

Bratislava or Bust Report – Matthew Shaw, 4th Year Physicist, Pembroke College

What did I do?

This summer I took part in Bratislava or Bust, a charity European rally organised by Student Adventures. We bought a car for under £500, pimped it up, and then competed against 30 other teams completing challenges for the title of rally champion. I took part with two other friends from Cambridge and Bristol University under the name of "Team LeKAR". We bought a BMW 323i and in the end finished 3rd in the rally! Event dates: 1st to 7th August 2012. Route: UK, France, Belgium, Luxemburg, Switzerland, Lichtenstein, (Alps), Italy, Slovenia, Hungary, Austria, Slovakia.

Why did you choose to do that particular challenge?

I like taking part in adventurous activities and making a fool of myself completing challenges. The event was only 7 days so did not require much time commitment. The minimum sponsorship was only £100 per person so this was not too stressful to manage.

How difficult was it to organise and raise sponsorship?

Sponsorship was not a problem because I had experience from Cambridge RAG Jailbreak raising money by requesting friends to set us challenges. Finding a car was not a problem, there is an abundance on Auto Trader. My friend knew a lot about cars so knew exactly what to get (though this definitely isn't a requisite for the event!). The main difficulty, however, was car insurance. We were OK because we were all 21, but younger participants may have found more difficulty. In the end, my friend just added the car to his existing policy for a month and us all as named drivers.

What was the best part of the challenge?

I can recall three favourite occasions from the trip. Firstly, descending the Stelvio Pass in the Alps was great fun. The view was breathtaking and we had fun racing down the narrow winding roads. Secondly, the beautiful scenery and country roads of Slovenia were amazing to drive through. Finally, challenges added a fun dynamic to the trip. We enjoyed competing to get the most points by completing them as imaginatively as possible.

What was the worst part of the challenge?

On the second day we had been a little overambitious completing challenges. We had tried to complete all challenges on the list and cut time quite finely. We all got a bit frustrated and after a desperate sprint missed the check in deadline by a few minutes. We were gutted. Last minute checking in caused us problems on other occasions. We often arrived too late to book hostel rooms so had to make do sleeping in our car or on some random floor – though this also added to the experience.

Did you gain anything from the event?

It was great to find out more about buying and decorating cars and to discover that driving on the continent is not as scary as it sounds. The event has also provided a great discussion point in interviews, as my friend found out. Each day we had to strategically plan our itinerary to achieve the maximum points available. It was not realistic to complete everything so we had to manage our time and resources well, focusing on easier and high yielding challenges and discarding other ones.

Would you encourage others to do it?

Yes, definitely. It gave us an excellent opportunity to travel Europe and experience the thrills of a rally. The event duration is convenient if you are working and have limited holiday allowance and the sponsorship amount is easily manageable.

Anything else you can think of?

I am quite keen on videography and there were two video competitions for the event. We were first asked to make a team intro video and then collect footage from our trip to make a video at the end. This was great fun and we produced some amazing videos. Our intro video achieved the most views in the history of the event! You can check out our videos on these links:

Intro Video: <http://tinyurl.com/teamlekarintro>

Post-Rally Video: <http://tinyurl.com/teamlekar1>