

1 And we're off, mixing it with the traffic and waving goodbye to asphalt roads on the way out of Cape Town.

2 Wherever we went, the locals cheered us on our way. This relatively well made road near Botswana didn't prepare us for what lay ahead.



3 Two days in, here we are on the Kazungula ferry leaving Botswana. Waiting for ferries was one of the few times we were at a standstill.

4 We stopped regularly to check the Panda over, but aside from four punctures when we drove over some glass, it caused us no worries at all.

From Cape Town to London by Panda

Two Brits in a Fiat Panda TwinAir have set a new world record driving from South Africa to England. **Jim Holder** reports

The plan started with a browse of Autocar and, after 10 days, 13 hours and 28 minutes of almost non-stop driving, ended with celebrations in Marble Arch. Philip Young and Paul Brace, two slightly mad Brits, had driven a Fiat Panda TwinAir from Cape Town, South Africa, to London, England in world-record-breaking time. Along the 10,300-mile route, they encountered tropical rainstorms, muddy quagmires and sun-beaten tracks. They overcame officious passport officers, bazooka-carrying locals and a country in lock-down following the assassination of an opposition

leader. And they never once put a drop of oil or water in the car. "We chose the Panda because Autocar told us it was the pick of today's city cars," says Young. "The record was held by a team that used a Range Rover 30 years ago, but I was determined to prove that the world had moved on, that today's small cars can do everything that's needed of them. If this record has proved one thing, it is the strength and engineering that goes into these cars." The Panda was bought from a dealership, Mellors of Wantage, and modified by the crew and their support team. The spare wheel well housed

a second fuel tank, space was made for two spare tyres, a sump and tank guard were fitted, the shock absorbers were changed and a foam bed was made up in the back. Driving three hours on and three hours off, the pair alternated between being behind the wheel or stretched out in the reclined, sheepskin-covered passenger seat. Although they had support vehicles (and, at times, armed guards), the crew drove the entire distance themselves, averaging 1000 miles a day at just over 40mph. The only mechanical glitch was when sand clogged up the CD player. "In 10 days, I think we were

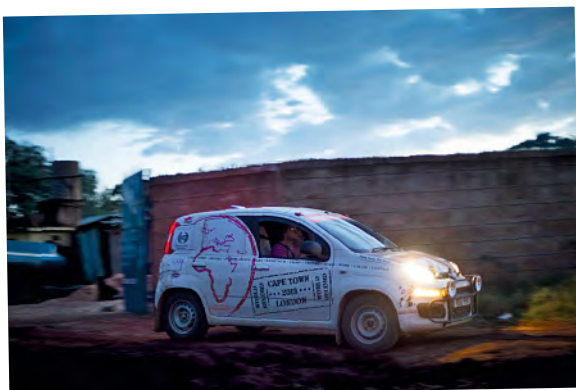
stationary for no more than 10 hours, either waiting for ferries, at border controls, refuelling, eating or getting some proper sleep," says Young. "We even had self-heating bags of food that we cooked up in the passenger footwell." With the record broken, the future of the Panda is uncertain. Young would like it to take pride of place in a museum, or take it on a tour and spread the word on the merits of small cars. "What it has achieved is remarkable," he says. "But the trouble is that I need a car to run around in. It's amazing to say, but after all those miles I'm still not sick of the sight of it."



5 Other vehicles weren't the only hazard.



6 It seemed wrong not to celebrate reaching the equator in Kenya, even though stopping for the holiday snap cost us time.



7 We did a couple of double stints – six hours at the wheel – but mostly we drove for three hours and slept for three hours, almost non-stop.



8 It wasn't just the road conditions that posed problems in Ethiopia – there was plenty of diesel and benzine on sale, but no petrol.



9 Broken roads and other road traffic made keeping a 40mph average over the 10 days especially hard work.

10 Driving a car emblazoned with a Union flag through Libya – a country closed to all foreigners – may not have seemed sensible, but everyone we met welcomed us with open arms.



11 We encountered plenty of guns, rocket launchers and even bazookas on the way – so much so that we had to hire our own armed escorts at times.

12 A detour through Italy, up to France and then celebrating in Marble Arch. Even a cancelled train from Calais, which cost us an hour, couldn't stop us beating the record by 24 hours.

