

# touchdown

Monthly • September 2010 • Vol III • Issue IX

A Magazine by MIAL

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**V.S. Naipaul**

unleashes his latest

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"Yes, yes, yes" to South Africa

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**NEW CAR LAUNCHES**

## PRACHI DESAI

Goa Tourism's new face rocks Bollywood  
(...and we caught up with her at this airport!)

**5 states**  
**10 SUVs**  
**12 days**  
**3000 km**  
**18,000+ sq ft**

words | ASHISH GUPTA

The world's highest inhabited village; the highest motorable pass; the second coldest inhabited place after Siberia... And then you reach the salt water lake where the final scene of *3 Idiots* was shot. Here's a leg-by-leg account of The Himalayan Dash, 2010

**The Himalayan Dash, a unique Trans Himalayan self driving expedition from New Delhi to the remote regions of Ladakh, covering over 3000 km, concluded successfully on July 27, 2010.**

The expedition had over forty participants including thirteen women. Ten vehicles were part of the expedition, including Mitsubishi Pajero, Volkswagen Touareg, Ford Endeavour, Toyota Innova, Maruti Grand Vitara, Maruti Gypsy, Mahindra Scorpio and Xylo. A service vehicle as well as an ambulance with a doctor (specifically qualified to manage high altitude related problems) and medical supplies accompanied the expedition.

Over the course of 12 days, the Rally crossed constantly changing landscapes, high mountain passes, several beautiful lakes as well as deep gorges, on what can only be called a drive of a lifetime. The route was carefully planned for gradual acclimatisation to the higher altitudes.



**Ceremonial start: July 16, 2010, New Delhi**

To allow participants to get to know each

other, a pre-event dinner was hosted at The Lalit, New Delhi. The highlight of the evening were the photographs from the retrace of the Himalayan Dash route, which heightened the sense of expectation.



**Leg 1: July 17, 2010 (New Delhi to Shimla)**

The re-grouping for the first day's drive was at Haryana Tourism's Ethnic Resort at Rai, on the outskirts of Delhi. The vehicles started to arrive, to a very warm welcome, at The Wildflower Hall in Shimla after covering over 300 km by late afternoon. A wine tasting of locally produced fruit and flower wines (only available in the state) was organised, and all of us got busy trying to discover the underlying fruit or flower. This was followed by a Himachali dinner with a Ghazal session by the resident singer.



**Leg 2: July 18, 2010 (Shimla to Manali)**

The convoy departed at 9 am after breakfast and arrived at Jalori Top (11,500 ft) at 1.30



pm. The participants enjoyed the packed lunches along with hot tea and Maggi noodles from the local dhaba. The weather was pleasant, with faint fog and mist. After the steep descent from Jalori and a drive of 250 km, the vehicles made their way to Manali, past the flowing Beas river. Drinks and dinner were organised in the lawns with a bonfire.



**Leg 3: July 19, 2010 (Manali to Jispa)**

Leg 3 was planned as a short day after two long days of driving. Jispa was chosen as the night halt to allow participants to acclimatise. Post breakfast, the convoy left Manu Allaya and made its way across the Rohtang Pass through broken and slushy roads, heavy traffic and rain. Lunch break was at Rohtang

The satellite phone at Karzok, the world's highest inhabited village, came in handy to make the much needed calls to civilisation

top (13,050 ft) where everyone huddled into a dhaba, as the weather turned wet along with strong winds. The packed lunch from Manu Allaya was again supplemented by hot tea, omeletes and Maggi noodles. The convoy made its way through Koksar and Sissu to Tandi to refuel at the last petrol pump until Leh and to witness the confluence of the Chandra and Bhaga rivers to form Chandrabhaga. After covering 145 km and passing through Keylong, the vehicles arrived at Hotel Ibex. The sight of the beautiful valley and flowing Bhaga river in front of the hotel left everyone mesmerised.



**Leg 4: July 20, 2010 (Jispa to Sarchu)**

In the morning participants visited the monastery at Jispa. A few intrepid participants tried off-roading close to the river bed in the Gypsy. A doctor briefed the expedition to address concerns relating to high altitude sickness. The convoy left Hotel Ibex at 12 noon. At Darcha, the vehicles were registered at the police check post. The climb to Patseo army transit camp followed passing Deepak Tal on the way. Most participants visited the wet canteen at the army camp and bought woolen caps, jackets and gloves in preparation of the days ahead. The convoy climbed onwards to Baralacha Top (16,050 ft) passing Suraj Tal, the origin of the river Bhaga, on the way and the first point to hit snow. Of course, snow fights were fought



**THE HIMALAYAN DASH**

The Himalayan Dash organized by Cougar Motorsport, is held in July and the registrations start in February. The Club takes care of all details.

**The package:** ₹ 50,000 to ₹ 65,000 depending on the duration opted for. The cost is all inclusive.

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amidst a lot of excitement. The vehicles arrived at the Goldrop Campsite at Sarchu by late afternoon after covering a total of 72 km. A number of marmots sitting on the hillside greeted us. Everyone retired to their tents to escape the biting cold wind blowing through the valley.



**Leg 5: July 21, 2010 (Sarchu to Tso Moriri lake)**

The scheduled departure of the convoy was advanced to 7 am as most participants were still adjusting to the high altitude and slept only for short durations. The vehicles climbed the spectacular 21 hairpin Gata Loops, passed Nakee La (15,547 ft) and Lachung La (16,613 ft) to arrive into Pang for a tea break. This was followed by a drive through More Plains and Tso Kar lake for lunch break. It was interesting to find a flat desert in the middle of the Himalayas and experience some off-roading through the dirt tracks. A drive through a scenic dirt track led to Karzok village, claimed



*Tented accomodations en route*



## The Himalayan self drive expedition from New Delhi to Ladakh had over forty participants including thirteen women

to be the world's highest inhabited village at 15,250 ft, and the beautiful blue Tso Moriri salt water lake. After a total drive of 221 km and 10 hours, the participants checked into a Nomadic campsite in Karzok village, near the lake. The satellite phone in the village came in handy to make family calls. The service team worked late into the night to patch a leaking air compressor in the suspension of the Volkswagen Touareg.



### Leg 6: July 22, 2010 (Tso Moriri Lake to Leh)

After watching the sunrise over the lake, the expedition left the Nomadic campsite at 9 am on the 215 km drive to Leh. The highlight was a stop at the hot sulphur springs at

Chumathang village and a visit to the Thiksey monastery close to Leh. All vehicles arrived into Lha-Ri-Sa resort at Skara in Leh by early afternoon. After two days of camping and driving through dirt tracks, a hot bath, comfortable rooms and washed cars felt like sheer ecstasy.



### Leg 7: July 23, 2010 (Leh to Pangong Tso to Leh)

Expedition members who wanted to go for the optional excursion to Pangong Tso for the day set off by 7 am. Pangong Tso is the largest salt water lake in the world and is shared by India and China. Everyone enjoyed the free tea served by the Indian army at

Chang La top (17,800 ft), the 3rd highest motorable pass in the world. The convoy reached the Pangong Tso salt water lake after covering a total distance of 160 km to an awesome sight which had everyone grabbing for their cameras. The concluding scene of film *3 Idiots* was shot here. The vehicles returned to Lha-Ri-Sa in the evening, this time with a lot more water on the drive from the snow-melt during the day. This turned the tables a bit: the service car got stuck in the loose rocks and had to be pulled out by an expedition vehicle!



### Leg 8: July 24, 2010 (Leh to Hunder)

On to the highest motorable pass in the world! The convoy left Lha-Ri-Sa at 10 am and passed Khardung La top (18,640 ft). There was hot tea at the Rinchen dhaba, built in memory of Col. Rinchen, two time Maha Vir Chakra winner. The convoy descended from Khardung La into North Pullu, for what was eventually billed as the most awesome lunch hosted by the Indian Army. The drive into Nubra valley followed along the Shyok river, with a stop at the Diskit Monastery en-route, where preparations were in full swing for the inauguration next day of the 106 ft tall statute of Lord Maitraya Buddha by The

#### THINGS TO KEEP IN MIND FOR PARTICIPATION

- The Himalayan Dash goes to altitudes in excess of 15,000 ft above sea level.
- At these altitudes, lower levels of oxygen in the air and low atmospheric pressure can affect you in different ways. Consult a doctor before joining the expedition.
- The cars need to have a high ground clearance to be able to negotiate the tough terrain. An all-wheel drive option on the vehicle will be an added advantage.
- Mobile connectivity in the region is extremely bad and your mobile phones might not work for up to 3 consecutive days!
- Consumption of alcohol and cigarettes are not advisable at high altitudes



Dalai Lama. The participants were greeted by the incredible sight of a large number of white sand dunes almost identically shaped. The vehicles reached the Royal Camp at Hundar by late afternoon after covering a total of 128 km. Some participants went for rides on the double humped Bactrian camels on the sand dunes. A bonfire was organised in the evening.



**Leg 9: July 25, 2010 (Hundar to Leh)**

The army hosted a para-sailing activity on the Nubra sand dunes for early risers. The sight of the valley below while sailing high in the air with a parachute was, well out of this world. A visit to the Hundar village followed. The vehicles returned to Leh shortly thereafter, after crossing Khardung La for the second time. The day was spent visiting the Shanti Stupa, palace and other attractions in Leh. At the Leh market, most of us bought yak cheese pizza.



**FROM THE DRIVING SEAT**

"A unique event of its kind, Himalayan Dash is definitely an experience which will stay in my top ten memories for a long time. The sheer beauty and mystique of nature comes with inhospitality of the terrain."



**Abhishek Gupta, Vice President-Finance, GE Capital**

"We had the opportunity to travel over 3000 km to a dream destination, through some of the most scenic routes imaginable, all in relative safety and comfort."



**Mohit Arya, Director, Precious Carrying Corporation**



**Leg 10: July 26, 2010 (Leh to Mulbekh)**

The remaining participants and vehicles that had opted to continue with the expedition to Srinagar left the Lha-Ri-Sa at 8 am. Brief stopovers were organised at the army museum at Leh and the confluence of the Indus and Zaskar rivers at Nimmu and at the Lamayuru Monastery. After lunch, the vehicles climbed the 18 hairpin Hangro loops and crossed the Fotu La pass (13,480 ft) to descend into Wakha and Mulbekh by early afternoon after a drive of 185 km. After the long drive, The Himalayan Solitaire campsite on the banks of the Indus river was a welcome sight.



**Leg 11: July 27, 2010 (Mulbekh to Srinagar)**

The convoy left on the last leg of the expedition early morning from the camp and passed Kargil to reach Drass. A visit to the Operation Vijay memorial followed, where the 11th anniversary celebrations of the victory of the Kargil war had just concluded. Drass is also the second coldest inhabited place in the world after Siberia. The convoy later crossed the Zozi La pass (11,650 ft) to descend into Sonamarg and reached the Lalit Grand Palace along the Dal Lake in Srinagar by evening. The DJ made sure we were on our toes till late in the night!

From there, it was a downward ride back to Delhi again... ↘

*(The writer is MD, Cougar Motorsport)*

**UPCOMING TRIP: THE DESERT DASH  
November 25 – 28**

The Desert Dash is a Time, Speed, Distance (TSD) event that combines the thrill of motor sports with the luxury of fine, hand-picked hotels in Rajasthan. Apart from these two events, other planned rally includes The Rain Forest Dash and The Coastal Dash. Log onto: [cougarmotorsport.in](http://cougarmotorsport.in)

