

Rallye solaire 2006



Girona, Spain to Toulouse, France

1st - 4th June 2006

Day 2

Finally off the freeways. The superb satellite navigation system in the Land Rover was dialled for Prades, then to Mont Louis. The chosen route took us through major, but narrow roads, past the occasional castle, and many small towns. In the background were the snow-capped peaks of the Pyrenees.

The small towns specialised in extremely narrow streets, just wide enough for us to slowly pass through. The Aurora 101 solar car on the trailer bemused many of the locals.



The main roads are not freeways



Town planners hard at work

After Prades, we began the first of the serious mountain climbs to the top of the 1850 metre high Mont Louis. This road was extremely narrow, with no visibility of oncoming traffic and precipitous edges. It was also a continual climb for 36 km. Apart from the clearance to the edge of the solar car, we were concerned that the unrelenting climb would cause our wheel motor, which was designed for flat desert runs, to overheat. This was surely different from anything we had done before.



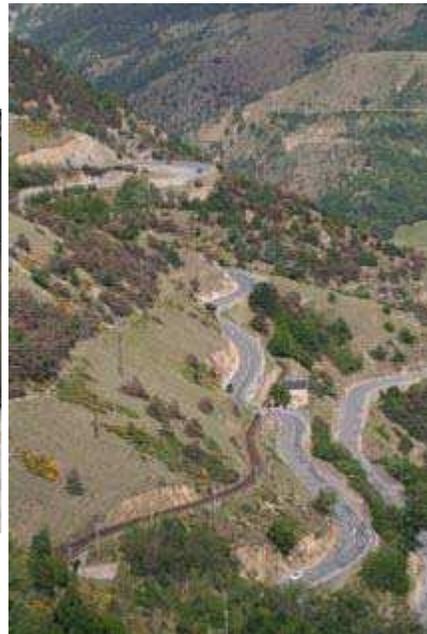
The winding road to Mont Louis

After an excellent supermarket lunch, with figs, pastries, fresh ham and an assortment of cheeses and yoghurts, we tackled the second big climb: Col de Puymorens. The top of this mountain was at 1915 metres. We could see the switchback climb ahead of us as we progressed up the valley, and this had us really wondering whether Aurora 101 could make the climb. In the past, European solar car races encouraged the development of very powerful solar cars where solar energy was used mainly for recharging the batteries at the end of a relatively short driving stage. We expected to see one such car, from Joachim Kamm, amongst the entries.

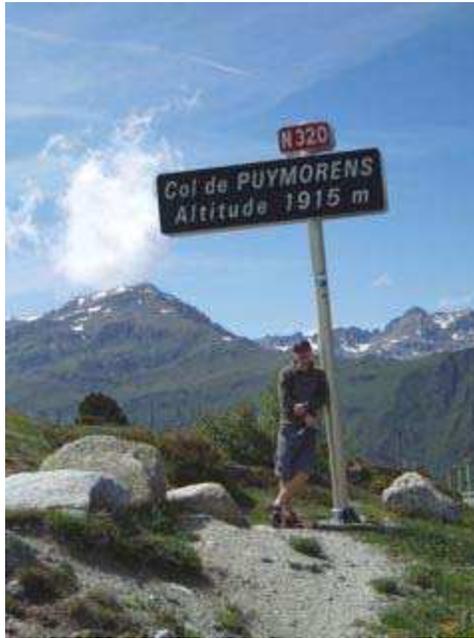
One mitigating factor was the air temperature. The higher we climbed the colder it got, dropping to just 9 degrees Celcius at the summit. This would help cool the motor.



An Aussie road worker in France



The final climb to Col de Puymorens



Kon at the summit

Finally it was on to our destination at Gerona, where we planned to spend the night at Can Bellevitge.



Heading to Gerona at the end of the day

Not easy to find. Our GPS gave up about 10 km short of our destination. When we did arrive, in the dark, we were unexpected guests. Despite the fact that none of us spoke Catalan or Spanish, and none of them spoke English, we eventually worked out that there 60 beds available, so accommodation was not a problem. But dinner was. But first, we needed to find David Sims Williams, who had arrived from the UK, and then get to Gerona airport to pick up Dennis Trehwella, also from the UK. This left dinner extremely late, and we were lucky to find a fast-food centre willing to sell us salads and hamburgers. That was it. Dormitory comfort. Choice of toilets. All in a building that existed before the discovery of Australia.

Tomorrow was going to be interesting, as all of the other entrants would arrive.

