

Wreck and Rouen...

Ever wondered what it would be like to take part in the Cannonball Run? Well, Surrey resident **Jake Peet** got a little taste just recently when he embarked on the Farnham Banger Rally - aka *Wreck & Rouen*. Here, in a daily diary, he recounts their exciting adventures...

PHOTOGRAPHY: JAKE PEET

Day one (part one):

With bleary eyes and blurry heads (it was an early start from Farnham's Packhouse, eased by bacon sandwiches and steaming coffee), we hit the wet and grimy road, lights blazing, music blaring and in convoy for our journey to Dover. It's a humid, foggy morning and my co-pilot Stas is at the wheel, hip-hop on the stereo and cylinders roaring, as we gun The Beast through the early morning M25 traffic.

After about 30 miles, our airbag warning light flicks on in the dashboard display, leaving us wondering if this is an omen for

worse things to come. The windscreen is already splitting in places after an unfortunate collision with a stone near Trowbridge on the way back from collecting our car. Despite this vehicle having a valid, current MOT, it's fair to say that it feels, let's say, a little bit rough-around-the-edges.

Still, our ride is certainly an exotic beast, specc'd out with a three-litre, V6, 24-valve engine with a brace bar and a 're-mapped' computer; this thing literally flies! It's a Peugeot special edition 406 Coupé designed by Pininfarina - the independent coach-builders who have worked for Ferrari among others - in light blue. However, for a banger rally it has to be pimped, right? Yes, we thought so too, only this car came



Wreck & Rouen 2014:
The route...

- Farnham
-
- Paris
-
- Le Mans
-
- Rouen
-
- Farnham

to us via eBay from TV's Jason Dawe - the former *Top Gear* motoring journalist - pre-loaded with superhero décor. Adorned with a cityscape back-drop, Spiderman, Batman and Superman logos, a large metal web on the bonnet and a Batman spoiler, we were good to go!

Like me, Stas is from Farnham; we met when our children were at the local school together and he was looking for a mountain biking partner for Saturday morning blasts around Bourne Woods. Stas is both typical and untypical of the average Farnham family man - he's typical in that he has a good job at Microsoft in cloud services and his wife and teenage sons are active members of the local community. However, Stas was born to Polish and Argentinean parents in Buenos Aires and spent his childhood in Brazil before moving to Europe via South Africa then to the US where he met his English wife. He's a character, that's for sure. It was he who first alerted me to Wreck & Rouen in early 2014 - now the day of reckoning is upon us and, fuelled on coffee and unleaded, we head for the ferry.



ABOVE: One of the most important bits of the day - planning the all-important route



ABOVE: Raring to go on the open road

“The car came to us via eBay from TV’s Jason Dawe – the former *Top Gear* motoring journalist – pre-loaded with superhero décor...”

Day one (part two):

The crossing is painless (except for Stas who is nursing a sporting injury to his neck and quickly notices that codeine and lager don’t mix terribly well) and we arrive in Calais in good time to begin our drive to the first campsite, la Croix du Vieux Pont, near Soissons. It’s just as well we’re on schedule, because our *petit* French foray is not only about the driving; we also have a whole list of daily challenges to complete set by organiser Darren Stone (get a photo with a gendarme, obtain a French beret, buy the cheapest bottle of red you can find etc, etc).

Darren is a Farnham man through and through, having lived here all his life,

unlike many residents who have moved there for the good schools, leafy streets and an easy commute to London. His inspiration for the Farnham Banger Rally comes from his love of a good challenge. The 125-mile North Downs Way was his first, deciding to try and break the 56-hour walking record for its completion. He did so in 54 hours and was the only one to finish that year, all in aid of the local Phyllis Tuckwell Hospice - incidentally one of our two charities for the Farnham Banger Rally, the other being Step by Step in Aldershot. Last year, he decided to enter the Milton Keynes Marathon despite not being a fan of running. Then came the Midnight Mountain Marathon in Brecon. A gruelling mountain run that starts at 5.30pm and to complete it you have to

finish by midnight, again raising money for the Phyllis Tuckwell Hospice.

Looking for a non-physical challenge this year, Darren’s friend brought to his attention a banger rally run by the St Austel Round Table whose route ends every year in Southern Europe and where entrants scrap their cars and fly home. Darren’s twist on this theme was as ever altruistic in that he insisted we do a shorter route enabling us to return home in the cars and then sell them to recuperate some of the costs we’d had to fork out for our trip.

Back to matters in hand though and we refuel the car and buy some provisions at a large Auchan before Stas and I find ourselves arriving at the campsite first out of everyone. It’s not a race, but this inevitably seems to be on our agenda >



ABOVE: Jake, right, and co-driver Stas - aka 'Bourne to Lose'

with such a fast car. That evening, after pitching our tent, we meet the rest of the team for dinner and wine in the restaurant, and it's here that Woody, Darren's right-hand-man, compiles the results of the daily challenges and announces that team Ped au Chocolat are apparently today's victors. We all talk and introduce ourselves a bit more then move on to sit outside the tents for a nightcap.

Day two:

After a quick breakfast of pain au chocolat and an espresso made on my stove, we meet the rest of the guys and are given our destination and daily challenges. Our route today will take us to Teloché and a very basic campsite next to a carp fishing lake but we have a choice - to go through Paris or round - the daily challenges also being

different according to which route we choose. Assuming Paris will be busy, coupled with the fact that Stas's aunt and cousins live just to the north in Fontenay-Saint-Père and could possibly supply us with lunch and some of the items required for the daily challenge, it's a no-brainer. We head north.

Nicole isn't at home but the local Carrefour yields a beret and a €1.20 bottle of wine - exactly what we need for today's challenge - not to mention a whole chicken and a bottle of Bordeaux for lunch.

Thanks to our nifty set of wheels (and no interference from any errant airbags as yet), once again, we manage to arrive at the campsite several hours before any of the other cars - also helped by my internationally experienced co-pilot's command of French when asking a group of locals for directions. The campsite is as glorious as the weather and we secure ourselves a nice spot under a tree by the lake. Our early arrival also means that we can go off and complete our daily challenges in good time.

At the local supermarket, we stumble upon rival teammates Doug and Chris absorbed in a Citroen 2CV - the pair have just snapped a photo of the old French car as part of our challenge. Doug is Darren's brother-in-law and has seen the whole Farnham Banger Rally unfold from idea to reality - no truer example of American philosopher Ralph Waldo Emerson's

quote: "The ancestor of every action is a thought."

Once everyone arrives and has pitched up, we relax and catch up about our respective days and the daily challenges, handing our results into Woody before dinner in the campsite restaurant. Unexpectedly, our team, Bourne to Lose, is pronounced today's winner and we receive a rather lovely bottle of red, which is nice. After dinner, a few of us sit up late and lie looking at the stars, something you don't often get a chance to do in densely wooded and heavily light-polluted Surrey.

Day three:

After a slap-up English breakfast, we line the cars up for a quick photo and then head off in convoy to Le Mans for a photo and video shoot of all of the cars coming round the track. This is a lot of fun, especially for those real car fans among us as Le Mans is something of a Mecca, known for its 24-hour endurance road race. I, on the other hand, stand by the side of the road and shoot a photo of every car in the rally along with Marcus who gets some footage for the official FBR movie. Once we've finished, we all disperse and head off in separate directions as usual to make our own way to Camping La Source, between Dieppe and Rouen, and complete our daily tasks.

We arrive in plenty of time - well, first



ABOVE: Our own Jake Peet driving The Beast



Wreck & Rouen 2014: In numbers...

Max Spend On Car = £350
 Cars = 13
 Participants = 33
 Charities = Phyllis Tuckwell Hospice, Farnham, and Step by Step, Aldershot
 Days = 3
 Miles = 900
 Potential Problems = loads

again as usual - and the campsite is eventually found when we manage to drive the wrong way down a one-way road and annoy a local man and his wife. After apologising and explaining what we are looking for, he offers to show us the way if we follow them. It never ceases to amaze me how, if you show a little patience and actually talk to people, they nearly always show their human side. Alarmingly, the campsite is wet and boggy, and with rain

forecast all day, I wonder if we might float away in the night! Much wine will be needed later, I decide, to aid a potentially waterlogged night's sleep.

Heading to Dieppe centre to look for items for the challenges (crucially the longest baguette) and gifts for loved ones back home, Stas and I decide on a late lunch of seafood, in the rain. After a bowl of moules marinière and a red wine, and armed with three large French sticks, we

returned to the campsite to meet the others. The afternoon turns into an early evening barbecue despite the weather, with the winner of the day's challenges announced - this time, it's The Oddballs who triumph. In addition, the auctioning of a bottle of champagne helps Stas to find a good use for his €200 note, and we all catch up on a general round-up of the past three days.

It's here I discover that some of the cars purchased came from as far afield as Manchester, Bristol, Cardiff and Bognor Regis, as well as ours from Trowbridge. And apart from one engine failure when driving home from collection (Stewart and Alex's Golf), I can report no major mechanical issues. There were no accidents, no one got lost, everyone got on and we raised well over £8,500 for charity - plus everyone had an awful lot of fun. So apart from tomorrow's short trip home, I can safely announce Wreck & Rouen 2014 a roaring success. Roll on next year, I say. ■

• To find out more about next year's Farnham Banger Rally and how to get involved, visit the official website at farnhambangerrally.org.uk



ABOVE: No prizes for guessing which won the longest baguette contest...

Coming up next month...

Be sure to pick up next month's edition of the magazine to find out what happened when we sent *Surrey Life* writer Pete Gardner to try and tame The Stig at the *Top Gear* track in Dunsfold. And why it didn't quite turn out that way...!