

Rallye solaire 2006



Girona, Spain to Toulouse, France

1st - 4th June 2006

Day 5

We awoke to a cool and grey morning. After breakfast, the cars assembled in a car park at the Prades sports centre, and one by one departed for the long journey up the narrow, winding mountain roads.

For this leg, we swapped Peter Pudney for some luggage, and Peter travelled with Jean-Marc Dubie in his blue Renault Kangoo. This is one of only 35 hybrid petrol-electric vans built by Renault, and was once owned by French President Jaques Chirac. The Kangoo is normally driven using batteries, but also has a small petrol engine that can be started manually to generate extra electrical energy.

We travelled to Olette, then turned off the main road to a very narrow secondary road. Fortunately, the only other traffic we encountered was travelling in the same direction.



Rush hour on the road from Olette to Mont Louis

The normal range of the Kangoo is 80 km. But on the unrelenting climb to Mont Louis, the Kangoo managed just over 30 km before the battery was empty. Jean-Marc started the petrol engine, and we continued on our way up the hill. At the top of the hill, we stopped to take photographs. The small petrol tank emptied, and the engine stopped.



The Kangoo at the top of Mont Louis

We were able to roll down the hill, and use the regenerative braking to put some energy back into the batteries.

Lunch was at the National Centre for Scientific Research, one of three enormous solar concentrators in the area. The sun was shining, but the air was a cold 9 degrees Celcius. Gradually the teams arrived, and plugged in to recharge their vehicles. Helios was the first solar car to arrive. They had climbed the first of the two mountains, but with some stops to allow the motor to cool. The smaller, more powerful Kamm solar car climbed the mountains with ease, but the acrylic canopy had blown off during the journey and had to be repaired with clear adhesive tape.



The big solar collector at the National Centre for Scientific Research



Kamm arrives for lunch, without his canopy, desperate for a hot drink



Solelhada soaks up the sunlight

After lunch, the next stop was the thermal pools at Dorres. Teams could gain extra points if they stopped and bathed.



A bath with a view

After a quick bath, Jean-Marc and Peter headed off in the Kangoo for the second of the mountains, Col de Puymorens. The battery had not quite been filled at lunch, so we were not certain that the car would make the climb to 1915 metres.

Three quarters up the steep, winding road we found Helios stopped by the side of the road. Something was wrong with their motor.



Helios stopped on the climb to Col de Puymorens

The Kangoo continued the long climb. With about 1 km to go, the battery warning light came on. But we made it to the top, with about 5% of the battery energy remaining.

Of the solar cars, only Kamm conquered the Col.



The Kangoo, Peugeot 106 electric car and Twike at Col de Puymorens



David gets directions to the evening stop from organisers

We then proceeded to a Go-Kart centre at Aigues-Vives for the evening meal, a summary of the day, and some night-time driving on the Go-Kart track. At about midnight we retired to a nearby campground for the night.