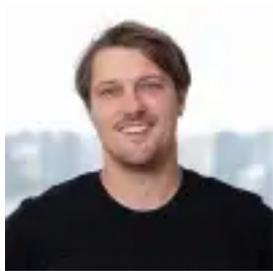


# ***Overland to America might be the greatest documentary the world forgot***



BY TOM WHITE



“Never heard of it” was the office consensus when I asked if anyone had watched the UNESCO-endorsed British ITV program.

When I explained that it was a team of typical British explorer stereotypes (yes, one of them is ex-SAS, stop asking) who drove continuously from London to New York via Russia and the Bering strait, I was met with “how has nobody heard of this?”

Yeah, I don't know... maybe it's just not well known in Australia or something... Regardless, the entire series has been uploaded to YouTube for your viewing pleasure.

The lack of publicity for the documentary is likely due to the lack of celebs involved. More people - for example – have heard of Ewan McGregor's '*The Long Way Round*' – a TV series documenting a similar trip done on motorcycles.

The Overland Challenge trip took place a whole decade earlier, in 1993, when the channel tunnel between the UK and France wasn't even finished.

In part one of the series, they casually mention that they set a milestone, being the first people to cross the incomplete tunnel as part of a journey (obviously excluding service and construction vehicles). In the scheme of things though, it was the smallest hurdle.

The team goes on to cross no less than 10 countries, through the horrific and barely populated arctic Siberian wastes and then attempts to cross the Bering strait while it is frozen over. They cross through areas of Russia that had been shut off to the west for decades during the cold war. It's fascinating.

While the original plan was to drive continuously the whole way, there was no chance the Ford Mavericks (not the muscle car one, the re-branded Nissan Terrano one) and prototype 4x4 [Mondeo](#) sedans provided by primary sponsor, Ford, were going to make it.

By the time the team had reached north eastern Russia, the Mavericks were being towed by tough Russian Ural 6x6 trucks. The terrain was so harsh that even the trucks had a hard time, and broke axles on more than one occasion.

Such were the temperatures (-50 degrees Celsius), that at many points the team dared not switch off the cars, and had to run them continuously for fear the engines would freeze and never start again.

Sadly, the trip wasn't quite uninterrupted driving. When the team attempted to cross the Bering strait, the ice was too soft and thin, and

their [ARKTOS](#) treaded vehicle simply couldn't make it over the terrain. This resulted in an 80km gap in the trip, and the team completed the crossing in helicopters and planes.

Other highlights on the trip include visits to a far flung nuclear power station in [Bilibino](#) (where the team was greeted by a protest group, the station's employees hadn't been paid for six months...), haunting visits to the most remote of gulags, and encounters with the local indigenous population.

It's also pretty dramatic, with arguments between the British and Russian team members as well as infighting over the safety and direction of the trip. It's as good as something on Netflix... only instead of 4k, it's like 240p...

Incidentally, there are plans that pop up every few years to create [the world's longest undersea tunnel between Russia and Alaska under the Bering strait](#). If ever completed it would be possible to travel by road from New York to London.

What happened to the Ford vehicles? Apparently [one of the Mondeos is in Ulster Folk & Transport Museum, Northern Ireland](#).