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Almaty, 9th of June 2011

The China part – May 2nd to June 7th 2011

« The Middle Kingdom from east to west »

After well over a year of hard work, on May 2nd, the Side by Side Sino-French Team supported by Total Lubricants China finally set on its route to France.

From the South East to the North West, from Shanghai to Wulumuqi, China, the world's leading power, is in motion. Houses are growing everywhere, the road network is soon-to-be impeccable and one cannot look in any direction without seeing solar panels.

In just about 5 weeks and 6,400 km, we went from laughter to tears, all of this in sheer amazement. We also said goodbye to three of our fellow riders at the Kazakh border.

Between Shanghai and Xi'an, factories, endless lines of trucks dominate the landscape; this is the modern China where nothing can get in the way of progress.

After 1,200km, we reach Xi'an; this famous city is the Eastern ending point of the Silk Road, it was also for us where we first encountered a more traditional China. The past is still present here: The buried army with its 8,000 + soldiers from 210 BC, the traditional courtyards, the incredible private museum of Mr Wu.

While reaching the Qinghai lake, at just 3,200m altitude, we enter Tibetan lands and take this opportunity to get our bikes and ourselves blessed by a Buddhist monk. We eventually enter the Taklamakan desert, « The death desert » in the language of the Uighur, where we get hit by a sand storm.

Circled by snowy mountains, this terrible desert has fortunately a few oases to offer on the way. We stopped in one of them to see the western end of the Great Wall of China, and in another one called Dunhuang which has the Mogao Caves, the '*Thousand Buddha caves*', which are over 1,400 years old.

After a harassing last day of ride in the TianShan mountains, we arrive in Wulumuqi. We take this opportunity to stop for a few days and do heavy maintenance on our sidecars; one of them even

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needs to get a new engine. The highlight of our stop was when the Total Lubricant team flew in from Shanghai with French cheese and French wine, they were greeted as the true heroes they were!

We use those few days off to visit the surroundings of Wulumuqi and set off to the Oasis of Turpan, considered as the hottest spot in China (it was 49 degrees the day we went there), this important halt on the Silk road is well known for its dried raisins, its underground irrigation system which is over 2,000 years old, and the ruins of the Buddhist village Jiaohe, dating from the 7th century.

Having eaten a sufficient amount of descent meals and filed up our stock of Total lubricant oil, we set on the road again.

We are now down to 4 people and will remain so until the end of our journey: Valériane, Thomas, Kewen and Gernot, an Austrian friend from Shanghai who is using this trip as his long way back home after 5 years in Shanghai. We are now getting ready to cross the border into Kazakhstan.

China has amazed us in many ways, we are now eager to enter Central Asia and cross it from East to West for a little over a month, riding through Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan and Georgia.

We will send you several other press releases during our expedition, don't hesitate to contact us if you have any questions. If you need to have access to our selection of high resolution pictures, please contact us.

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