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Day 4 Egilssradir to Hofn – Eastern Island 340km

After the first test of the day we start the long decent down the Fragadalur valley, there are tall fir trees in this area each planted by a student on the slopes of Mount Graenafell – in the bright sunshine the snow looked like icing on a cake. At the head of this the largest eastern fjord is Reyoardjorour where 3,000 British troops were stationed during World War II, the local population at the time was only 300. A test and coffee followed at the huge Alcoa Aluminium Refinery watched by many of the staff. Back up the main road looking for a pickup truck with oil drums for wheels on the dock side? Then into a 6km tunnel (speed cameras prevented anyone from having a good time – boring!) but this cut 50km from the route. Through the tunnel our next test on an old airfield was probably Clive's favourite – longer than most, on loose volcanic gravel and 2 seconds quicker than anyone else. We would now roughly follow the coast line along the south of the island, the first regularity of the day at 22kms with 11 speed changes along the "96". Another 22km to test/lunch/test and then time allowed to watch the waves crashing on the shoreline and to see numerous turf covered farms tucked under the soaring cliffs.



The next Jogularity was reindeer at 15km/11 speed changes followed by a short transit section to Djupivogur another trading post for coffee at Hotel Framtio, built in 1905, with embroidered table cloths it had kept is old world charm. Overlooking a pretty harbour we now had a little leisure time and optional tulips took us to view the Granite eggs 34 egg shaped sculptures on pillars representing each species of local bird, also nearby was a nautical "reclamation yard" with whole whale bones guarding the entrance.



An optical illusion along the next section of road made it look like you were driving below sea level as we crossed a dozen flat bridges and the mountain screens above the lagoons on our right were more green/grey rather than black/grey. The next test was the hill climb, which Clive hadn't been looking forward to due to lack of power but being on the loose and straight up he didn't do too badly. The views at the top were stunning across a vast natural bay and out to the sea; we made our descent in groups before rejoining the main road and our second tunnel. Our overnight halt was the Foss Hotel at Vatnajokull, the views from our room of three fingers of the glacier were stunning, although the service was very poor/slow as it had only just reopened that week after a large rebuild and refurbishment. Being absolutely in the middle of nowhere and a clear night this

was to be our best shot at seeing the northern lights but being so tired only Maisie and the official photographer got to see them.



Day 5 – Hofn to Hella 425 km along the south coast, we would pass ice caps and drive much closer to the glacier fingers with a stop at the Iceberg Lagoon. Apparently 3 weeks earlier on the recce the lagoon was empty as it was all still frozen but today it was full and you could hear the ice cracking as it broke up and made its way under the bridge and out to sea. The various colours of the ice were amazing and evidence of the dust from the Eyjafjajokull eruption in 2010 was obvious in places, also spotted were a couple of sea lions swimming in the lagoon. This is the site of scenes from Die another day where James Bond drove the Aston Martin across the frozen lake and Tomb raider where Angelina Jolie crosses the glacial sea in an amphibious vehicle.



A 55km transit section gave us plenty of opportunity to look and stop at views of the glacier and the changing landscape and play guess what the next road book clue is – mainly bridges. Several of the bridges were long, up to a km and single track with passing places, the last one built in 1974 completed Iceland’s “ring road” but they are often destroyed by icebergs in storms. With several of Iceland’s biggest waterfalls in the area extra time was allowed to go and view.

A test before lunch in the hotel car park and then a jogularity / test / regularity afterwards it was back into rally mode after the mornings site seeing. A really bad vibration from the car at the beginning of the regularity was really worrying however we carried on as it was at low speeds but were forced to stop after the finish – the sump guard was absolutely full of stones and pressing on the sump. We then had to catch up to avoid being OTL for the last test where I was screaming at Clive “through F” he just managed to stop the car and spin it round to get the correct test – admiring his long black lines on the tarmac on the way back through gate “F”. Our stop for the night was a brand new hotel and many of us took the opportunity to sit in the hot tubs before the evening meal.

Day 6 Hella back to Reykjavik 280km – This was to be a shortened day as the 4 wheel drive 48 hour advance crew with studded snow tyres had got blocked by the snow on the planned hill climb and final regularity which were then scrapped, effectively finishing the rally at the afternoon coffee halt where new tulips took us to the final stand alone test at a motor cross track. Firstly though we had a test – unfortunately not a re-run of the one the night before, then Jogularities Ytri-Ranga 5.88km Gisholt 15.12km and Kalfholt 7km all run immediately after each other taking us to near Mount Hekla and another break. By now we were travelling north to the east of Reykjavik and a more agricultural landscape, a really big flock of Bewick swans were grazing by the roadside.



Gullfoss or golden waterfall is in two stages and extra spectacular as the spray was freezing and coating everything in its path – really really cold but very beautiful.

Lunch was at the Geysir – site of the original water spout from which all geysirs take their names and after standing waiting for it to blow we realised that Strokkur further along the path was the more active and moved up to wait for it to erupt again. You could tell we were now close to Reykjavik by the number of buses and tourists so it was on to the last regularity of the event Pingvellir “Drive road 36 total 8.82km at a constant speed of 45kph, after 8.82 km turn R into cafe car park” - no speed changes or changes of direction!.



After handing our time cards over for the last time we had a little time to go and see where the north American and Eurasian tectonic plates meet and take in the views over the largest lake in Iceland before heading back to Reykjavik and the rally cross track.. Out of the main championship it was PLAY time especially when the back end stepped out on the first turn Clive then managed to keep it almost sideways all the way round. The official photographer actually came and apologised that he had been using the still camera and not the video!!! One last leg took us back to the ceremonial finish at Harpa – where we started, we were very pleasantly surprised to be met officially by Stuart Gill the British Ambassador (officially) and by John & Wendy Huntingdon, we did our last Le Jog tour with John and his brother, laughing all the way and having seen our names on the entry list they decided to come over for the weekend.

A glass of champagne welcomed us back to the hotel before we changed for the awards dinner. We had managed to maintain 7th position overall but had quietly been catching 6th place (we finished only 5 seconds behind) which gave us the class win and Team Puffin took the team honours but the biggest surprise was when Clive was called up for the “Test Pilot” award for the quickest driver based on totalled test times.



Saturday morning saw the cars returned to their containers in the dockyard and we took a trip out to the Blue Lagoon which was very relaxing. In the evening we met up with John & Wendy and Alan & Jan Shaw from Nottingham (also doing the event in a white Porsche) and went to a local restaurant recommended by the Icelandic family who'd ran the tests all week. All of Team Puffin tried the Puffin starter, which was smoked, I think we would have preferred the roasted version but the fin whale for mains was especially tender.

An extremely well run event with spectacular scenery and luckily, beautiful weather. Fantastic comaradary with all the competitors, marshalls, timekeepers and support crews. The people in Iceland are exceptionally friendly and accomodating, when two test venues were blocked they just closed the main street and then a school

playground and the tests were set up there with not a single piece of red and white tape. We were very sad to leave but will surely return someday. Anji & Clive