

Prepping a Volvo 1800 ES for the 2019 Peking to Paris Rally



BY JOE LAZENBY

Often, to those afflicted with the psycho-neurotic condition known as *car disease*, thoughts of unadorned exploration through remote and exotic areas of the world behind the wheel of a solid, well-sorted vintage car are nurtured in a dusty corner of their minds. For those of us whose condition has mutated into the *vintage Volvo* strain of the disease, we see ourselves cruising in a PV, a 120 series, or an 1800, as we investigate the outer reaches of the world's barren fringes.

I began to get early whiffs of vicarious adventure when I was contacted by Russell Jacobs of RJ Cars in Arkport, New York in the spring of 2017. RJ Cars (www.rjcars.com) is a full-service restoration shop for classic cars and motorcycles owned and operated by Russell. He was searching for parts and information related to the restoration and modification of a 1973 1800 ES in preparation for the car's participation in the famous 2019 Peking to Paris Motor Challenge.

The Peking to Paris Motor Challenge runs every three years and the 2019 edition is scheduled for June 2 to July 7 next year. The first Peking to Paris rally was run in 1907 and won by Scipione Borghese who left the French Embassy in Peking June 10 and arrived in Paris August 10. The 2019 rally will cover nearly 9,000 miles and here's how the organizers—the Endurance Rally Association—describe it:

“The Peking to Paris Motor Challenge is open to cars of a type produced before 1976 and is suitable to both novice crews, with training and support, as well as experienced rally entrants. Taking an exciting route via gravel, sand and stunning roads, luxuri-

ous hotels and desert camping, this is a life changing, never to be forgotten, adventure.

The route is challenging but the organizers welcome both newcomers and experienced crews. You will need a sense of adventure and be prepared to spend nights

Erik van Droogenbroek and Tone Moller, his Danish wife, who will also be his co-driver and navigator in the 2019 Peking to Paris Motor Challenge. They acquired the 1973 1800 ES from Rich Kushner of Swedish Motors in Marietta, Pa. It's being prepped by RJ Cars in Arkport, N.Y.



under canvas in the deserts of Mongolia and Kazakhstan. The ability to carry out regular maintenance on your own car is essential. Average daily distances are around 400 kilometers, but—on occasion—they can be as much as 650 kilometers. It is an endurance event after all.”

It is interesting to note that the list of entrants for the 2019 rally (as of January 2018) include 12 Volvos, including three 142/144, two 1800s (the 1800 ES is one of them), five 122s, and two 544s.

Erik van Droogenbroek—a Dutchman living in Aruba—had approached Russell about preparing a car for the rally. He came across RJ Cars by a somewhat circuitous route. Erik’s wife—Tone Moller, who is also his co-driver/navigator—had past family ties to Brooktondale, N.Y. in the Finger Lakes region. Because of this connection, Erik wanted a shop in New York State to prepare whatever car he chose. An Internet search ended up bringing him and RJ Cars together.

RJ Cars, while having restored a variety of classic cars and motorcycles, had never prepared a rally car. The two parties conferred on what path to take. In the beginning, no one was really sure what car to choose, however, after studying the record of successful finishers in previous Peking to Paris events, Volvo stood out boldly. But which model? The 120 series was an obvious choice, but there were already a number of those entered. Erik wanted something a little different, yet still a vintage Volvo. Collectively it was decided to go with an 1800 ES and a 1973 was obtained from Rich Kushner



The 1800 was completely disassembled, with all parts meticulously cataloged, before being sandblasted and then primed in epoxy.

of Swedish Motors in Marietta, Pa.

It is important to point out that Erik is not a novice in the world of international auto rallying. He previously entered a 1965 Ford Mustang convertible in the 2016 Rally of the Incas, a 27-day rally through beautiful South American geography. Unfortunately, the Mustang had not been properly prepared and did not finish.

With that experience in his hip pocket, Erik was set on trying to avoid the same error in the 2019 Peking rally. He had some very specific ideas of the work he wanted done to the ES. Russell and crew also had some thoughts and the two perspectives converged. With that in mind, the Arkport staff—headed by parts and service manager Darren Ohara—dove in. ▷

Russell Jacobs (left), owner of RJ Cars, and Darren Ohara, who manages the 1800 project.



The rear axle was also disassembled, sandblasted, and painted. It was then reassembled with a new ring and pinion setup (4.27:1), new bearings, and a Trutrac limited slip unit.





The front cross member was reinforced through some ingenious welding patterns.

The first step was to totally disassemble, sandblast, and epoxy-prime the 1800's body. The driver's seat was temporarily installed so that an interior roll cage could be constructed in the proper configuration. The rear axle was disassembled, sandblasted, painted, and then reassembled using a new ring and pinion setup (4.27:1), new bearings, and a Trutrac limited slip unit.

The front suspension was also completely disassembled, sandblasted, painted, and reassembled with new bushings and Bilstein shocks. In addition, many hours were invested in ingenious welding patterns, which reinforced the front cross member and control arms at strategic points. The overdrive transmission was sent out for refurbishing and the engine rebuild subcontracted to Kirkum's Automotive, a local machine shop. (Phil Singher of Whidbey Island, Washing-

ton was consulted at various points on the engine job.)

The original fuel injection system was replaced with dual SU carbs, which were also sent out for rebuilding. A large aluminum skid plate was constructed to protect the bottom of the car from the front cross member back to and including the transmission and drive shaft. All brake and fuel lines were rerouted inside the body of the car and the original fuel tank was replaced with an aluminum fuel cell, with an internal bladder and a capacity increase from 11.9 gallons to 22 gallons.

In addition to the body restoration and modification, quite a bit of attention was given to the car's cosmetics. Both the upper and lower dash pads were replaced. New door, rear quarter, and kick panels, and carpet set were installed as well as all new weather stripping. A new

The front suspension is coming together.



A large aluminum skid plate was fabricated to protect the bottom of the car, including the front cross member, transmission, and drive shaft.

windshield with new seal and outer trim was also put in place.

The organizers require each participant to carry two extra spare wheels/tires so RJ Cars modified a safari-type roof rack, which had once adorned a 122 wagon, to fit the ES. Cor Engelen, of Pine Grove, Pa., finely crafted a set of wooden, white oak slats to go with it.

Last summer—as Russell, Darren, and company labored back in Arkport on the ES project—I traveled to Sweden for the annual VROM meet in Gothenburg. While there, I was fortunate enough to make contact with some vintage Volvo owners who had significant rally experience. Through some of those contacts, I was able to pick up several tips, which I relayed back to RJ Cars.

One of these tips concerned the suspension. The goal was to raise the car's body high enough to avoid rocks while crossing streams and other rough terrain in Mongolia,

The fuel tank was replaced with an aluminum fuel cell holding 22 gallons.





All cars must be able to carry two spare wheels, tents, sleeping bags, and all spare parts. The organizers' support mechanics are the best in the business at roadside repairs, but they do not carry parts for the participants.

Kazakhstan, and other far off Asian outposts. I was lucky enough to get a lead on a British company that produces springs, descriptively called *Africa Springs*, which significantly increase road clearance without creating a center of gravity that is too high.

Many others in the vintage Volvo world in both Sweden and England were also very generous and open in sharing their information and experience.

I just visited Russell and Darren in Arkport in January and found the ES completely disassembled, in primer, and being moved around the shop on dollies. Since then, the car has received its final paint job in California White. Additionally, two large, blue racing stripes have been added. All wheels have been sandblasted and painted in the original silver color. The crown jewel of the paint job is a beautiful air-brushed Aruban flag, which graces the hood of the ES.

The progress on the assembly of the Volvo has been so impressive that Erik has decided to try it out in the 2018 Trans-America Challenge, which starts in Charleston, S.C. on May 27th and finishes in Seattle, Wash. on June 17th, some 5,000 miles later.

Should be a great shakedown cruise for the Peking to Paris 1800 ES! ■
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be reached at jmlazenby46@gmail.com. Russell Jacobs can be reached at rjacobs@rjcars.com, Darren Ohara at darren@rjcars.com.

Sandy Hoffman and Judy Difasi of Wild Spirit Creations (www.airbrushingbysandy.com) airbrushed the Aruban flag on the hood of the 1800.

