

**The Official Newsletter of the
Gold Coast Tweed Motorsporting Car Club Inc.**

Next Meeting is on Wednesday 21st January
At Merrimac High School, Dunlop Court, Mermaid Waters,
UBD 49 H 4

www.gctmc.org.au

RepcO Rally Australia.

Community Consultation Meetings.

A series of Community meetings have been scheduled for 7th February in Kingscliff, Murwillumbah & Kyogle.

All residents, Land Owners, Business Operators & People involved in Motor Sports & Motorsport Club Members are invited to attend.

At the meetings the organisers plan to release details of the proposed Rally Route Including Details of Roads that will be Closed for the Rally Cars to Compete on (Subject to council approval.) Timings for the meetings are:

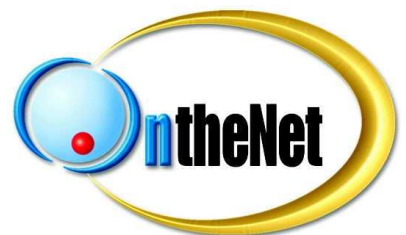
9 am Kingscliff Community Centre.

12 Noon Tweed Shire Council Building Murwillumbah.

4 pm Kyogle Town Hall.

Gold Coast Tweed Motorsporting Car Club AGM.

This years AGM will be held during the Club meeting on Wednesday 21st January at Merrimac High School. Members are asked to attend & vote for new committee as well as other posts that will be vacant And any changes to the Clubs Rules that have been put forward as Motions. At the back of this Newsletter a Nomination form & a Membership form are available. Any Nominations/ Motions Need to be given to the Secretary before the start of the AGM.



President: Jason Delaney: Jason@amalgamatedglass.com.au 0414533771
Secretary: Shaun Brown: sbrown99@bigpond.com.au
Treasurer: Tony Taylor: tony6020@optusnet.com.au 0419787783
Newsletter: Simon Petty: simon.petty@virginbroadband.com.au 0423364763
Club Trailer Ron King 0414180546 (24 Hours Notice Please)

Vice President: Gary Mitchell 5578 3173 (H)
Club Captain: Baden Uren: buren@bond.edu.au
Membership: Peter Preston: 5546 6373 (H)
CAMS Delegate: Bruce Hodgson: 0408159515
Alt CAMS Delegate: Wayne Johnston: 0417717288

Club Patron Alan Jones MBE

Training Courses to be held at CAMS

Auditorium, Milton.

1st Feb 2009 Fire & Rescue. 7th Feb 2009 Silver Module.

Training Course to be held at Hervey Bay 7th Feb 2009 Scrutineer. To Enrol in any of the above

Courses contact Lisa at CAMS qld@cams.com.au

Dakar 2009

Anybody following this years Dakar will be interested in the reports following the progress of Queenslander Bruce Garland & his Navigator Harry Suzuki, in later pages of this Newsletter.

For anyone who is not aware the Dakar is running at present in Argentina & Chile in South America due to problems in Africa where the Rally normally Runs. I would like to thank Peter Lockhart for sending the Reports that are included. Also thanks to Journalist Liz Swanton for writing the reports & Photographer Willy Weyens for the Pictures. (Due to the amount of material involved the pages are only available with the E-Mail version of Pitstop.)



All bitumen road event for standard road cars

Separate novice and experienced classes

IDEAL FOR BEGINNERS

Saturday 14 March 2009

Contact Brisbane Sporting Car Club

Phone (07) 3846 0233

www.bscc.asn.au

Learn more at the information night on Thursday 26 February 2009
at BSCC Club Rooms, 206 Montague Road, West End



QUEENSLAND MOBILE SAFETY CERTIFICATES
www.qmsc.com.au

Jason Ruse

jason@qmsc.com.au
qmsc.com.au

ph 1300 137 402
PO Box 3682, Robina TC 4230

Events Calendar Mid January till End March From QLD CAMS Calendar Version 8

Date	Organiser	Type	Status	Venue
7 February	Brisbane Sporting Car club	Rally	Multi Club	Benarkin
8 February	MG Car Club of QLD	Hillclimb	Come & Try	Mt Cotton
14/15 February	Warwick District Sporting Car Club	Supersprint	Multi Club	Morgan Park
14/15 February	Black Flag Racing	Off Road Short Course	Multi Club	Toowoomba
15 February	Ipswich West Moreton Auto Club	Autocross	Multi Club	Willowbank Park
15 February	Holden sporting car Club	Motokhana	Multi Club	Willowbank Raceway
28 Feb-01 Mar	Brisbane Sporting Car club	Rally	Multi Club	Willowbank Park
28 Feb-01 Mar	Warwick District Sporting Car Club	Supersprint	Multi Club	Morgan Park
07/08 February	Goondwindi Motorsport Assn	Off Road Long Course	State Ch/Ship	Goondwindi
07/08 March	MG Car Club of QLD	Race	State Ch/Ship	Morgan Park
14 March	Brisbane Sporting Car club	Touring Road Event	Multi Club	Public Roads in SE Qld
15 March	MG Car Club of QLD	Hillclimb	Multi Club	Mt Cotton
15 March	Ipswich West Moreton Auto Club	One Car Sprint	Multi Club	Willowbank Park
20 March	Black Flag Racing	Off Road Stadium	Multi Club	RNA Showgrounds
21 March	Northern Districts Sporting Car club	Rally	Club	Yaraman
21/22 March	Australian All Rally Group	One Car Sprint	Multi Club	Gatton

"The Brown Stuff"

Well last year wrapped up the way we started, with a rain cancelled event!

To all the competitors out there who are frustrated when this occurs, spare a thought for the organisers who have still had to do all the planning, paperwork, and in some cases even started the course set up before being forced to pull the pin on an event due to the weather.

Hopefully 2009 will see a return to some slightly better weather patterns and see our events less weather effected than they were in 2008.

There has been plenty of discussions re next years committee and I think there is at least one name in the hat for each of the main positions with a mix of experience and new blood on hand. Don't be shy however, if you would like to have more say on how your club is run, get off your backside and stick your hand up to help.

I know one position that we will most likely need to fill is that of newsletter editor as Simon will be stepping down from that role this year. Its not that hard, you just need a computer and the ability to come up with a few articles.

For my part I will be taking a break next year as between a new baby daughter (Lara Brown) that came home last week and a job that will be needing more of my time for a while I am simply running out of nights and weekends!

I still hope to be able to run (organise) at least 2 events this year as both myself and Tony Taylor still need to be assessed for our Club Chief licences and I would also like a khanacross from scratch as well.

Don't forget when re joining this year that we have changed the membership fee structure and you now have the option of joining up your partner and 2 kids (up to 18 YO) on the one

membership for \$80.00. If you are doing this please be aware that all parties on the membership need to fill out and sign a form (as everyone basically needs to "apply" for membership.

Access to land continues to be our major issue. If we get an area to use we do seem to be able to get people to step up and run events. I would hope all members would keep their eyes and ears open for possible venues. We would still like to have a crack at running something on a large hotmix surface (no weather problems) so please lets all keep our thinking caps on.

In a related vein, the subject of private testing or "fun" at Tanah Kita Nursery came up recently. We have asked Peter Preston to decline those requests as it has simply taken us so long and a lot of work to get that track back into commission.

Everyone is aware of how few venues we have and the nursery is extremely sensitive to use when wet (ruts badly). All would agree it is probably the best local venue for our events when it is usable, and if we want to keep it that way we have to limit our use to club activities. To be blunt anyone seeking to use it for practice / testing outside club days is just plain selfish and is disrespectful of the time and money that the club and members put into getting that area back into use.

Have I been clear enough?

Lastly, I will leave you with the answers to the trivia question I set in Novembers newsletter: That was who knows how many motor race tracks there have been in Queensland? (By definition these must have had some sort of permanent layout and have hosted real road racing events).

The answer is13 and they are:

Echo Valley 1966-
Surfers Paradise Indy Circuit
1991-

Lakeside 1961 – 2001(?)
(reopened in 2008 for limited use).

Leyburn 1949-1954

Lowood 1948-1966

Middle Ridge 1958-1961 (public road circuit)

Oxley 1947

Rosewood 1935 – 1949 (no cars after WW2)

Southport 1954-1955

Strathpine 1947-1960 (sprints held since 1936)

Surfers Paradise Int Raceway 1966-1987

Werrington Park 1923-1928

Wood Point 1936 (public road circuit)

See you at the meeting,

Brownie.

Gold Coast Tweed Motorsporting Club Inc.

PO Box 8582 Gold Coast Mail Centre QLD 9726



Please Note: Written nominations for the positions on the 2009 GCTMC Inc Committee must be held by the club's secretary prior to the start of the Annual General Meeting.

GCTMC Inc Committee Nomination Form 2009

I hereby nominate
..... for the position of
..... for the 2009 club year.
Signed: Seconded by:

GCTMC Inc Committee Nomination Form 2009

I hereby nominate
..... for the position of
..... for the 2009 club year.
Signed: Seconded by:

Motions for change of club procedures must be held in writing by the club's secretary prior to the start of the Annual general Meeting.

Motion:
.....
.....
.....
.....

Moved by: Signature:

Gold Coast Tweed Motorsporting Club Inc.

PO Box 8582 Gold Coast Mail Centre QLD 9726

www.gctmc.org.au

CAMS affiliated.



Name:	
Address:	
.....Post code:.....	
Phone:	Mobile:
Email:	

I hereby apply for membership of Gold Coast Tweed Motorsporting Club Inc. I agree to be abide by a spirit of fair play and good humour and by the Constitution of the Club and any amendments thereto.

Signed: Dated:

I/We wish to receive our newsletter by (tick one)

Mail:

Email:

<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>

This is an Individual membership (\$60): (tick one)

Family Membership (\$80):

A family membership caters for 2 adults and 2 children up to 18 yo, additional under 18's \$10.00 per membership. Please note, only 1 newsletter will be distributed per family membership.

All family members must complete and sign a membership application form.

Club Use Only:
Fee paid: \$
Date:
Form to membership officer
Copy to newsletter editor:



ISUZU RALLY TEAM READY FOR DAKAR

(Sydney, January 2, 2009)

(Please note: Photos included are from Harry Suzuki as the team prepared in Argentina. Official event photos (hi-res) will be provided once the event gets underway.)

The Australian/Swedish Isuzu Rally Team is primed and ready for a start in the 2009 Dakar (Argentina) Rally.

Aussies Bruce Garland and Harry Suzuki and Swedes Pelle Wallentheim and Olle Ohlsson and their two Isuzu D-Max utes (numbers 362 and 447 respectively) are facing 14 days of competition over nearly 6000km when the new event kicks off with a ceremonial start on the evening of January 2 in Buenos Aires (approx 12 hours behind Australia).

A total of 539 teams from 49 countries are contesting the event, including 188 'cars', which is the division the two Garland-built Isuzus are entered in. They will travel from Buenos Aires to Valparaiso in Chile and back, via the Andes Mountains and the Atacama Desert, said to be the driest place on earth. The event will travel to a height of 4700m, the highest in the rally's history.

"Dakar is the biggest, hardest, toughest, most dangerous race in the world," says Garland.

"Nothing comes close to it. It's the Mt Everest of rally and off-road, of all motorsport, really. If you can succeed in that, it's a huge achievement.

"It's always been that way during the years the event has been run in Africa. The difference is, no-one has ever raced like this in Argentina and Chile before, so it will be a more level playing field for us than it would have been in Africa."

Originally known as the Paris-Dakar, the Dakar Rally has been staged in Africa since 1978, but last year's event was cancelled on the eve of the start after terrorists killed seven people in the area and made direct threats to the organisers of the rally, hence the move to South America.

The Isuzu team (Garland MotorSports and Tubus Racing) has been in Argentina since mid-December, preparing for the event. The vehicles have been tested at 3800m to allow Isuzu engineers to re-tune the engines to work more efficiently at high altitudes.

"We unloaded everything in Buenos Aires, then drove about 1100km to Mendoza, then started climbing into the mountains near the Chilean border to test the cars – and ourselves," Garland says.

"Working at this altitude is difficult – you feel the pressure in your head and you lose concentration and focus. If you try to do something too quickly, it's

very hard to breathe and your reaction times drop away, but we've had a lot of advice from the people at Isuzu Argentina which has really helped us acclimatise.

"We've learned to drink a lot more water, not just because of the heat but also because it helps with the altitude issues, so we're doing that and we feel a lot more comfortable.

"But we know we will be getting up as high as 4700m and spending several hours at that height and that's when any mechanical issues, or a flat tyre, will present us with real problems. We've sourced some oxygen to take with us, just in case."

Garland and Wallentheim are currently seeded 62nd and 147th respectively but, having sized up the competition around them, are confident they will be re-seeded higher in the order after the first day or two.

That's once things get serious though ... which is not just yet. Because they strongly believe in a balance between work and play, in typical style they held a huge New Years Eve party complete with fireworks ("the locals thought they were in Baghdad!"). Then it was final documentation and vehicle scrutineering late on New Year's Day.

"There were about 200,000 people there. It was just amazing. The Argentinians are just so excited about the event. It's a great atmosphere."

The ceremonial start is on Friday evening and the team has moved from its earlier headquarters on the BA outskirts, into town, to make things easier for Saturday's start. In Australia, SBS TV will show daily highlights of the event from Sunday, January 4 to Monday, January 19, at 6pm.

Stage 1: Saturday, January 3

Buenos Aires – Santa Rosa

Competition (special stage) = 371km; Total distance: 733km.

Many have heard of La Pampa, where men are reputed to be "rough, but always courteous". This first stage will provide the opportunity to discover the length of these vast plains. Dakar competitors have never faced such a long special. With over 400km of rolling routes, perhaps the fastest on the program, this will constitute a real warm-up.

Stage 2: Sunday, January 4

Santa Rosa – Puerto Madryn

Competition (special stage) = 237km; Total distance: 837km.

The longest stage of the rally will not necessarily be the most difficult. However, it should still be approached with vigilance and, above all, with rally equipment that works. After a rapid first part of the special, there's a foretaste of the sand to come. On the off-roads of this stage, crews will need to pay

careful attention to their course. The more distracted will begin to “turn in circles”.



AUSSIES DO DAKAR – DAY ONE

(Sydney, January 4, 2009)

Stage 1: Saturday, January 3

Buenos Aires – Santa Rosa

Competition (special stage) = 371km; Total distance: 733km.

Australia' Bruce Garland and Harry Suzuki have finished 51st of the 157 starters in their class at the end of Day One of the 2009 Dakar Rally in Argentina.

Their time of 3hr 20min 02sec for the 371km special stage brought them into Santa Rosa around 44 minutes behind the leaders. They had started in 62nd place.

Swedish teammates Pelle Wallentheim and Olle Ohlsson finished the day in 67th place, having started at 147th.

A total of 539 teams from 49 countries were to have contested the event, initially including 188 'cars', which is the division the two Garland-built Isuzu D-Max utes are entered in, but last-minute withdrawals whittled the number back. The field was also reduced during the first day of competition.

"It was unbelievably dusty," says Garland.

"We just ate dust for miles and miles. So many people doing this event don't know how to pass in the dust, so we would come up behind a car and find it was part of a convoy. So then you would have to find a way around the convoy, which could take ages. You just have to be patient and wait your chance and then take a big gulp of brave and do it.

"We passed about 12 cars and I think Pelle passed about 32. We knew we would be faster than a lot of them, so we're hoping to be re-seeded within the next day or so.

"We know we have another day with these sort of conditions and then it should get more open and more interesting."

Garland says the reception from the Argentinians has been an amazing experience.

"The ceremonial start was beyond belief. The news here was reporting around a million people in Buenos Aires to see us, but even if that's exaggerated, half a million wouldn't be. It was incredible.

"We had to do a six-kilometre loop around the city and it was supposed to take one and a half hours, but it ended up taking around three and a half.

They're so excited by it all. They reckon it's the biggest thing to hit the country since the World Cup back in the Seventies.

"And even out on the route today. For the last 150km through all these farms, there were crowds lined up at the side of the road, and everywhere there was a corner, there would be thousands of people with cameras and they're all going nuts as you come through. I've just never seen anything like it and it really is quite amazing to be part of it."

Nasser Al-Attiyah, driving a BMW, won the opening stage of the Rally as defending champions Mitsubishi struggled. The reigning world rally raid champion dominated the special stage with a winning time of 2hr 36min 15sec.

Volkswagen filled the next three places, with former world rally champion Carlos Sainz second, 2min 17sec off the pace, South Africa's Giniel De Villiers third another 13 seconds back, and Mark Miller of the United States fourth another 1min 41sec behind.

Originally known as the Paris-Dakar, the Dakar Rally has been staged in Africa since 1978, but last year's event was cancelled on the eve of the start after terrorists killed seven people in the area and made direct threats to the organisers of the rally, hence the move to South America.

The new event will take competitors 9500km (including 5600km of special stages) from Buenos Aires to Valparaiso in Chile and back (January 3-17), via the Andes Mountains and the Atacama Desert, said to be the driest place on earth. The event will travel to a height of 4700m, the highest in the rally's 31-year history.

Garland/Suzuki and Wallentheim/Ohlsson are driving two Isuzu D-Max utes, hand-built in Garland's Sydney workshop. They put out 160kW of power (up 33 per cent on the standard vehicle) and 500Nm of torque (@2000rpm; up 39 per cent).

Stage 2: Sunday, January 4 (results, January 5)

Santa Rosa – Puerto Madryn

Competition (special stage) = 237km; Total distance: 837km.

The longest stage of the rally will not necessarily be the most difficult. However, it should still be approached with vigilance and, above all, with rally equipment that works. After a rapid first part of the special, there's a foretaste of the sand to come. On the off-roads of this stage, crews will need to pay careful attention to their course. The more distracted will begin to "turn in circles".

THE DAKAR ASSAULT – DAY TWO – UPDATE ON BRUCE GARLAND

(Sydney, January 5, 2009)

A series of problems was behind Bruce Garland's lower-than-expected placing at the end of Day Two of the Dakar Rally in Argentina.

Bruce Garland and Harry Suzuki (Car 362) had been sitting as high as 39th in the order before slipping way back somewhere between the 108km and 225km mark.

They finished the day in 72nd place and that, coupled with the Day One result of 51st sees them in 65th outright.

"It was a really frustrating day in the dust," says Garland.

"We started the day having a good, clean run and then we got into the tight, twisty stuff and some of the vehicles couldn't manoeuvre so well and we were driving in all this blinding bulldust, trying to avoid cars and bikes and trucks that were going off the road all over the place.

"At one point there were so many vehicles broken down on the track that we actually headed off into the bushes to get around them. Then when we did get back on the track, we got a puncture.

"So then we were trying to dig a hole in the sand to get the jack set up and there would be trucks going past, tossing a wave of bulldust over you. It was just total insanity out there.

"At one point, when we were going, this truck came past us and it was towing a buggy that had broken down. Of course, the buggy had no control being towed, and it hit one of the bikes that had broken down and pushed it down the road and into our car. Luckily it was mainly just panel damage, but it certainly was a day to remember for all the wrong reasons."

Adding to the frustration is that there is no re-seeding in the event. Starting position each day is determined by where you finished the day before, so after starting Day Two around 51st spot, courtesy of their Day One finish, Garland and Suzuki will be back around the 72-mark, and will have to make up ground yet again, to pass a lot of the crews they have already proved to be faster than so far.

"I'm stuffed," says Garland, whose early morning phone call (Argentine time) meant he would get little sleep before the start of Day Three.

"It was a helluva day. Tomorrow is a really long stretch but hopefully the conditions will be better and we can start pulling ahead again."

Stage Three: Puerto Madryn to Jacobacci. Total distance is 694km of which 616km is the competitive stage. Route notes suggest this stage (entering

Patagonia) will be hillier, with some long curved sections and plenty of lakes to navigate by. Pink flamingoes will be a feature – if the crews have time to notice!

DAKAR (ARGENTINA-CHILE) – DAY THREE

(Sydney, January 6, 2009)

Stage Three: Puerto Madryn to Jacobacci. Total distance is 694km of which 616km is the competitive stage. Route notes suggest this stage (entering Patagonia) will be hillier, with some long curved sections and plenty of lakes to navigate by. Pink flamingoes will be a feature – if the crews have time to notice!

A sensational effort by the two Isuzu Rally crews on Day Three of the Dakar has put them into the top 50.

Pelle Wallentheim/Olle Ohlsson (Tubus Racing; car 447) finished 34th quickest on the stage, which puts him in 36th outright, while Bruce Garland/Harry Suzuki (Garland MotorSports; car 362) finished the day in 47th for 46th outright.

COMMENTS HERE

Up the front, it was Nasser Al-Attiyah (BMW) who was the fastest on the day, to secure his second stage win of the event.

Having lost the lead to dual world rally champion Carlos Sainz (VW) during Stage Two, Al-Attiyah set about moving back up the order after a trip off-course on Sunday saw him slip from first place down to fourth.

On the stage, Dieter Depping and de Villiers (both VW) were third and fourth quickest ahead of Stephane Peterhansel (Mitsubishi) but overall it is Sainz, Al Attiyah and De Villiers, with nine-time Dakar champion, Stéphane Peterhansel in fourth.

Originally known as the Paris-Dakar, the Dakar Rally has been staged in Africa since 1978, but last year's event was cancelled on the eve of the start after terrorists killed seven people in the area and made direct threats to the organisers of the rally, hence the move to South America.

The new event will take competitors 9500km (including 5600km of special stages) from Buenos Aires to Valparaiso in Chile and back (January 3-17), via

the Andes Mountains and the Atacama Desert, said to be the driest place on earth. The event will travel to a height of 4700m, the highest in the rally's 31-year history.

Garland/Suzuki and Wallentheim/Ohlsson are driving two Isuzu D-Max utes, hand-built in Garland's Sydney workshop. They put out 160kW of power (up 33 per cent on the standard vehicle) and 500Nm of torque (@2000rpm; up 39 per cent).

Their results so far:

Day One: Garland/Suzuki 51st O/R; Wallentheim/Ohlsson 67th O/R
Day Two: Wallentheim/Ohlsson 61st O/R (64th on stage)
Garland/Suzuki 65th O/R (72nd on stage)

Stage Four: Jacobacci to Neuquen.

Total distance: 488km; Competitive: 459km.

According to the official event notes:

"At the start of this stage, the rocky passageways will make heavy demands on the arms of the motorcyclists, while those who are accustomed to 'wadis' (dry river valleys – shallow and steep) will be obliged to negotiate the Argentinian 'rios' with the same careful attention. Next, the first sandy portions and the long kilometres of off-road will thrill those who love driving them. Careful now! Mistakes can begin to be costly: the stage towards Neuquen has all the ingredients of a trap. By taking on more or less of a lead, the favourites can begin to show themselves and provide indications of a ranking that might just last."

DAKAR – DAY FOUR FOR THE AUSSIES AND SWEDES

A mixed day for the Aussies and Swedes of the Isuzu Rally Team as they continue their climb towards the Andes Mountains on Day Four of the 2009 Dakar (Argentina-Chile) Rally.

Bruce Garland and Harry Suzuki (Garland MotorSports) brought their Isuzu D-Max ute (car 362) home in 41st place on the stage across the Patagonian steppe from Ingeniero Jacobacci to Neuquen in Argentina. That puts them in 44th outright, but after a fast start, it was a very different story for their teammates Pelle Wallentheim and Olle Ohlsson (Tubus Racing, car 447).

“Pelle was going pretty fast this morning and it sounds like he has hit a grid or a gate of some sort and damaged the transfer case,” says Garland.

“The car just won’t drive. He was initially hoping the truck would tow him in, but he’s still 120km away [at time of writing] and in these conditions, it would take half a day for him to get here, which is just crazy, so we’re trying to sort out a way to get him in and fix it so he can keep going.

“It is a real shame because he was going so well, but we will get him to the finish.”

Garland has described the rally as ‘insanity’ and says both he and Wallentheim consider that doing famous but grueling Australian events such as the Finke Desert Race in Central Australia or the Australasian Safari in Western Australia is like driving along a major city road compared to the conditions in Argentina.

“This is the first time they have combined the trucks and the cars in the one class and they’re starting us all 30 seconds apart with the trucks behind, but they are so fast that they just overtake you.

“The really scary part is if you have to slow down or stop somewhere on the track. The dust is a hundred times worse than Aussie bulldust, so I just panic that someone is going to run over the top of us if we are stuck like that.

“It’s happening all the time. Trucks are just pounding into the back of cars...but the trucks can keep going. And the other problem is that they cut up the road so badly. They’re carving trenches in the track that are a metre deep and the cars are just grinding along on their sump guards. It’s just madness out here.”

But there is a highlight: the Argentine people.

“They’re just fabulous. You’re out in the middle of nowhere and there are hundreds of thousands of them lining the track, and they are so excited. If you’re in trouble, they’re so quick to help. And when you get into town at the

end of the day, they're giving you apples and beers, and wanting to have their photos taken with you. That part is really special."

Given Wallentheim's experience today, and his own observations of the event, Garland has formulated a plan for the rest of the rally.

"Slow and steady. At least for now. There will be time for racing later, but for now, the issue is if you go too hard and damage the car, it might not be an immediate problem but it will show up later.

"So I'm keeping an eye on a couple of the Dakar veterans and pacing myself against them. They know what to do to keep a car intact so you make the finish line, and that's what we're aiming for. It's just survival at this stage."

Garland's plan was locked into place after his own dramas on Day Three, when he initially had a puncture and then got stuck for a while. After that, he decided to back right off, and it's the plan he stuck with today.

Today's fourth stage was originally planned to include a special stage that was 459km but the competitive section was shortened by organisers to 380km.

It featured numerous rocky and sandy sections with lots of potholes and several 'rios', the Argentine equivalent of Africa's 'wadis' or dry creek beds which can be quite shallow, or deep and steep. The route passed through the Sierra Mesanlyes and meandered to the north-east of the Negro River to finish near the renowned Valley of the Dinosaurs in a protected geological area dating back to the Cretaceous Period.

At the top of the field, dual world rally champion Carlos Sainz (VW) won the fourth stage of the rally, holding off Nasser Al Attiyah (BMW) to maintain the overall lead.

Sainz, who also won the second stage, came home just six seconds ahead of Al Attiyah, who won the first and third stages through Argentina.

Luc Alphand (Mitsubishi) was third and Mark Miller (VW) was fourth with the overall rankings after four days being Sainz, Al Attiyah, Giniel De Villiers (VW) and nine-time Dakar champion, Stéphane Peterhansel in fourth.

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Day Two: Wallentheim/Ohlsson 61st O/R (64th on stage); Garland/Suzuki 65th O/R (72nd on stage)
Day Three: Wallentheim/Ohlsson 36th (34th); Garland/Suzuki 48th (49th).

Stage Five (Wednesday): Neuquen to San Rafael

Total distance: 763km; competitive: 506km

The major test of this first week of the race will perhaps be fought on the road to San Rafael. The long distance will oblige teams to remain focussed at all times. The drivers will also be confronted with real dune passageways, including a range nearly 20km long. Long offroad stretches will alternate with much more technical sections in the track following the 'rios' (see definition above). The Cordillera (mountain range) can be seen on the horizon but taking time to sightsee is out of the question.

DAKAR – DAY FIVE FOR THE AUSSIES AND SWEDES

(Sydney, January 8, 2009)

A long, hard day of cautious driving – and a little bit of luck – has put the Australian Isuzu crew in 24th place outright on Day Five of the 2009 Dakar Rally (Argentina-Chile).

Sydney's Bruce Garland and Harry Suzuki and their Isuzu D-Max left in 42nd place from the start at Neuquén and finished 18th on the 763km stage to San Rafaël, which included a competitive special stage of 506km.

The route, which ranged in altitude from 400m to 2300m above sea level, alternated between clearly visible tracks and long sections of off-road driving, as well as around 20km of sand dunes at the end, which caught out many competitors, including some of the front runners.

At time of writing, Swedish teammates Pelle Wallentheim and Olle Ohlsson were still to arrive at the overnight stop. They started from 139th in the morning, after an all-night effort by the team to repair the damage caused when they hit a grid in Stage Four. They were last marked in 74th and still travelling.

"That was one tough day," says Garland.

"It took us about eight and a half hours to drive a 500km special stage, with the first 110km taking two hours.

"The road was really bad and then you add in the truck factor. They're starting the trucks and the cars together, combining their finishing times to determine starting order each day, so it's cars and trucks out there together and they are really fast – plus they cut up the road really badly.

"You can't drive slowly because there's only a 30-second gap between each entry, but if you get caught behind something, you can get hit, so if it looks like there is a delay, we try to get off the road immediately to get around it. One of these trucks could go over a car or a bike in the dust and not even notice."

Once through this section, the route opened up, with beautiful flowing roads and great views. It was an excellent spot for spectators and there are still plenty of them.

"It was all steppe-y plains with no trees, just wide open, and I reckon the whole of Argentina has come out to watch – where you might see a kangaroo or two when you are doing the Australian Safari, there are 100,000 Argentineans standing there, and if you get lost, they point you in the right direction!"

After several days of being further back in the field, Garland believes he and Suzuki are now tracking where they should be.

“If we can hold around this point, we should be able to make steady progress. When you’re further back, you end up constantly trying to pass people who really don’t know what they’re doing and you can get stuck for 80km trying to do it.

“The racing really starts now, but we’re taking it conservatively. The people who are overdriving are starting to have car problems. Our first goal is to finish, and our second goal is to finish ahead of South Africa’s Alfie Cox. We’re on a mission – we have to beat the South Africans at something!”

Argentina is hotter than Africa is at this time of year, and the heat, plus the difficult driving conditions – and, increasingly from now on, the altitude – are combining to make it what veterans are calling the toughest Dakar ever.

“I got quite dehydrated on Day Two when we were driving through the bulldust and then had to stop to fix a puncture, so I’m drinking about eight to 10 litres a day – and I only had two toilet stops today! You just need the water, and I’m trying to drink more than I think I need, because we’ve learned that being properly hydrated also helps with altitude sickness.”

Garland had minimal issues with the sand dunes in the final section of today’s stage but it was a different story for some of the leaders.

Dual world rally champion Carlos Sainz (VW) had been leading the event till today, but he made a mistake in the dunes (courtesy of a lack of power steering) and tore off the bonnet of his car. Nine-time Dakar winner Stéphane Peterhansel (Mitsubishi) had a similar problem with the rear hood of his car. Both were able to continue but it has affected their standings.

At the end of the stage, Sainz’ teammate Giniel De Villiers was first ahead of yet another VW pilot, Dieter Depping, with Robbie Gordon and his Hummer third. In outright terms, Sainz has dropped back to third, behind De Villiers with BMW’s Nasser Al Attiyah in the lead. Peterhansel has dropped from fourth to sixth.

Garland says the reality of just how tough this event is has hit all the competitors with the news that French motorcycle competitor Pascal Terry was found dead today after going missing during competition three days ago.

Day Six: San Rafaël to Mendoza
Total: 625km; 395km of competitive.

The sixth leg is characterised by lots of possible route choices. The drivers and their co-pilots will first encounter a 60km stretch of dunes. The second part of the day’s journey is then seemingly easier, but is tricky all the same – a wide ford will require all of the participants’ attention if they want to avoid taking an unexpected dip.

The stage heads through the northern Patagonian lakeland and then turns north to a finish south of Pareditas. A 154km liaison then takes crews into the overnight halt in Mendoza, with the volcanic peak of Tupungatito rising to 6550m in the background.

Mendoza stands 824m above sea level in a region famous for its wine industry and is a popular destination for tourists interested in climbing, skiing, rafting and hiking.

Garland and Wallentheim tested at this level before the event started, to tune the Isuzus to the higher altitudes they have to tackle, and to acclimatise themselves to the demands of climbing into the Andes.

DAKAR – DAY SIX - A GREAT DAY FOR THE AUSSIE/SWEDISH TEAM

(Sydney, January 9, 2009)

Australia's Bruce Garland and Harry Suzuki and their Isuzu D-Max ute are now in 20th outright in the 2009 Dakar Rally (Argentina-Chile) after a shortened stage six.

The Australians finished the day in 21st place, while their Swedish teammates Pelle Wallentheim and Olle Ohlsson (Tubus Racing) finished the stage in 30th, an impressive drive after starting at position 121.

They are now 57th outright. It's a huge improvement in one day given they had started a long way behind the Australians because they got caught in the chaos that was Stage Five – snow, hail, a flooded creek and lengthy delays that resulted in the stage being halted. All the latecomers then effectively 'transported' the rest of the stage, rather than completing it under full competition conditions. They received a derived time, rather than a true result against the clock.

"We started the day in the section of sand dunes that we had travelled over on Day Five," says Garland.

"Many of the vehicles that had got stuck there were still there, so you had to be extra careful getting through that section. Former world rally championship driver Alister McRae was one of the ones who got stuck late at night, but he waited out there till daybreak, then drove in to the start control, got his starting position and drove straight out again for today's stage!"

Garland says he and Suzuki were running as high as 13th on the road within the first five minutes on the dunes, but then made an uncharacteristic mistake that the Aussie offroad star is still kicking himself about.

"We got stuck! We hadn't let the tyres down properly and we followed someone else's tracks and we got stuck, so we lost about 20 minutes getting ourselves out of that mess, but the rest of the stage was flat, flowing sandy stuff. It was boring, but it was fairly quick, so all in all it was quite a good day."

Teammates Pelle Wallentheim and Olle Ohlsson are also describing Stage Six as a good day, after the dramas of Day Four (broken diff and axle) and Day Five (leaking radiator as well as the event problems mentioned earlier).

"We're fine but we're tired. We will sleep very well tonight, I think, because we did not have much sleep the last two nights," Wallentheim says.

"This rally I seem to have a good day, then a bad day, then another good day. Then I have two bad days – but today was definitely a good one. You have a bad one and you have to start behind so many cars and pass them again.

“Today I started almost at the very end of the field and now I am up closer to where I want to be, so it’s much better. I think we passed about 60 cars today, so tomorrow we will have a much better start on the road.”

Wallentheim says they took it fairly cautiously today, even though they were able to make up so much time.

“It’s a good feeling to pass all these cars. It’s fun to know that you are doing it right, that they are getting stuck in the sanddunes but you can sail through because you are doing it right.

“But let’s not be silly about it. This rally is very tough, much tougher than I thought, even though I knew it would be very, very hard, and it does make you tired because you have to work hard.

“For instance, we missed several way points in the sand dunes today because we got a bit lost, so we lost time turning around and going back to go past them properly, because if you miss them, you get a time penalty and we don’t need to lose any more time.”

What certainly helped improve the situation for both Isuzu drivers was the fact that organisers decided to start the trucks an hour after the cars. Previously, the two classes had been starting together, depending on their finishing times the day before.

“That just made it so much better,” says Garland, “because they had been carving up the tracks so badly, and because they were so fast, it was really dangerous. There have already been some instances where they have ploughed into the backs of cars, and yesterday it happened at least once and both the car and the truck burned to the ground!

“So both Pelle and I were pleased to have them behind us and hope it stays that way from now on.”

Garland says the crowds continue to line the route in their thousands, and greet them when they arrive at the overnight stop: “It’s incredible how many people are coming to see us. We all feel like rock stars!”

At the front end of the pack, there was a shock move today when previous event leader Nasser Al Attiyah was excluded from the rally for missing nine of the mandatory ‘way’ points [like a check points] that Wallentheim mentioned.

The BMW driver, who won the first and third stages and led the field in outright terms by more than seven minutes, was having radiator problems and decided to avoid the section of sanddunes because of the risk of overheating and engine damage. Making that call meant he missed the way points which meant automatic exclusion.

VW’s Giniel De Villiers, who was second on the day, was promoted to stage winner and inherited the overall lead ahead of his teammates Carlos Sainz

and Mark Miller. Nine-time Dakar winner Stéphane Peterhansel (Mitsubishi) is in fifth.

Today's stage was shortened from 394km to 178km after just 230 of the 410 vehicles involved made the connection after the punishing fifth stage on Wednesday which also witnessed the withdrawal of more than 30 vehicles. A flooded river ford also meant the stage had to be trimmed.

Originally known as the Paris-Dakar, the Dakar Rally has been staged in Africa since 1978. However last year's event was cancelled on the eve of the start after terrorists killed seven people in the region and made direct threats to the organisers of the rally, hence the move to South America.

The new event is taking competitors 9500km (including 5600km of special stages) from Buenos Aires to Valparaiso in Chile and back (January 3-17), via the Andes Mountains and the Atacama Desert, said to be the driest place on earth. The event will travel to a height of 4700m, the highest in the rally's 31-year history.

Garland/Suzuki and Wallentheim/Ohlsson are driving two Isuzu D-Max utes, hand-built in Garland's Sydney workshop. They put out 160kW of power (up 33 per cent on the standard vehicle) and 500Nm of torque (@2000rpm; up 39 per cent).

Their results on Day Six show just how far they have moved through the field after finishing 51st (Garland/Suzuki) and 67th (Wallentheim/Ohlsson) on Day One.

Stage Seven: Mendoza (Argentina) to Valparaiso (Chile)

Total distance: 816km; Competitive (special) stage: 419km

The variety of terrain that is now a constant for this event is evident again on this stage where, in addition to a change of country, the competitors will get to know the Andes. But before measuring themselves against the mountains, they must cross a series of dunes and endure a session of fesh-fesh (powder-like sand) which is like Saharan sand. This will be the only special stage to include sections at 3000m above sea level, on a section that will allow them – if they have time to look – a wonderful view of the Aconcagua, the highest point in the Andes at 6959m. Then it's over the border to reach the sea at Valparaiso – and a much needed day off to recover, before starting the return journey to Buenos Aires.

DAKAR – DAY SEVEN

THE AUSSIES AND SWEDES CONTINUE TO IMPROVE

(Sydney, January 10, 2009)

The Australian/Swedish Isuzu Rally Team is looking forward to a day of rest after seven days of hard racing in the 2009 Dakar Rally, being run in South America.

Australia's Bruce Garland and Harry Suzuki (Garland MotorSports) and their Isuzu D-Max ute had a trouble-free day to finish the shortened seventh stage as 19th fastest, which puts them in 18th place outright.

In contrast, after two days of major drama, their Swedish teammates Pelle Wallentheim and Olle Ohlsson (Tubus Racing) had more problems. This time it was the transfer case which led to them being stuck in low range for most of the stage. They had started the stage as car 32 but finished as 49th fastest. Overall, though, they have improved another few places and are now 54th outright, but it's not as good as they were hoping for after such an impressive drive yesterday.

Heavy overnight rain churned up the track, making conditions muddy and treacherous. It forced organisers to shorten the stage by nearly half because the tracks were so badly damaged. Originally, the competitive stage was to have been 419km of a total distance of 816km, but the detour reduced the special stage to 243km.

But that was only for the bikes and cars who ran the shortened route which took them from the Argentinean side of the Andes Mountains to Valparaiso on the coast of Chile. Organisers banned the truck class from the stage altogether, sending them direct to Valparaiso by public roads.

"I'm looking forward to a bit of a rest," says Garland, calling in after a shower at the end of yet another long day.

"We're all planning to have a bit of a sleep-in, but then we have work to do on the cars, so it won't be much of a rest. But at least it's a break from the driving. It's a bloody tough event."

The road was quite fast despite the mud, but narrow and full of potholes. One of the leading drivers described the combination of rain and the fine fesh-fesh sand as like driving on ice, but Garland was not worried by the conditions.

“There was a bit of mud, but not enough for our liking. We’ve got great mud tyres from Bridgestone and they coped with the conditions really well. There were lots of people getting stuck but we were just flying past them.

“Basically it was like driving the Finke [Desert Race, in Central Australia] in the wet, but a bit rougher. It was pretty easy early on and then a bit harder in the mud, but not much.

“We’re just trying to keep out of trouble because we’re really only half-way through this. There’s a few in front of us who I reckon won’t make it because they’re over-driving and that will soon start to cause problems for them mechanically.

“I’m aiming for a finish, not a new land speed record every day and my approach is working. The car is running like a dream. We’ve certainly had no overheating problems as yet. We had them in Dubai and we re-thought everything and re-worked everything and so far, so good.”

Yet again, Garland says, the start and finish of the day’s stage was witnessed by huge crowds, and despite the increasing remoteness of the route, there are still plenty of spectators prepared to make the pilgrimage.

“I reckon this must be the most watched sporting event in the world right now. We came to one little group of corners and there was a crowd like you would get at the Melbourne Cricket Ground all standing there. It was huge. And that was just one example. I don’t think the Pope gets as big a crowd as we are!”

Originally known as the Paris-Dakar, the Dakar Rally has been staged in Africa since 1978, but last year’s event was cancelled on the eve of the start after terrorists killed seven people and made direct threats to the rally, hence the move. The new South American event covers 9500km from Buenos Aires to Chile and back, finishing on January 17.

As of today, VW holds down the top three spots in field, with former dual world rally champion, Carlos Sainz, in the lead, ahead of Giniel de Villiers and Mark Miller.

Nine-time Dakar winner, and defending champion, Stéphane Peterhansel, who had been running as high as fourth in the event so far, had to put out a fire in the engine of his Mitsubishi after 57km of today’s stage. He was able to resume briefly before his engine broke down completely, and looks to have pulled out of the battle.

The crews are now enjoying the rest day ahead of the eighth stage on Sunday which is a 652km run from Valparaiso to La Serena. From there, it is back up into the Andes and on to the Atacama Desert as the crews return to the finishing line in Buenos Aires next weekend.

COMPARISON FROM DAY ONE: Garland/Suzuki 51st O/R;
Wallentheim/Ohlsson 67th

AS OF DAY SEVEN: Garland/Suzuki 18th; Wallentheim/Ohlsson 54th.

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DAKAR RALLY 2009 – DAY EIGHT FOR THE AUSSIES AND SWEDES

(Sydney, January 12, 2009)

“The real rally starts now” says Australia’s Bruce Garland, who is now running 16th outright after Day Eight of the gruelling 9000km Dakar Rally being staged in Argentina and Chile.

Garland, navigator Harry Suzuki and their Isuzu D-MAX ute finished the 652km stage (including 294km competitive) in 20th, giving them 16th in the overall standings. That puts them just behind the multi-million dollar factory teams, and in line to win the award for best privateer result.

Swedish teammates Pelle Wallentheim and Olle Ohlsson are now battling to make up ground after a series of dramas last week, and finished today’s run from Valparaiso to La Serena in 50th which puts them in 53rd place outright.

“It was more of a long, rough rally stage today, than anything else we have seen so far,” says Garland.

“It was very rocky and incredibly narrow. You just had no room for error and there were plenty of cars and trucks that rolled. There were some very steep drops but I don’t think any of the ones that rolled actually went over in the really steep sections.

“We’re just driving well within our limits, both of us, because the next few days will be really tough. The rally really starts now because we have long days and we’re moving into the Atacama Desert, which is supposed to be the driest place in the world, and we’re supposed to have temperatures upwards of 40 degrees.

“I think tomorrow is going to be an eight or 10-hour day on the road and it will probably be even harder the day after. I think the next couple of days will really change the face of the event, and people who haven’t done events like Dubai (the UAE Desert Challenge), as we have, are really going to struggle.

“I’m not saying we won’t struggle in the conditions, but at least with our experience in Dubai, we have a bit more idea of what to expect, and I’m confident we have sorted out our overheating problems. I think we’re probably better prepared than many others, so I am expecting quite a bit of attrition from now on.”

In the meantime, it remains a VW trilogy at the head of the car class. Former world rally champion Carlos Sainz has extended his lead in this, the 30th Dakar Rally (and the first held outside Africa), after winning the eighth stage.

He now leads teammate Giniel De Villiers by nearly 11 minutes, with their colleague Mark Miller remaining in third place. Record nine-times and defending champion, Stéphane Peterhansel (Mitsubishi) withdrew on Friday with a faulty engine.

Originally known as the Paris-Dakar, the Dakar Rally has been staged in Africa since 1978, but last year's event was cancelled on the eve of the start after terrorists killed seven people in the area and made direct threats to event organisers, hence the move to South America.

The new event is taking competitors 9500km (including 5600km of special stages) from Buenos Aires to Valparaiso in Chile and back (January 3-17), via the Andes Mountains and the Atacama Desert, said to be the driest place on earth. The event will travel to a height of 4700m, the highest in the rally's 31-year history.

Garland/Suzuki and Wallentheim/Ohlsson are driving two Isuzu D-Max utes, hand-built in Garland's Sydney workshop. They put out 160kW of power (up 33 per cent on the standard vehicle) and 500Nm of torque (@2000rpm; up 39 per cent).

Their results so far:

Day One: Garland/Suzuki 51st O/R; Wallentheim/Ohlsson 67th O/R

Day Eight: Garland/Suzuki 16th O/R; Wallentheim/Ohlsson 50th.

Only 337 of the 500 bikes, quads, cars and trucks that started in Buenos Aires on January 3 remain in competition for the second week (pending today's retirements).

Stage Nine: Total 537km; special (competitive) 449km.

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DAKAR – DAY NINE: SLOW AND STEADY FOR THE ISUZUS

(Sydney, January 13, 2009)

Slow and steady was the order of the day for the Australian/Swedish rally team, after Day Nine of the demanding Dakar Rally.

Australian team leader Bruce Garland says he and Pelle Wallentheim are mindful of the two heavy days that lie ahead: they're long days, at high altitudes and temperatures, with much of the competitive sections being run in the Atacama Desert. There is also the issue on Wednesday's stage, of whether the service trucks will make it through to the overnight stop, which makes driving without error even more imperative.

Garland and co-driver Harry Suzuki (Garland MotorSports) have dropped back two places to 18th while Wallentheim and co-driver Olle Ohlsson (Tubus Racing) have gained 11 places, now in 42nd outright, after finishing the stage 30th and 44th respectively.

"It was a long, hard day today, and very rough," says Garland.

"I think we were on the road for about 11 hours, with over eight hours of actual racing. But we have two absolute marathons ahead, so if people wanted to pass us today, we let them. We both know what we're aiming for – we want to finish.

"We can't believe some of the people around us. They're in a hurry to pass you, and they bash and crash their way through, and then a few kays down the road, there they are, fixing a puncture, or pulling themselves out of somewhere they have got stuck.

"You go a bit further, they pass you again, and then sure enough, they're stopped at the side of the road again. We didn't have any dramas at all."

[Wallentheim had only just completed the stage at time of writing. Still chasing comment.]

Garland says today's route followed the coast and offered some spectacular scenery – sheer cliffs and pounding waves – then they turned inland.

"We had heard about these sanddunes we were going to be crossing. We could see these clouds in the distance and then suddenly, there were the dunes – with the top of them in the clouds! They were about 1000m high!"

The next two stages take the crews into the Atacama Desert, famed as being the driest place on earth. While today's stage from La Serena to Copiapo was long (Total distance of 517km, with 429km of competitive), tomorrow's will be a marathon.

The round trip from Copiapo to Copiapo is 686km with 666km of competition – even the organiser’s notes describe it as “simply the longest and most difficult of the rally”. Those notes go on to say:

“Even the leading specialists will be faced with something new. The Chilean dunes are veritable mountains of sand and pilots must learn to climb and descend their sides over more than one kilometre. Another unknown: due to the extreme heat of the region, no-one knows exactly how the sand will behave.”

The next day (Wednesday) is 680km with the special stage against the clock being 215km. All competitors – and their service vehicles – will be travelling at altitudes close to 4000m. Competitors must carry as many spares as they can manage – in case the service trucks don’t make it through to the overnight stop in time.

At the front end of the car class, it’s still a VW trilogy with a slight change in the order.

Former world rally champion Carlos Sainz is still leading, but second and third have changed places. Mark Miller is now in second while Giniel de Villiers had a very tough day and is now third outright. On the stage itself, it was Sainz and Miller with Robby Gordon’s Hummer the third fastest.

DAKAR DAY 10

A SAND DUNE SPECTACULAR FOR THE AUSSIES AND SWEDES

(Sydney, January 14, 2009)

It was the day of the dunes for the Australian and Swedish Isuzu team, in Day 10 of the 2009 Dakar Rally, being run in Argentina and Chile.

Today's stage was set to be the longest of the rally at 666km, but nearly 200km in the middle was lopped off. [Organisers believed that certain sections were not](#) challenging enough and should be avoided so teams would have more time to tackle the tricky dunes. Then the now-476km stage started nearly three hours late because of thick fog.

That presented enough problems for the competitors, but the real issue was safety – the observation teams' helicopters could not get off the ground.

Service vehicles remained at the Copiapó bivouac while the competitors eventually headed out for a loop around the Atacama Desert, with the stage including 100km of dunes (some close to one kilometre in height).

"The irony is that this is supposed to be the driest place on the planet, and yet we had dampness on the windscreen," says Garland, who's now in 16th outright after finishing the stage as 22nd quickest.

"But it was only fog, not rain, so it didn't affect the surface. It was quite a tough stage so we had another day of steady driving rather than all-out racing. Guys around us were getting lost but Harry did a great job and we didn't have any problems with navigation.

"The only real issue was getting stuck in the dunes at one point. Then this spectator came over and pulled the valve out of the tube, which let the tyre down too much, so we lost a bit of time there.

"He was just trying to help, but of course he couldn't speak English and I don't speak much Chile, so there was a bit of a communication problem there, but it didn't cost us too much time."

Garland and Suzuki did the entire 100km stretch of dunes at the end of the stage but teammates Pelle Wallentheim and Olle Ohlsson missed out, because the last 40km of the dune section was cancelled as darkness fell – and they feel cheated! At time of writing, their position had not yet been finalised.

"Today was the easiest stage, one of the easiest. Don't listen to Bruce!" Wallentheim laughs, admitting he feels very fresh after a marathon sleep the night before in the wake of a demanding ninth stage.

“We love the sand dunes. We’re not afraid – we’re having fun! Other people try to go around them, but we just go through them and over them, and we pass lots of people when we do. The D-MAX just loves sand dunes. We want more of them and we were very disappointed when they cancelled that part.

“We did lose some time, about half an hour, with some problems with brakes and with power, but we were able to fix that and we have made up a lot of places.”

Tomorrow’s stage – Copiapó to Fiambala (in Catamarca province, 1520m above sea level) – is 680km in total, and was to include a 215km special stage, but because heavy fog has been forecast for the route, organisers have decided to cancel the competition section and participants will simply transport the whole way, rather than race against the clock.

It will certainly give them some time for sight-seeing as this stage takes them back towards Argentina through the San Francisco Pass at 4700m. However, they won’t have time to talk about it that night – the service trucks are bypassing this stop to head towards the bivouac for the following stage. All competitors will be doing their own servicing tomorrow night, hoping they are carrying the spares they need.

Originally known as the Paris-Dakar, the Dakar Rally has been staged in Africa since 1978, but last year’s event was cancelled on the eve of the start after terrorists killed seven people in the area and made direct threats to event organisers, hence the move to South America.

The new event is taking competitors 9500km (including 5600km of special stages) from Buenos Aires to Valparaiso in Chile and back (January 3-17), via the Andes Mountains and the Atacama Desert, said to be the driest place on earth. The event will travel to a height of 4700m, the highest in the rally’s 31-year history.

Garland/Suzuki and Wallentheim/Ohlsson are driving two Isuzu D-Max utes, hand-built in Garland’s Sydney workshop. They put out 160kW of power (up 33 per cent on the standard vehicle) and 500Nm of torque (@2000rpm; up 39 per cent).

They are running in the T1 (2) class, which is modified diesel vehicles. The VW Touaregs which are leading the event are in the same class, but are far more modified than the Isuzu, which is almost stock-standard.

Liz Swanton

DAKAR – DAY 11: DOWNTIME FOR THE AUSSIES AND SWEDES

(Sydney, January 15, 2009)

In complete contrast to the hard-fought run around the Atacama Desert which was Stage 10, the Australian and Swedish Isuzu team have simply cruised on Day 11 of the demanding Dakar Rally, being contested this year in South America.

Forecasts of heavy fog forced organisers to cancel the 215km race against the clock that was on today's schedule because of safety and timing concerns, so competitors transported from Copiapó in Chile to Fiambala in Argentina at their own pace.

Australians Bruce Garland and Harry Suzuki and Swedish teammates Pelle Wallentheim and Olle Ohlsson joined the rest of the caravan of cars, bikes, trucks and quads, driving their Isuzu D-MAX utes through the spectacular San Francisco Pass at nearly 4700m, the highest the rally has ever reached in its 30-year history.

Tomorrow, competitors will face more dunes in the 518km run from Fiambala to La Rioja. The 12th stage includes a special competitive section of 253km.

Going into the next stage, Garland and Suzuki are in 16th place outright in the car class while Wallentheim and Ohlsson are in 41st outright.

Their class continues to be led by the three VW Touaregs, with former world rally champion Carlos Sainz nearly 30 minutes ahead of his teammates Mark Miller and Giniel De Villiers.

Liz Swanton