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a car from India for the world

Raid de Himalaya

We take on the Himalayas in Maruti's SX4

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ISSUE NO 09

Himalayan Inva

In spite of the treacherous conditions and sub zero temperatures, the Raid de Himalaya happens to be one event which anyone with the slightest of interest in rallying waits for. Mostly because you need a stock car with a sump guard and bucket loads of courage

Winter Mount Everest
Raid de Himalaya and other stories of the world



Post scrutiny, the competitors lined up for the flag off and people had come with a variety of vehicles. The first leg consisted of 229kilometres ending in Sangla. Although we were on tarmac for the first bit, being a TSD (Time-Speed-Distance) a constant vigil had to be kept so that we don't end up too late or worse still, early, at the time control post or TC. But the bigger threat was getting lost or missing a TC. Being the first leg, the route was just a curtain raiser which saw us snaking through the dirt roads or at times slush, at decently high speeds. It was here that I hit the sump for

sion



the first time sending a chill down my spine. After a check, and deducing everything was okay, we carried on. However once the results were declared, we were far from jubilant. Lots of wheelspin, courtesy my enthusiastic driving, meant the odo wasn't giving us accurate info about distance travelled. Little surprise, we had picked up penalties aplenty for reaching early.

The second leg was to start at Bhadrash near the Sangla hydel power plant and end in Manali, but a freak land slide added another 70 kilometres to the day in shape of a diversion. Even at this point we were falling behind due to odo errors

but the SX4 deserves a pat on the back. At times we were doing 60 kays on dirt and jumps came up from no where! But, it was just the start, because we had to cross Rohtang pass in the next leg. The 251km leg from Manali to Tabo had this popular tourist destination and the roads up to the pass were horrible. With seconds at stake for better positions we gunned the SX4 uphill. Thanks to the superb ground clearance we were able to fly but at one turn to miss a skirmish with another competitor I swerved left and felt a rock scrap the under carriage. The exhaust took the hit. Nilabh being one enthusiastic navi, jumped out to the rescue.

Raid through the camera



Thanks to the good ground clearance of the SX4, we rarely had a belly scraping moment - even while negotiating tiny jumps or overflowing streams



The Gypsies were literally flying! Thanks to the short overhangs and superb ground clearance taking such a risk wasn't a problem for the competitors



Anil Wadia races through the unforgiving terrain to claim 4th spot in the Xtreme four wheeler category at the end of the last leg



Major Shakti Bajaj, another entry from the Indian Army provided good competition to Anil Wadia and took 6th spot in the Xtreme four wheelers



The Auto Bild SX4 takes a well deserved break at the Baralacha Pass. Some covered mountains and decent roads meant it was a cynosure to eyes

As I jacked up the car, he went under and retrofitted the end can. All though back in the race, we lost more than 20 minutes.

Leg 4 saw us heading to Patseo and a couple of TCs later we arrived at Tandi, the last pump for the next 365kms. With the SX4 filled up, we headed to the army camp. Bad roads and army movement meant most of the people had difficulties in keeping up with the time, but surprisingly we had gained a lot, thanks to my navigator's new calculation strategy and some spirited driving.

The 310kms next day would take us to Leh and soon out of Patseo, we hit the climb to Baralacha La. Another pass and I dreaded another Rohtang. But to my surprise the army had made a superb stretch of tarmac around this area. While we were gradually climbing up the ladder with our points, at the top end there was a reshuffle in the top three contestants. While K Prasad had taken the lead, Jitender Bajwa who was leading had slipped into fourth.

Leg 6 included two passes, Fotu La and Namik La and the roads leading up to these are far from being good making it very competitive. Just before entering Leh, a good tarmac road snakes through towns. On this stretch, the organizers threw a really



Thanks for the Raid being special, we were welcomed at cordoned off areas. The army camp in Patseo and seen here at the hydel plant near Sangla

low average speed testing the patience of every driver.

It is from here that the Raid was reorganized thanks to the tension brewing in J&K. So instead of heading to Srinagar, we were now heading towards Rangdum, 237km away. This section threw at competitors problems of the other kind. I still remember it was a tight right hander and I came in at speed just to stand on my brakes as the road ahead was blocked with stones. We kept on going with police protection at every town. The undercarriage of the SX4 was now being beat up frequently and especially because we lost time to remove obstacles en route. A Gypsy turned out with a smashed rear windscreen at Rangdum TC resulting in the return leg being a free run for the safety of the competitors.

The final Kargil-Leh stretch was a free run once again and we were flagged off at 4 am in -7 degrees. Soon we hit black ice. It was like having no steering or brakes and no matter what you do, you are sliding down. Thankfully I got a bit of gravel and floored it and just few feet away from the fall. What we were considering easiest, happened to be filled with more thrill than any of the previous legs. Few others weren't as lucky as we saw the Gypsy slide straight into a stationary truck. Being a free run there weren't any TCs en route and we made it back to Leh with more than an hour to spare.

At the end of the day Rajesh Chalana took top spot in cars followed by Manoj Vaidya and JS Rana. As for SUVs, K Prasad took top draw followed by Lt Colonel Vijay Bhatti and Amit Kulkarni. As for us we finished 9th in cars and came back with a goal to get back again and win it next time.

X-treme update

The competition in the Xtreme category was rather intense. On Day 5 for instance, the second and the third placed contestants Sanket Shanbagh and Harprit Singh Bawa in their Gypsies were separated by a 10 seconds, while Capt Amarinder

5 Brar, trailing Bawa by another 10 seconds was running fourth.

However at the end of the day Suresh Rana took the top trophy in X-treme category followed by Capt A S Brar. Harprit Singh Bawa finished third in his Gypsy.



Suresh Rana and navigator Nandal celebrate after claiming the crown

The Indian Army had participants in both the Adventure and Xtreme categories. Seen here is Lt Col Harpreet S Sidhu tackling an overflowing stream. He finished 17th in the SUVs



Suresh Rana in his Gypsy blitzes past through Rangdum in the last leg. He finished first overall in the Xtreme four wheeler category



Beautiful sights like this adorned the entire Raid route. However we were busy calculating speed and avoiding obstacles, not to forget black ice