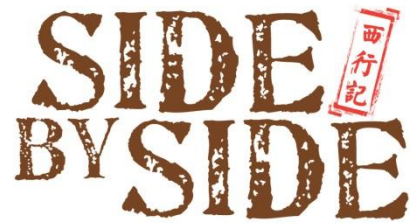


SIDE BYSIDE



In partnership with Total Lubricants China, Side by Side is a Sino-French expedition linking Shanghai to Paris in four months, looking at breaking a new Guinness World Record for the longest distance covered by sidecar.

Going through Xi'an, Almaty and Istanbul, this group of Chinese and French adventurers will bring you back to the Silk Road and its ancestral myths from China to Europe. On their 1930's motorbikes, they will brave the Asian steps, numerous deserts, explore the dying Aral sea, walk the souks of Istanbul, go up Montenegro's longest Fjord, chill out in Croatia before enjoying a French Camembert below the Eiffel tower.

Erzincan, 12th of July 2011

2nd part – Kazakhstan – From June the 7th to July the 4th 2011

« Kazakhstan in all its greatness »

Our expedition takes another turn when we cross the border from China into Kazakhstan. We don't speak the language anymore and don't know anything about this enormous country, apart from a few hints given by other travelers we've met on the way. Twenty years after the fall of the USSR, we are eager to see what has become of Kazakhstan.

We will have to cover 4,000km in just 28 days from the China border to the Caspian sea.

The Charyn canyon is the second biggest canyon in the world after the one in Colorado, it was our first stop in Kazakhstan. Red in its sand and light, it is superb, we have it to ourselves for the night and camp on the side of its steep cliffs.



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We ride along an impressive mountain chain to Almaty, the economical capital of Kazakhstan. What we had heard about the generosity of the locals turned out to be true, they were all extremely welcoming and it was usually quite challenging to find a way out of the house of very modest people who seemed to have set to feed you to death. Just stop for a while next to a house and you'll be taken in for tea and biscuits. On the other side, the police was not truly focused on feeding us tea and biscuits. Just in 3 days in Almaty, we were stopped five times by the police and even taken in once by cops who pretended they were going to take us to the police station unless we paid them a fine.

To get to the Caspian sea, we had to go along the southern border with Uzbekistan for a while and then head north towards the Russian border. We stopped on the way in Shymkent. Captivated by our Total Lubricants sidecar, a club of local bikers took us under their wing for the day by fixing our bikes and giving us a month load of beer. They tried to talk us into setting up an export business of old Ladas' and other crazy ideas.

We took the road up north towards the Aral Sea of which 75% had already disappeared in 2005, we were amazed by the beauty of the mausoleum of Turkistan on the way and the Russian cosmodrome of Baikonur where the first man in space was sent from in 1961.

For immediate release



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Finally, we reached Aralsk, an old flourishing fishermen's village. The harbor is now dry and the sea is 80km away. A few 60 km away, the boat cemetery awaited us, there were only 3 boats left; our guide told us that by next year the boats will be all gone as the locals sell them by the weight; killing the potential of tourism for the city.



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Leaving Aralsk, we got ready to ride through a very tough desert for two weeks where gas stations are almost inexistent. By 9am, we could already fry an egg on the sidecar of our bikes. The few villages on the way allowed us to buy canned food and water. The road was a mess, not only were there no asphalt but the numerous trucks who had taken the same road made the Paris Dakar look like a walk in the park. Some potholes were more than 1m deep and the brightness of the sun on the surface of the road prevented us from seeing most obstacles before reaching them. Our bikes and our backs were in pain. Add to this an enormous thunder and haze storm which literally threw us to the ground and you get an approximate idea of what we rode through.

For immediate release

After 600+km, we finally arrived in Makat, we thought it would be a real city, tough luck, the chief of the police of the city pulled us over after minutes and told us that “Makat is the Chicago of Kazakhstan; people shoot at each other’s in the streets, you are not safe here”.

After long talks, we came to the conclusion that we wanted to sleep in the police station and the poor officer Norlan could do nothing but open his own office and an interrogation room for us to sleep; he asked us in return to tell people that the Police of Kazakhstan is welcoming and friendly. We must say he made his point!

Dirty, tired and with our bikes falling apart, we made it to Aktau on the side of the Caspian sea where we had to board to Azerbaijan; we got our visas easily (even for Kewen, who as a Chinese citizen wasn’t allowed to go into Azerbaijan in theory) but found it very difficult to catch a boat to cross the sea; it took us 5 days to get a boat to Baku in just 24 hours of sailing.

We are slightly nostalgic as we know we won’t see anymore the incredible huge landscapes of Kazakhstan populated by wild horses and camels, nor its extremely welcoming and generous people.

We will send you some more press releases as we move forward on our expedition, do not hesitate to contact us if you want to know more about our expedition or if you want more photos.

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