

Tushar & Pooja: London to Delhi by road

by Garry Sowerby

Now and then the phone rings or I get an email from someone keen to take on an epic drive to raise money for something, set a new record or to soothe a yearning to fulfill a life-long motoring ambition.

The communiqués most likely come as a result of the four long-distance global driving records Ken Langley, Tim Cahill and I set in the 1980s. But in most cases, when the caller realizes the planning, risk, expense and dedication that went into those events, I never hear from them again.

Last spring I got an email from Tushar and Pooja Agarwal, a couple in London, England. The first indication the IT specialist and insurance broker were different from the usual tire-kicking would-be road adventurers was their lack of questions other than how to order a couple of books on my boy-wonder motoring extravaganzas.



The Agarwals are driving through 15 countries from London to Delhi, in aid of Friendicoes, a non-profit that helps neglected animals.

I sent the books and didn't hear from the Agarwal's for few months. Then they sent an email outlining their plans to drive from London, England to New Delhi, India.

"London Delhi by Road is a charity event that will travel through 15 countries starting from London in April 2010 to reach New Delhi, India in 7 weeks," Tushar wrote.

The journey is in aid of an animal charity in India called Friendicoes SECA, a registered non-profit charity operating in the city of Delhi since 1979 that at any given time has 1,000 animals to feed, medicate and provide care for. (www.friendicoes.org)

The couple hopes to raise awareness among people in countries enroute on how they can better look after their animals and spread the message that cruelty to animals is not acceptable.

Over the next few months Pooja and Tushar, thirty year olds who grew up in India but were educated and now work in England, kept me up to date on their progress. Although I offered bits of advice, I was impressed by their tenacious, levelheaded approach to the mission.

They understand the impact of carbon emissions produced by the 13,500 kilometre drive and subsequent return flight back to the UK from India and have calculated the carbon footprint and offset it by donating financially towards planting trees in Kenya.

After considering many vehicles they purchased a 2.5 L, 6-speed Jeep Cherokee for the trek, right-hand drive of course. Aside from a roof rack, extra spare tires and a load of guidebooks, maps and visas, theirs is a stock vehicle.



Although they looked for corporate sponsorship, it was not something that stood in Tushar and Pooja's way. The result is a purity in their blog, no corporate PR departments wagging the tail of their efforts. No frivolous press conference and massaged press releases either. Just an email once in a while that links to a blog on their website <http://www.LondonDelhiByRoad.com>.

Since their trip began on April 17th, I find myself waiting to hear where they are, and even worry about them. And, since they will be motoring through China, and Nepal following their journey is a nice complement to the Stanley Cup playoffs. Montreal not playing tonight? No sweat just got an update from Tushar and Pooja. They made it

through the border between Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan and the Cherokee is running just fine!

So for the past few weeks I've been along with them virtually as a preoccupied Tushar arrived for his last day of work with his shirt on inside out, as they discovered historic European cities, Nazi death camps and the Danube River and drank horse and camel milk in Kazakhstan.

Although I have driven from London to India before, the route was through Turkey, Iran and Pakistan and not north of the Caspian and Black Seas through Russia, the 'Stans' and China. So in a way I'm living a road trip through places that were some of the most inaccessible places on the planet for Westerners not that long ago.

In the last report from the team Tushar writes, "I am amazed that Kazakhstan, being the 9th largest country in the world; it is mineral rich; it is oil rich, but it still remains unexplored. Believe me, the film *Borat* does not do justice to this country."

"A lot of people warned us about Kazakhstan not being safe for foreigners. We were told to keep a distance from the local people and to keep a low profile. Whoever said this could not have been more wrong. People here are extremely friendly, hospitable, helpful and always smiling. Even the cops and the custom officers smile here!"

Reading the rest of the update I couldn't help but smile myself because even in these times of financial uncertainty and global conflict, there are people like Tushar and Pooja Agarwal who are following their dreams all the way from London to Delhi. But Tushar and Pooja are only half way there, and with China, Nepal and India down the road, the grit of their trek is still on the horizon.

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