
Brazilian Veterans of Paris-Dakar Give the Social Lowdown on Rallies

Contributed by Débora Rubin
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Klever Kolberg, 45, one of the pilots in the Petrobras Lubrax rally team, has a 20-year background in the sport - in 1987, he participated for the first time in the most famous of all rallies, the Paris-Dakar.

Alongside André Azevedo, pilot in the "trucks" category, he launched last month the book *Rali - Abrindo os caminhos do Brasil* (Rally - opening the paths of Brazil) - Via das Artes publishing house, 80 Brazilian reais - US\$ 44. The objective of the book, says Kolberg, is to present to laymen what a rally is, and to show how the sport promotes cultural exchange.

Kolberg highlights the fact that the book also shows a less known aspect of rallies, namely that of social assistance.

"We have done years and years of unrecognized work. There were hundreds of improvements in African territory, ranging from wells and irrigation systems to schools and hospitals," says the pilot, who races in the "cars" category.

"And that model is reproduced here in Brazil, in the Rally of the Drylands - the best known in Brazil." The pilot explains that part of the money obtained with enrollments to the rally is used to build these improvements.

On the other hand, the teams themselves also take their donations. And the medical doctors that accompany the pilots often treat the local communities. "This is the more 'handout' aspect of it, but one that is also welcome in those locations," he believes.

To the pilot, the rally attracts the attention of the world to places that are usually unknown, abandoned. The Dakar Rally showed - and continues to show - distant locations in Africa. The rally always starts in Europe and ends in Dakar, one of the most densely populated cities in Senegal.

In the middle of the trajectory, there is always an Arab country such as Algeria, Morocco, or Mauritania. "I know that a lot of Brazilians have heard of Mauritania because of the Paris-Dakar Rally," says Klever.

Arab countries, by the way, are perfect settings for this type of race. The desert areas present enough challenges to ensure the adventure. October 3 saw the beginning of the Pharaohs Rally, in Egypt. It will cover 2,600 kilometers, starting from the part that goes from Cairo to Baharija.

The Rally of Morocco took place from September 24th to September 30th. There is also the Rally of Tunisia, held in the beginning of the year. The Brazilian Paulo Nobre competes in all of these rallies. In Morocco, last week, he finished in seventh place.

Kolberg only participated twice in the Pharaohs Rally. But he passed through Egypt on other occasions because of the Dakar Rally. His recollections of the country's desert are those of unbearable cold during the nights.

On his way across the country, he recalls many villages with much better infrastructure than the ones he saw in Mauritania early this year - the Dakar 2007 started in Lisbon and crossed countries such as Spain, Morocco, and Mali.

"But it does not matter where we go, we always attract multitudes of people who migrate to the places we pass to offer services - ranging from renting a run-down house, which avoids our having to camp in the desert, to people who offer themselves to watch our equipment," the pilot explains.

Kolberg only regrets not having had more time to get to know these people he meets along the way a little better . "We take a trip in which we do not get to choose the route, nor the times. And we maintain an average speed of 150 kilometers/hour. This is the frustrating part: not being able to stop and get to know these villages, these people."

After two decades of rallies, Kolberg now focuses on competing only in the Dakar and the Drylands rallies. "And in some other smaller Brazilian rallies." In the sidelines, he puts his experience to use giving lectures at companies. He and André give an average of 70 lectures per year.

"In addition to talking about what the rally is, we show how long we take to plan the race, the time that we invest in it, and we also talk about the importance of team work," he says. Speaking of that, they have already been planning the Dakar 2008, to be held next January, for months. "We have 340 days of preparation, and 20 of execution," the pilot sums it up.

The book "Rali - Abrindo os Caminhos do Brasil" features many photographs of the participation of the Brazilian team in so many other rallies, such as the Paris-Moscow-Beijing, and the Incas Rally. In the beginning of their international rallying careers, Kolberg and Azevedo used to compete in the "motorcycle" category.

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