

4L Trophy 2019 21 February – 3 March

Humanitarian action –
competition – joint endeavour !



ERI is once again taking part in the 4L Trophy Rally, the fifth time it has entered.

In 2019, our Renault 4L will be driven by two 22-year-olds students who are in their third and fourth years of engineering studies in Pau respectively

Simon Etchecopar & Laurent Tauzin Petit

The team EuskAtlas, will be racing under ERI's colours and the number 325. Euskal means «basque». The pair have chosen this name to pay homage to their roots.

The raid entails 6000 km of on- and off-road driving across France, Spain and Morocco, finishing in Marrakech. The rally, which is aimed at students, attracts close to 1500 teams driving the legendary Renault 4L each year.



After several long months of hard work, the car is finally ready. The mechanics, the styling and the interior all needed work!



Wednesday 20 February

We've been receiving the official documents bit by bit, and we've been invited to a technical inspection at 7.30am on 20 February. We'll be the first team inspected!

It's strangely quiet when we arrive. We pass our technical inspection with flying colours – hooray! We park in the exhibition area. The second 4L soon arrives and we get chatting to the drivers.

By the time we've finished our coffees, there are around 100 cars in the car park. Renault 4Ls parade around all day like a colourful festival. The beautiful weather and good spirits contribute to the festival atmosphere!

By the end of the day, about 200 cars have yet to pass their inspection.



Thursday 21 February

Today's the day. The excitement is palpable, and we hear that some teams have spent the night working under the bonnet or underneath their cars: the follow-up inspection is their last chance to take part.

Around midday, Jean-Jacques Rey, the director of the competition, makes a speech. He's joined by the head of the partner charity Enfants du Désert, and they remind us of the safety rules as well as the competition's humanitarian impact in Morocco. The starting gun goes and we set off surrounded by our families, who have turned out in force to support us. There are so many teams that we cause a traffic jam coming out of Biarritz! It takes us over an hour to reach the motorway, surrounded by the happy sound of everyone honking their horns. We're all so excited!



We soon arrive in Spain and, over the course of the day, we pass hundreds of 4Ls, each nicer than the last. We drive for hours before stopping in Salamanca. Once there, we share a delicious tapas and a few cold beers with dozens of our fellow adventurers.



Friday 22 February

We're up bright and early at 6am to set off for Algeciras in southern Spain. That's where we'll catch the ferry the next day. We hear that the campsite is not to be missed, so we cancel our hotel reservation and set up camp with the others instead. The tents are clean and everyone is kitted out for camping in the best possible conditions. We share our camping stove, pasta and tomato sauce. There's a great atmosphere, and, thanks to some makeshift DJing, the party continues long into the night!

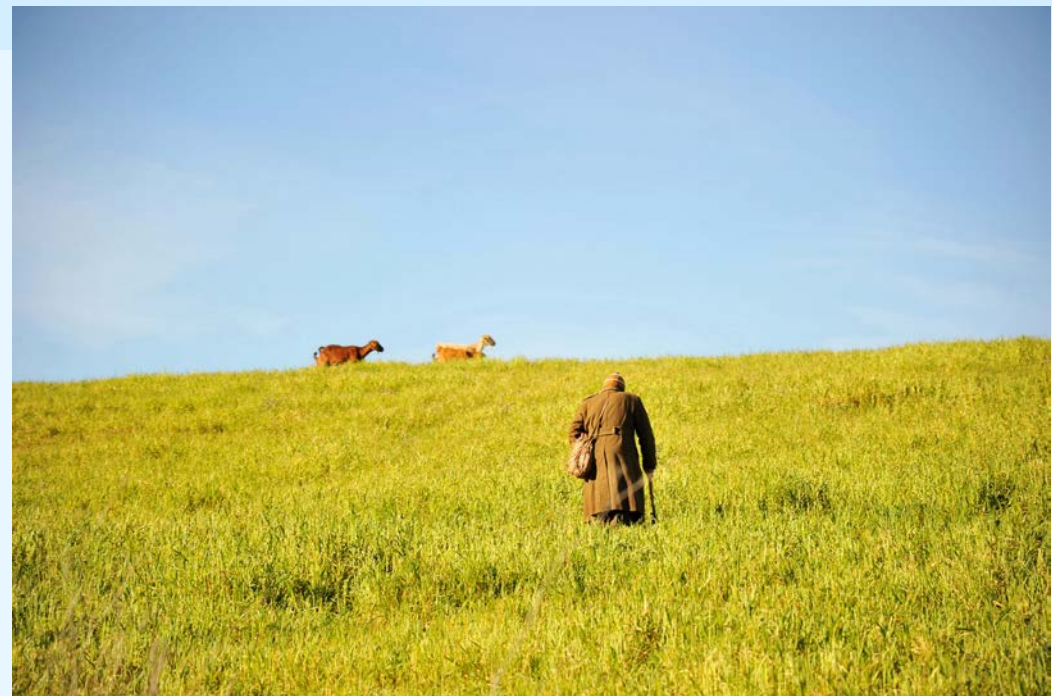


Saturday 23 February

The ferries start to arrive at the port and we're lucky enough to catch the first one. After passing through customs, we go up on deck and wait to see Morocco to appear on the horizon.



When we disembark, we follow the crowd to Rabat. The route is very scenic – the countryside is surprisingly green and mountainous! We have to set the tent up quickly once we reach the campsite as it's already getting dark and cold. Only a few teams are sleeping here because those catching later ferries won't have time to stop in Rabat. The night is short and cold, and the fastening of my sleeping bag has already given up the ghost...



Sunday 24 February

We get back out on the road with the friends that we've made over the last few days. We climb to Boulaajoul at around 2000m. The scenery is still spectacular, but we pass through poverty-stricken villages. The contrast with our quality of life is striking and it really hits home. It's hard to imagine that people are living in these conditions just 1500 km from where we live. They don't even have electricity or running water.







After negotiating a pass with a beautiful view, we finally reach the campsite. It's a huge expanse of desert with a cold wind coming straight off the Atlas Mountains. Believe it or not, we see snow-capped mountains even in Morocco!

The teams arrive in dribs and drabs and we gear up for our first night camping all together in Morocco, but when the wind picks up, everyone hurries for their tents.



Monday 25 February

We're up at the crack of dawn! It was so, so cold, and judging by the amount of dust covering the car and the tent, it looks like the wind was to blame. We head to breakfast to warm up over a nice, hot cup of coffee.



Today we're off to Merzouga, where we will drop off the supplies we've brought from France and set up camp for three nights. It's an enjoyable drive and everyone is still in good spirits. Some teams start to suffer mechanical failures, but everyone pitches in to help them get going again. We drive alongside the breathtaking Lake Errachidia – it really is spectacular, and a few people even go for a dip! On the competition side of things, we're currently in 436th place, having been penalised 300 points for driving 2 km too far.



When we arrive at the campsite, we hand over our donations and the Enfants du Désert volunteers are really grateful when they see how much has been collected. The local children join us for some activities organised by the charity. We have a great time, the kids are having fun and they're really happy to see so many bags of supplies.

We're told that the donations total 30 tonnes of school and sports supplies and 36 000 euros! The charity director thanks us, telling us what a big difference the 4L Trophy makes. She mentions that three new schools have been built this year and 200 000 children have received an education in the 14 years since the partnership between the 4L Trophy and Enfants du Désert began. It's a really moving and celebratory day.





After the speeches, we share a delicious couscous before going back to our tents. Some people keep the party going and we can hear car horns sounding until late into the night.





Tuesday 26 February

At 7am, we're up and raring to get started on the desert laps around Merzouga. For us, this stage starts with a 105 km loop on difficult terrain, which makes us realise how sturdy our car is. It's unbelievable – she conquers every climb and withstands some heavy impacts! Driving alongside magnificent dunes, we finally see the kind of Moroccan landscapes that we had expected. Having completed our lap, it's back to the campsite, awestruck and overjoyed that the car is still in one piece!





We had had an eventful day. The aim of the competition (insofar as there is one) is to drive as few kilometres as possible during each stage. Today, we started off really well, having gained 6 km by halfway, and we decided to take another shortcut to save a few more. However, that turned out to be a terrible decision. We tried to cut between the mountains and got stuck in the sand at the Algerian border (which is supposed to be a dangerous area). There wasn't a soul in sight, the sun was blazing and, in spite of our best efforts, the car wouldn't move an inch. We tried absolutely everything before calling for help. Our rescuers couldn't believe their eyes when they saw where we had ended up! They took us back 15 km to the last checkpoint, but we were penalised 300 points for having called for help, in addition to having driven 9 km further than the distance given in the roadbook. We had been a bit too ambitious! As a result, after being close to winning the stage earlier on, we finished the day in 837th place.

We spend the evening comparing notes with teams who started the stage with the other loop. Then we head to the bonfire, where a temporary stage has been set up for a private concert from special guest Louisy Joseph.



Wednesday 27 February

We head out on the second loop around Merzouga. This one measures about 92 km and is less technical than the last, giving us a chance to really appreciate the view and absorb this incredible experience. We fare much better today, managing the fourth best performance (tied with several other teams). That leaves us in 21st place for the stage as a whole. Finally, it's back to camp for a pre-briefing about the coming two days. The sand is getting everywhere!



Thursday 28 February

We set off on the marathon stage: two days of independent driving to reach Marrakech. We join forces with some of the teams with whom we've bonded the most, forming a convoy of four cars.

We enjoy some incredible moments in the desert. The stream of cars gradually disperses into a few small groups, each following the headings as best they can. We take a few breaks to let the cars recover, stopping in a ghost town at one point to eat a small lunch (we don't have much food left apart from one packet of instant soup and some spaghetti). We make the most of our moment of freedom and take the time to appreciate how lucky we are to be here without a care in the world. The end of the adventure is in sight, and we're already starting to miss it... We try not to think about it for now!



We keep driving until sunset but, during a tricky section 30 km from Tazarine, the tailpipe decides to give up on us. We wait for it to cool down before trying to reattach it, but unfortunately the welds are broken. Alas, the tailpipe will finish the journey on the floor between the co-driver's feet, and the drive back to Spain will be a little bit noisier than expected!



We're stopped 10 km later at the last security checkpoint and told to set up camp nearby, as it's too dark to keep going.







It's a cosy camp of only a dozen or so teams and the night sky is spectacular – we've never seen so many stars! We have stars in our eyes in every sense. We all gather around a campfire until the wind picks up and we decide to turn in for the night.



Friday 1 March

We start the day at 6am, just as the first rays of sunshine are starting to show. Watching the sunrise in the middle of the desert is amazing!

We hit the road without eating, intending to stop in Tazarine for a traditional Moroccan breakfast. That turns out to be a great idea: just €4.50 buys us a delicious orange juice, an avocado milkshake, bread with olive oil, jam, cheese and loads of dried fruit. Our hunger satisfied, we set off again towards Marrakech.

This is a big stage: it's a long way and features the infamous Tizi n'Tichka pass that links Ouarzazat and Marrakech. It's a winding path and not easy to negotiate by car; we have to stop several times to let them cool down. The descent is just as difficult but very scenic – it's green again and we see some small fields and plants. The mountainside is very steep, and we can't help wondering how people have managed to build here!

We're still 70 km from Marrakech when the sun starts to set, but then we finally catch sight of the city lights.



We've made it! Our little Renault 4L has carried us all the way to Marrakech – we're proud of her, and of ourselves. Crowds of supporters are there to cheer us on. It's really great to see so much interest in the event.

We put our GPS beacons and roadbooks away and dig out our hotel reservations – we can't wait for a hot shower! It's a lovely hotel with soft beds, a heavenly shower and the best meal we've had for days.





Saturday 2 March

We meet up with our friends to visit the city. It's nothing like what we've seen of Morocco so far. The city is much more developed, with most of the same amenities as we have in the West.

We head to the famous Jemaa el-Fnaa market square, the trading hub of the old city. It's insane! You can find absolutely anything – all you have to do is ask. We see snake charmers, monkey trainers, and counterfeits of just about every designer shoe imaginable. The stalls form a sprawling network where haggling is the order of the day. We gradually get better at it and eventually manage to get some good bargains.

Time flies and it's soon time to make our way to the event's closing ceremony. A stunning riad has been booked out for the event, and the show, featuring horses, camels and traditional dancing, is captivating. Afterwards, Jean-Jacques Rey arrives with his team to make his closing speech and hand out the prizes. Then we all head to a tent where dinner is served, followed by an awesome party hosted by a DJ from NRJ Radio. The atmosphere is buzzing and everyone has a great time! We finally make our way back to the hotel late at night.



Sunday 3 March

Getting up at 6am is tough, but we've got a long drive ahead of us to reach Tangier in time for the ferry at 4pm. We refuel with coffee before hitting the road, and then drive non-stop except to refill the tank and change drivers. The noise of the engine is terrible thanks to the broken tailpipe, but I try not to complain too much since it's my last day in the car – I'm flying home from southern Spain tomorrow to be back at work on Tuesday.

We make the ferry and get to watch the France vs Scotland rugby match. It's dark by the time we dock in Spain, and we disembark to the sound of tired 4L horns honking.

This might be the last time we're all together, and the familiar sound tugs at our heartstrings: it reminds us that the adventure is almost over. We make our way to a hotel in Malaga with our friends.



Monday 4 March

Laurent sets off in the car at 5am with another team – they need to make it all the way across Spain in one day. I spend the day in Malaga with a friend before I fly home to Bordeaux and she to Marseille. While waiting for our flights, we look back at all the photos we've taken and reminisce about the fun we've had and the amazing landscapes we've seen. It's hard to believe it really happened! We were here, then there, then there...

We've been back for a few days now and everyone's shared their photos. We miss it so much that we've already planned some camping trips together in our 4Ls.

But what an experience it was! We could never have imagined that it would make such a big impression on us. We saw beautiful scenery as well as children destined for a life of poverty, we saw inequality and the kindness of the locals, we saw people pulling together to help one another, and above all we saw how lucky we are. It was a really powerful and emotional experience.

It's changed how we see the world!



The 2019 adventure is over !

Ranking of our team n°325:

465th Boulajoul to Merzouga leg

847th Erg Chebbi leg

21st Oued Ziz leg

752th Marathon leg

446th in the final standings



SEE YOU NEXT YEAR FOR THE 4L TROPHY



Main figures of the raid

3000 students

1500 Renault 4L

12 days of adventure

and 6500 km