
The Great Race - New York to Paris 2008

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It could be one of the greatest drives in the world, winding through country roads, mountain passes and scenic farmland - only this one is 35,000 kilometres long and was driven a century ago by some of the finest French, Italian, German and American automobiles of the era. It took place in 1908 and the 100th anniversary of this 'Great Race' from New York to Paris is next year. Participants are lining up to celebrate what is considered one of the most remarkable motorsports events of the last century.

On 12 February 1908, six automobiles left Times Square in New York City to the cheers of 250,000 people in what was described by its newspaper sponsors as "the toughest race ever devised": a race from New York to Paris in the dead of winter. Despite the challenge of travelling on poor roads in harsh weather, teams from three countries persevered across North America, Asia and Europe, finishing in Paris more than five months later (two in July, one in September). It was a sensational adventure told in breathless daily newspaper dispatches and later in books and films. The event was spoofed in the 1960s Tony Curtis-Jack Lemmon movie, 'The Great Race'.



Next May, the event will be recreated for the first time in what the organisers are calling The Great Race 2008: New York to Paris. The route will be a daunting challenge - though certainly not as fearful as that undertaken a century earlier in the original Great Race. This time, no one is suggesting the cars should be driven on ice across the Bering Strait from Alaska to Russia (as the 1908 organisers originally planned).



To date, nearly 30 teams of a field limited to 40 have signed up to drive their classic automobiles on this 30,000km adventure. Among them are a 1967 Aston Martin DB6 and a rare 1910 Nyberg Indy Racer from the U.S., a 1928 Ford Speedster from Colombia, a Willy's Jeep from Poland and a Cadillac from Mexico.

The 2008 Great Race will begin on 30 May in Times Square, New York City, and will take 65 days - 104 less than the winner needed in 1908 - and travel through 13 countries, finishing in Paris on 2 August. The total distance is 30,000km (18,900 miles), of which 21,000km (13,000 miles) is on land. Both car and team will travel about 9,000km (5,700 miles) in a flight across the Pacific Ocean from Vancouver, which marks the end of stage one, to Shanghai, China, for the beginning of the second stage.



The event is loosely based on a simplified adventure rally format. The teams are allowed GPS and odometers and will be scored using the same equipment found in the Lisbon-Dakar rally vehicles.

Teams will compete for trophies in either of two classes - the Schuster Class for classic cars, named for George Schuster, lead driver of the winning car in 1908, and the Innovation Class for the renewable-fuel vehicles.

"We're very fortunate to have the centennial as an excuse to make this run," said Bill Ewing, who heads the organisers of the 2008 event. "But you shouldn't need one. It's such an exciting challenge - and besides, how many people get to actually drive around the world?"

*If you are interested in participating in The Great Race or learning more, please contact the organisers as soon as possible. **The deadline for entries is 31 December 2007.***

For further information see www.greatrace.com



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