



September's Fundraiser of the Month is Matthew Cope (aka *Magic Matt*)

Please tell our readers what you have been up to?

I have performed the Magic Matt Show at MACS' Christmas parties and annual Family Weekend for the last six years and am always blown away by how the children and families cope with things that I could never imagine. I wanted to help raise funds so set off with my friend Glyn as part of the Mongol Rally in July from Battersea Park, London with the intention of driving approximately 8,500 miles to the Ulaanbaatar, the capital city of Mongolia in a 989cc Daihatsu Cuore named *Mr. Chow*. Under the assumption that driving the shortest route on paved roads through Russia would be a bit dull we opted to head through Europe to Turkey where we stopped in Istanbul for a quick bath and to do some repair work on our solar panels. From there we travelled north through Georgia and southern Russia (where we got stuck on a sandbank) into Kazakhstan. We changed our suspension then trundled on through Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan before heading back north through Eastern Kazakhstan and a tiny section of Russia to get to the western tip of Mongolia. From there it was just five days of driving through deserts, bogs and river crossings to reach the last bit of paved road into Ulaanbaatar.

How did you learn about the Mongol Rally and what made you want to do it?

I'd heard rumours of such an event years ago but was always too busy travelling elsewhere over the summer to take part. I was discussing it with Glyn when we met up in London over Christmas last year and after a couple of pints it seemed like a great idea.

How long did it take you to prepare for it?

We had many good intentions and met up on multiple occasions over the course of about 6 months leading up to the rally with the focus of planning all the important things like visas, a car, insurance, etc. Unfortunately all these things are really boring to do and I don't often get to see Glyn so these "planning meetings" would turn into more social occasions. Most of our actual planning was done in our PJs over Skype and aside

from those really important boring bits we thought it would be pretty fun to make the rest of it up as we went along, and it was.

How many countries did you visit and which one was your favourite?

We visited 14 countries. I loved Mongolia as much as I did when I visited a few years ago, but Serbia and Kyrgyzstan were pleasantly surprising, I'd happily go back one day. The Naryn Valley in Kyrgyzstan was stunning.

What was your highlight(s) of the journey?

We visited an orphanage just outskirts of Ulaanbaatar so I could put on a magic show and make a few balloons for the kids there, I'd taken my unicycle with me so they enjoyed that. I also enjoyed making balloons and doing tricks along the way for everyone from nomadic children to stone faced border guards. Scenery and experience wise, Kyrgyzstan is stunning as are Mongolia and South Eastern Russia but for experience, the 400 year old Turkish Baths in Istanbul were an experience and a half .

Did you bring back any interesting souvenirs?

Not really, I always travel light but I'm still trying to get *Mr. Chow's* number plates back off the shipping company which will be great to have. We also raised nearly £600 for MACS!

What happened to Mr Chow afterwards?

He got shipped back to Lithuania before being sent to the great scrapyards in the sky. At over 12 years old he'd never been sold outside of a three mile radius in South London so I feel we helped him see the world before his final goodbye.

If anyone wanted to do the Mongol Rally or a similar trip what advice would you give them?

Do it. There is another charity rally in existence where you drive a better car to Mongolia and leave it there to be used as an ambulance so I'd go for that option if I did it again.

Thanks Matt and well done!