

## Next stop, Buenos Aires!

It's official! The European competitors for the 2009 Dakar Rally have completed administrative and technical scrutineering and all their race machines have left the port of Le Havre on board the 'Grande Benelux' ship, which is currently crossing the Atlantic Ocean *en route* to South America.

Some 820 vehicles are on board (710 for the race and assistance as well as around 60 organisation vehicles and 50 for the media) and the ship's journey will finish on 17 December at Zarate, in the harbour of the Argentinean capital. Among the millions of Euros worth of factory-prepared rally-raid cars, trucks, quads and motorcycles is a privateer BMW G 650 Xchallenge, carefully and painstakingly built by Simon Pavey and Evan Davies in their workshop in South Wales.



Si Pavey runs BMW Motorrad UK's off-road school in the UK and has had his fair share of rally experience. A veteran of six Dakars – four on BMW F 650 GS machines – he has taught well over 1,000 BMW owners the skills of off-road riding in the nine years that the World of BMW Off-Road Skills Enduro Park has been operational, including many high-profile names such as Ewan McGregor, Charley Boorman, Prince Michael of Kent, and Jay Kay of Jamiroquai. And despite having raced all over the world, the 41-year-old Australian has never been to South America before, so is relishing the opportunity of joining this legendary rally event that starts for the first time ever in Buenos Aires on 2 January.

"I'm pretty sure that the organisers have planned a seriously tough Dakar and I know that they're going to 'throw us in at the deep end'," he said. "That said, I'm feeling pretty good and my head's in the right place. I've been out to the United Arab Emirates recently to compete in the six-day Dubai Rally, which was fantastic. I had a really good ride out there and came fourth, so it was good for training, fitness, road-book work and general confidence. However, I'm expecting things to be tough out in South America. Previous Dakars have given us time to tune in – such as being able to ride from Paris all

through France before the boat across to Africa and the rally proper. I've been looking at all the course details on the 2009 Dakar website and have worked out that the average stage is around 700 kilometres long, with the average 'special' being about 400 kilometres!"



In fact, the detailed route of the Dakar Argentina Chile 2009 has only recently been decided after more than 100 days of reconnaissance by the organisers, who will be inviting all race participants to evaluate their skills over 9,500 kilometres of dunes, scrub, sand, mud, rocks and mountains, including 5,650 kilometres of 'specials' across the plains of Patagonia, the Atacama Desert and the Andes – all in the heat of the austral summer.

Pavey is more prepared than most for this latest Dakar, having already competed in a major international rally earlier this year – the 11,000 kilometre Transorientale Rally from St Petersburg to Beijing. Having initially built a rally bike for this event from a standard BMW G 650 Xchallenge, Pavey and Evan Davies have since made several modifications to this machine in preparation for South America.

"With the G 650 Xchallenge we know what the weaknesses are – let's not forget that this is a trail bike that we've turned into a race bike," he said. "That said, it has many advantages over the F 650 GS-based rally bikes I've built and used in the past. It is more like a dirt bike in ergonomics and shape, so you've got more ability to ride it harder, plus, it's also around 30 kilos lighter than the original F 650 GS. I also feel that I know the bike well – doing the Transoriental Rally taught us a lot about the bike and we found out what needed changing or improving. As a result, we've made various modifications, such as putting in a bigger radiator to help cooling, and adding a new wiring configuration that allows us to do things like individually override the temperature switches."

Pavey flies out to Buenos Aires on 29 December and will have plenty to do once he gets there. First he'll need to go to the port to pick up his bike, then complete the second part of scrutineering, where things like race lights and helmets will be checked.

The bike will then go into 'parc fermé' in preparation for the rally, which will get underway on the morning of 3 January, when 530 teams (230 motorcycles, 30 quads, 188 cars and 82 trucks) will take off from Buenos Aires, representing 49 nationalities. Pavey's strategy for his first South American Dakar is quite simple – to take each day as it comes and try and enjoy himself, but make sure he gets to the finish.

"I'm just going to try and stay out of trouble, as you can only lose time in the Dakar – it's virtually impossible to make it up! The longer the rally goes on the more nervous you become as you know what a mammoth effort it has taken to get you to this point. As you enter the last couple of days of a big rally, you always get nervous and you start to imagine strange noises in the engine, which effects your concentration and makes you ride very poorly. The most important thing is to ride within your limits, keep your mind focussed and just keep it going for two weeks – only then do you have a chance of making it to the finish!"



Those who make it around 'the loop' through Argentina and Chile, and arrive back in Buenos Aires on 17 January will have achieved something few riders ever manage – a Dakar finishers medal. Follow Pavey's progress out in South America by visiting the [www.dakar.com](http://www.dakar.com) website.