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# Court 'n' Bowled

The craziness of the awesome Dakar Rally had lured the Jacobs brothers for years but it wasn't until they got themselves a Bowler that their wooing was successful

Words: Linda van Wilk Photos: Hans-Peter van Milltown



**Local interest** in the world's toughest motor-sport event has-ly registered

**R**aul Jacobs recalled lunching at the top of a dune and staring across what he described as the battlefield.

'My brother Jean-Pierre and I had started this 350-mile special stage through the sand dunes of Mauritania with a bent clutch plate. This meant changing gears without the use of the clutch.

'In the middle of the highest sand dunes of the stage the Bowler got stuck so deep in the sand, we thought we'd never get out again. Around us there were only dunes, as far as the eye could see... and another 10 cars

that were also stuck, although at least they were in perfect condition.

'We thought this was the end of our rally. After 15 minutes I jumped up and said: "Come on - let's give it one more try. The gearbox is jammed in reverse, so we can't start the engine. But if we dig out all the wheels the gearbox might come free; and if we put sand ladders underneath all four wheels, start the engine in low fourth... then who knows?"

'After a 10-minute fight with the soft sand, I started the engine. Jean-Pierre pushed the car. It moved, and on full throttle (yes, for a moment I forgot the rules) the Bowler drove out. I had the right track all figured out and didn't dare stop until I'd cleared the dunes after about two miles. Not only had I left Jean-Pierre behind, but he had to carry shovels and the sand ladders under a blazing sun. Mind you, he didn't mind - we were back in the race.

'We borrowed the satellite phone of Rene Metge - a Dakar Rally veteran - and called the organisers to let them know we were still in the running. We really motored for the next 150 miles, driving as fast

as we could to make the most of the daylight. But, blinded by the clouds of dust being kicked up by a truck, we drove straight into a hole and stalled the engine. We were stuck again.

'I managed to get it started once more but the impact had been too hard on the clutch. On the next jump - you make hundreds of jumps on a day like this - the clutch plate broke and we lost all drive. There we were, 30 miles from the finish and the rest day in Nouakchott. We had to wait two and a half hours for the service truck, which gave us a tow - but we managed to drive over the finish line ourselves, as this is one of the rules of the Dakar. It was 1.30am.

'But we were still in the race.'

Just another typical day in the infamous Dakar Rally, the hardest, cruellest motorsport event there is.

## **Making the dream a reality**

After trying for eight years to get enough sponsorship together for the Dakar, Raoul Jacobs (Camel Trophy driver and owner of the Dutch Off-Road Adventures training school) and his brother Jean-Pierre took a chance and changed tack: might it

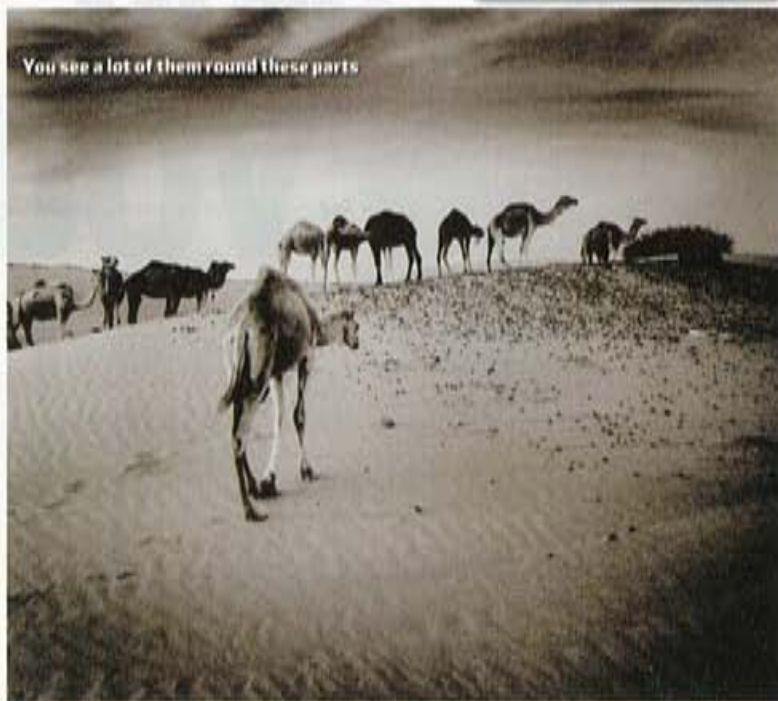


*Even the strongest will under the Dakar challenge*



Mauritania

Linda van Wijk



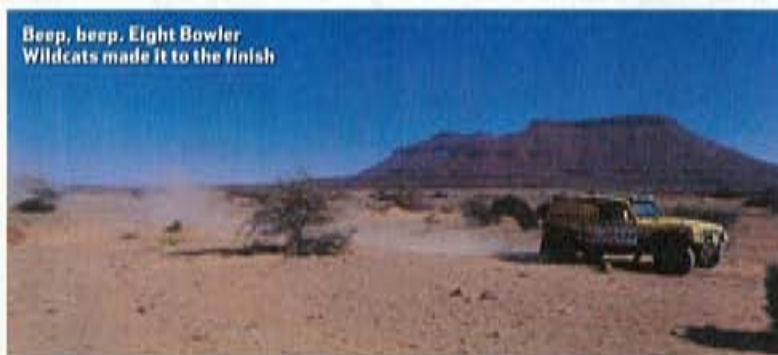
You see a lot of them round these parts



...and he drives the fastest rubbish cart in the West



Nice Bowler, doubtful colour



Beep, beep. Eight Bowler Wildcats made it to the finish

be easier to persuade backers to part with their money if the team actually had a vehicle?

The Jacobs brothers duly bought a Bowler Wildcat that had done half a Dakar Rally the year before – it was driven into a ravine at god-knows-what-speed and rolled four times.

Now to sort out the Bowler. The overriding aim was to build a vehicle to beat the dunes – hundreds of hours spent watching video re-runs of previous Dakars had confirmed that dunes were the bête noir of all the competitors. Conquer them, and you would be going somewhere.

A new International 2.8 TGV turbodiesel took its place under the (new) bonnet. This Brazilian-made version of the 300Tdi – to many, the most reliable engine Land Rover ever built – is the same as that fitted to LRO's project Discovery 1.

UK-based specialist Allisport made the intercooler and tuned the engine, resulting in 160bhp (up from 130bhp) and 420Nm of torque (up from 375Nm). Top speed was 112.5mph.

Ashcroft Transmissions built the enforced diffs, gearbox and transfer cases, all of which stood up to 6000

miles of unbelievable punishment, while Bearmach supplied a shedload of spares to cram into a support truck. Both firms gave the team a worthwhile discount.

The brothers' only ambition for the event was to get to Dakar – which, through a combination of dogged determination and the rude health of the Bowler, they did. As fewer than 35 per cent of the entries could boast the same, that was a monumental achievement in its own right – but to end up winning the T1 diesel class was beyond wildest dreams.

Raoul is still buzzing with the euphoria and excitement of the Dakar. 'The moment we came off the boat to Africa, we could smell we were in a different continent. We were left in awe by the sand dunes of Morocco – so imagine how we felt when we encountered dunes several times as big in Mauritania. Driving them is like skiing.

'In the latter half of the rally, people fall prey to fatigue – it causes lots of accidents. Once, we stopped when we came across a rider laying motionless beside his motorcycle. He told us he'd fallen asleep while riding.'

#### More Info...

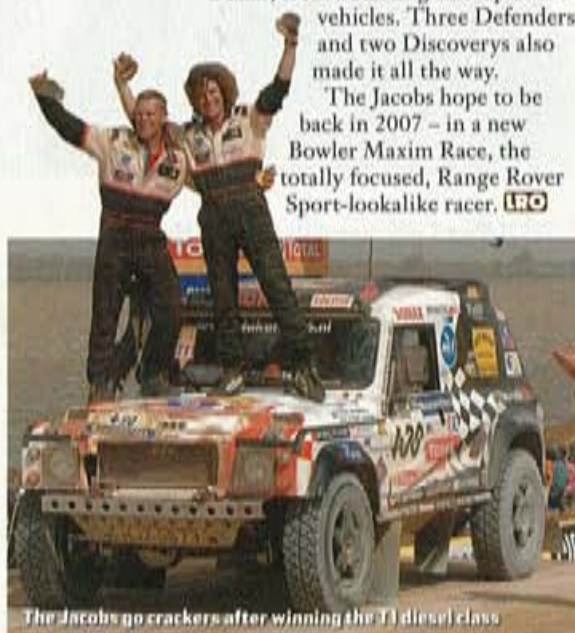
- [www.dakar2006.nl](http://www.dakar2006.nl)
- [www.dakar2007.nl](http://www.dakar2007.nl)
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#### Final analysis

As well as winning the T1 diesel class, the Off-Road Adventures Rally Team were third-placed 'rookies' and 32nd out of the 69 finishers.

Eight out of 23 Bowlers made it to Dakar, from a starting line-up of 178 vehicles. Three Defenders and two Discoverys also made it all the way.

The Jacobs hope to be back in 2007 – in a new Bowler Maxim Race, the totally focused, Range Rover Sport-lookalike racer. **LRO**



The Jacobs go crackers after winning the T1 diesel class