



5th to 15th September 2008

SOME QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Written by HYWEL THOMAS, the Route Co-ordinator

WHAT IS ICELAND LIKE?

There is nowhere in the world like Iceland. The island is 25% larger than Ireland, but its population is only 300,000 and more than half of those live in the capital, Reykjavik. So, away from the metropolitan area, this barren desolate land is **empty**, and on the long straight tarred roads there's practically no traffic.

Located on the mid-Atlantic ridge where the North American and Eurasian tectonic plates are pulling apart, the scenery is unique. There are hundreds of square miles of lava fields, ridges of black volcanic ash everywhere, and wherever you look you'll see volcanic cones and evidence of volcanic activity, some of it recent. Vents with steam (actually water vapour) billowing out are commonplace and there are many glaciers, including a huge one where we'll enjoy driving skidoos and a jeep safari.

In September the weather will be temperate, not cold but certainly not hot, and frequent rain showers are likely so bring warm waterproof clothes. There should be no snow or ice on the roads.

Most of the people we'll meet speak excellent English. Visitors from the EU do not need a visa.

However, Iceland is **expensive**. Apart from catching fish and smelting aluminium, the only other major industry is tourism. The country is self-sufficient in fresh vegetables, but everything else is imported. Petrol is about the same price as in Britain and there is a good network of fuel stations, but a plate of fish and chips in a roadside cafe will cost over £10. However, it's well worth it to visit this unique country.

HOW DO I GET MY CAR AND MYSELF TO ICELAND?

There is a drive-on / drive-off car ferry, but its only port of call in Britain is Lerwick in the Shetland Isles (itself a ferry trip from the north of Scotland). Furthermore, the ferry lands in the east of Iceland, two days drive from the Rally HQ in Reykjavik, which is in the southwest. This is not a convenient option.

For those competitors starting from the UK, their cars will be shipped to Reykjavik in containers from the port of Immingham (near Hull, NE England) and the crews will fly out by scheduled flights from Heathrow. For those competitors coming from the continent, their cars can be shipped from Rotterdam and they can fly to Iceland from any of several airports, including Frankfurt, Paris and Amsterdam.

British competitors must take their rally cars to Immingham at least a week before our outward flight (Friday 5th September) and the cars can be collected from Immingham some 10 days after our return flight (Monday 15th September).

North American crews are welcome and should contact the HERO office to discuss transportation arrangements

ARE THE ROADS ROUGH? WHAT CAR SHOULD I BRING?

The roads near the capital, Reykjavik, have a good tarred surface and so has most of Route 1, the main road that encircles the island and much of which we will be following. However, some of the rally route will be on minor roads and most of these have an excellent surface of smooth black ash.

On the last day of the rally we will drive from north to south for some 120 miles across the barren inhospitable interior. The first half of this road has a good firm surface but the southern half is 60 miles of rough track, but it is NOT a competitive section and the set average speed is only 25 mph. Furthermore, just after this track joins a tarred road, over an hour has been allocated for viewing the huge Gullfoss waterfall and the famous Geysir, so competitors can drive as slowly as they like. Note that this cross-country road is used by normal tourist traffic, and on the first recce we drove it in an ordinary hire car with no under body protection, so it is NOT a car-breaker.

Having said that, we suggest you do not bring a "Concourse standard" vehicle - small stone chips are inevitable when driving on loose-surfaced roads. Any historic car prepared for road rallies will be suitable, including pre-war cars. As on all rallies, fitting a sump guard and skidding the exhaust are strongly recommended and fitting a HERO-approved tripmeter is necessary, but no other special preparation work is needed. Please read the HERO Technical Regulations.

HOW GOOD ARE THE HOTELS?

In Reykjavik, where we are for six of our ten nights in Iceland, we are staying at one of the best 4-star hotels. Accommodation outside the capital for such a large group is not easy to find, and the locations of the overnight halts have been determined by the availability of hotel rooms, and each night the rally will usually be spread over two or three hotels. We've selected the best available, and these hotels are all of a good standard but not 5-star.

IS IT DANGEROUS TO DRIVE NEAR THE MOUNT HEKLA VOLCANO?

Obviously there is a risk entering any active volcanic region. However, these days seismologists with their remote monitoring equipment can usually give a warning days, if not weeks, ahead of an impending eruption. Hekla "blew" in 1990 and again in 2000, and in recent times it becomes active about every 10 years.

Also, Hekla is a "shield volcano", which means the lava is extruded from long fissures which break open along the ridge, unlike a cone volcano which tends to erupt in a great explosion (like Mount St. Helens).

However, if you do hear a big bang then ignore the set speed for the Regularity Section ... and you'll probably be passed by the marshals!

WHAT ARE THE COMPETITIVE PARTS? HOW FAR DO WE DRIVE EACH DAY?

On most days there will be three types of competitive sections: (a) regularity sections on open minor roads, usually with an ash or gravel surface, (b) traditional driving tests "around the cones" on private land, and (c) hill climbs on closed public roads. The driving tests and hill climbs will be marked by the usual HERO "class improvement" scoring system so that you're competing against similar cars in your own class.

On most days there will be two regularity sections, a hill climb and one or two driving tests - plus, of course, stops at places of interest.

The first car will leave the start most days at 8 am and will finish at 6-30 pm or earlier, covering some 490 km (300 miles) on the longest day and 275 km (170 miles) on the shortest day. There will be no driving in the dark. As most of the non-competitive sections are on fast empty main roads and the general speed limit is 90 kph (56 mph), the average speed set for these parts of the rally will be higher than the 30 mph maximum permitted on rallies held in Britain.

HOW MUCH TIME WILL WE HAVE TO VISIT PLACES OF INTEREST?

Plenty. Enough time has been allocated for you to visit places such as Thingvellir, the ancient site of the Icelandic Parliament, the boiling mud pools near Lake Myvatn (the lake is a birdwatcher's paradise), a geothermal power station, two huge waterfalls (and a smaller one which you can walk behind), a classic car museum, an ancient traditional farmstead, etc.

On the first day we'll have an hour off to watch the famous Icelandic "cliff hanger" buggies in action on near-vertical ash slopes, and on the last day we'll visit the famous Geysir, although it's the adjacent Strokkur which actually spouts these days.

Also, after the first two days of rallying there'll be an Activity Day, when competitors will ascend the massive Vatnajökull glacier to take part in a jeep safari and drive skidoos. Then at a nearby lagoon we'll take a boat trip see the huge glacier "calving" icebergs, and later that day we'll visit the Glacier Museum in Höfn, our overnight halt.

On the second and third nights of the rally when we'll be staying far away from the light pollution caused by centres of habitation, provided it's not cloudy then there is a good chance of seeing the famous Aurora Borealis or Northern Lights.

Finally, after returning to Reykjavik at the end of the rally, a whale-watching boat trip out into the Arctic Ocean has been booked for everyone.
