

CLASSIC DRIVER

1000 Millas Sport Argentina:



If you have the time and resources, there are few more tempting ways to spend five November days (springtime in Argentina) than on the South American equivalent of the Mille Miglia retrospective, the *1000 Millas Sport Argentina*.

Here, we join Shelby Myers and Chris Drake, who were among the 155 participants on the 2009 event. They piloted a Maserati Khamisn across 1000km of stunning Argentinean landscape. This is Shelby Myers' story...

Day One

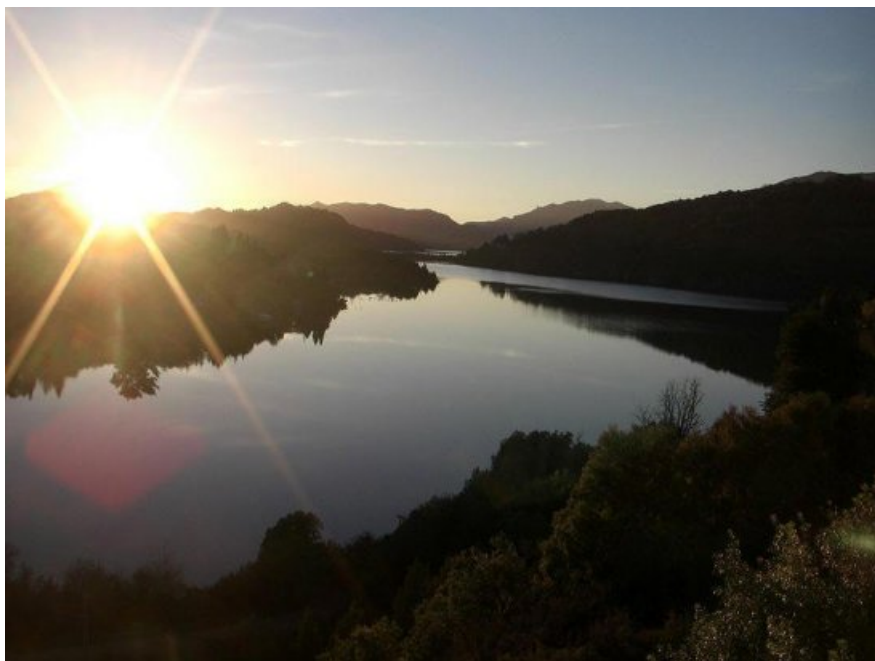
This is my first trip to Argentina and it has been a very long flight. My English co-driver **Chris Drake** drifts in and out of movies and I doze off...

...to be woken by "Ladies and gentleman, it is now 4am and the cabin crew will be passing through the cabin to serve breakfast before our descent into **Buenos Aires**." After landing, we have a meal in the Palermo region and crash early.

Day Two

Chris is up at 6:30am and heads for the first of many **South American** feasts. I join him in time for the taxi with an apple in hand. A two-hour flight takes us south to Bariloche, where the climate is cooler and we head out of the airport to find a red **Ferrari 250 SWB** zooming past. From the airport it is about 45 minutes to **Llao Llao Hotel**, a beautiful lodge set in a pristine location among the lakes and snowcapped mountain peaks of Patagonia, Argentina. Our room sits on the corner of the main building, overlooking the beautiful lakes east and west – perfect for watching the sun rise and set.





Our **Khamsin** is car #103, and we are given an enormous number of rally gifts including a GPS navigation system. It is now 9:00pm, although the sun has barely set. We head to the dining hall, a large room with high wooden rafters that seats 400 people or so, where large tables host the feast that is served each night – and we meet **Claudio Scalise**, whose car we are using. The meals feature freshly baked breads, cheeses, smoked salmon delicacies, pastas and – best of all – Argentinean beef, cut thinly and served singed on the outside and beautifully pink inside.

Day Three

I am woken by the sound of engines outside our window. The clock reads 7:15am... and our starting time is 9:19am. The way it works is this: you are given a starting time and must leave punctually or be docked points/time. You then set a stopwatch to make sure you get to the various checkpoints on time. In between, there are several sets of time trials, again timed exactly and, at the end of three days, the team with the closest time to the recommended is the winner.



After a fast bite to eat and a coffee, **Chris** and I make our way outside and warm up the car. There are 150 other mechanical wonders to admire, the **Ferrari 250 SWB** topping them in terms of value. However, such cars as the **Ferrari 250 Lusso**, **1750 Alfa Romeo 6C 1750 Zagato**, **275 GTB/4**, **Mercedes 300SL** and a lovely **Alfa Romeo 'Double Bubble'** are also quite stunning. The 1973 **Maserati Khamsin** which we are driving is not as valuable but is nonetheless iconic for its era. It has a 4.9-litre engine with around 310HP, most of it produced under 4000rpm. This particular car is the only one of its kind in Argentina and it has been there since new. The interior is original and finished in 'lovely' 70s colours of brown and orange.

I am in the driver's seat for the first day and, as we position ourselves in line behind car #102, a white 1970s **Porsche 911**, the rain starts to come down. We pass loads of eager Argentinean spectators, pretty girls and television crews and my biggest worry is that I will stall the car in front of them. As we pass through the start gate at exactly 9:19, the open road lies ahead... until **Chris**, navigating, shouts, "Oh s***, we have our first set of time trials in a couple hundred metres!" Using only the stopwatch on Chris's watch, we try to count 30 seconds from the car in front but soon realise this lacks accuracy. Luckily, the max penalty points are 100 (and we score 100).

We continue up some steep, winding roads, but not nearly as bumpy as I imagined. I feel the **Khamsin's** torque and I rarely need to shift gears. The roads wrap around a beautiful lake and soon we are perched atop a mountain. We continue through **Bariloche** and soon find ourselves on open road between two mountain ranges, picking up speed. Hitting various small villages, checkpoints, time trials and petrol stations along the way, we finally make our way to the **Chilean border**. Customs is very relaxed, the officials more interested in taking photos than checking to see if we are smuggling white powder.



As **Chris** and I pull in for a quick pit-stop, there seems to be a banging coming from under the engine bay. We reckon a water pump bearing has worked its way loose and we hope we can limp the car to the lunch stop in **Chile** and back. But after fiddling with the air-conditioning knob, the noise stops and we realise that the AC pump is causing the racket. We cut our lunch stop short and head back on the road, trying to get the white **Porsche** in our sights. Peering through fog, we soon find ourselves chasing car number 98. The rain is hammering down and, just as **Chris's** "Stop, stop, stop and go, go, go" techniques are starting to prove effective, the famous early **Maserati/Lamborghini** electrical gremlin strikes and the car dies quietly, leaving us stranded just yards from the final time trial of the day. The car is towed to the hotel by **Claudio's** support vehicle.

Day Four

Having watched the rest of the field shoot off for the day, **Chris** and I meet a mechanic who has come up from Bariloche. Our translator tries to explain to the mechanic what is wrong with the car. **Maserati** placed the black box that supplies power from the coil, which controls all of the car's electrics, at the very front of the car on a cross-member just under the grille. The obvious problem is that it sucks up whatever the road can throw at it. "How do you say hair-dryer in Spanish?" we ask the translator. We use one from the hotel to

blow-dry the water-soaked electrics. By the time we've refitted everything, it's 11:00am - and we're miles behind the field with no chance of catching up.

Instead, we accept an offer from the gentlemen in the **Mercedes 300SL Roadster** and the **Ferrari Lusso** and dine with them at their private hotel and cottage on a secluded lake in the **Andes**. Since the rain has subsided, the views are incredible.





Day Five

The final day of the rally is the shortest. It starts with a lie-in for most competitors then a lazy day winding to the south and back, covering only 400km or so. Recently armed with stopwatches, **Chris** and I are on a mission. We have all the right ingredients: **Chris**, an experienced UK *Formula Junior* driver; a freshly prepared car; great weather; and a good sleep. Our only problem is my amateur navigation skills. Reading the driving notes, time trials and overall timing takes quite a bit of focus and practice. The first time trial is a disaster and we easily score 100 penalty points. Each subsequent trial comes with disappointment and I feel sheepish.

This quickly changes as **Chris** engages in a high-speed chase through a long stretch of windy, open roads. Sandwiched between our friendly **Porsche 911** and a speedy little **Triumph TR6**, I put the navigation book down and play the role of photographer and spotter for **Chris**. The chase goes on for an hour or so and when we finally come to our stop, the cars are nicely warm and all the participants have huge grins.



Finally, the last time trials section of the rally – a difficult track of nine start/stop points. We slow the approach and, stopwatches in hand, proceed through the line. The first one is seven seconds and I count down aloud. Resetting the stopwatch on the finish/start line, we have 38 seconds to the next line. Tyres squealing and rushing through the end line, I hit the wrong reset button on one of the clocks and things start to go downhill. After a series of “Go, go, go... slow, slow, slow... No! No! No!” sequences we are at the end of our run.

Chris and I head back towards the hotel, filled with grateful thoughts of **Claudio Scalise**, for letting us use his wonderful car, and of **Cristian Bertschi** for making it all happen. We’re already looking forward to next year.

For further information on the Argentinean **1000 Millas Sport** event, visit www.1000millas.com.ar.

Main text and photos: Shelby Myers

Shelby Myers is part of the **RM Auctions** European team. RM's next sale is its '**Automobiles of Arizona**' on **21-22 January 2010**. The cars are being added daily to the [Classic Driver car database](http://www.classicdriver.com), or you can view the very latest news at www.rmauctions.com.

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