#4) and the Porsche Cayenne (#1). The competition was intense with the first 3 cars being separated only by 15 minutes, despite 2 out of the 3 being first –timers.



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The grand prize distribution ceremony and the poolside rally ball at AmanBagh continued late into the night. The shields to the first three participants were given away by Ms. Robyn Bickford, GM of AmanBagh. All participants received a certificate for successful completion, customised with a photograph of their cars. They were also treated to a specially edited video of the rally and their vehicles in the off-road stretches. There were special crystal prizes from Swarovski for the first three participants. Swarovski also honoured winners of the Cougar Bloody Mary awards across the categories of (a) Rookie of the event (#5); (b) Fastest speed in any off road (#1); (c) Most improved team (#3); (d) Fastest decision maker (#12); (e) Fastest in all off-roads (#4); Sportsmanship award (#10); (f) Endurance Award (#14); (g) Spirit of Cougar (#11); (h) Discovery of the event (#13) and (i) Most courageous wife (wife of competition # 4).

The participants and officials left AmanBagh the next morning, in gleaming rally vehicles that had been washed and serviced overnight. Another first for any motorsport event in the country!

We thank all our participants, officials and well-wishers for making this dream come true.

Warm regards

Team Cougar Motorsport

Visit www.cougarmotorsport.in for detailed results and pictures



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