



CHALLENGE ACCEPTED

NICK HENDRIX TAKES A MORE REGAL APPROACH TO THE
THREE PEAKS CHALLENGE - IN A BLACK BADGE CULLINAN

WORDS NICK HENDRIX IMAGES MICHAEL SHELFORD

If you asked a GCSE Geography student to name a famous mountain range, their mind would lunge straight for the Himalayas or the Alps, whilst top of the class would go west to the Andes or Rockies. It's unlikely that either would shout Snowdonia or The Scottish Highlands and certainly not Yorkshire's noble Lake District. But if you set yourself the personal and physical challenge of climbing a mountain during a global pandemic then the options are slightly less international.

Together with my brother, his wife and trusty photographer Michael Shelford, we set off with this mission in mind. As Everest wasn't an option (simply due to international travel restrictions - nothing to do with the stark reality that its fairly chilly up there and there's a genuine risk of death) we had to look a little closer to home. To compensate for the modest stature of Great Britain's peaks we decided to do 3 of them and as, even added together, they are still well below mighty Everest we decided to do them as quickly as possible - in under 24 hours in fact. You'd be right in thinking we weren't the first to think this up - the 3 Peaks 24hour Challenge is quite a thing now and we reckoned we could master it.

Now, I can't take full credit for this trip, it was my brother and his wife that came to me about it as they were in need of a driver - someone happy to grind out two big 5-hour drives and also someone who could maybe get their hands on the right kind of vehicle for the job. He never wanted discount tickets to any of my West End shows, but start a little automotive journalism and he's suddenly in need of a car. Thankfully I love a vehicular challenge so asked for a brief and got thinking. According to him, for a trip like this, we'd need a car big enough for 4 people and a variety of outdoor kit, rugged enough to deal with some rural landscapes, fast enough to make sure the 24 hours don't come around too quickly and importantly - something comfortable enough that the climbers can get some genuine shuteye. The most common choice, apparently, is the perennial minibus, but many go for various campervans or, if not, then a mid-range family estate (not an Audi RS6 in sight - sadly).



With this brief I got to work - big, fast, strong, comforting. Sadly, Anthony Joshua's agent wouldn't return my calls, so instead I opted for the Rolls Royce Cullinan. And as the standard one 'only' comes with 563 bhp, and we were in a rush, I opted for the Black Badge iteration which takes it up to nigh on 600bhp. Although, seeing as it weighs the same as your local pub, it really needs all that power. Learning that Rolls Royce claim the Black Badge range is for the 'younger, more adventurous client', I felt fairly vindicated in my choice.

With £348,000 worth of 4x4 at my disposal I collected our band of hikers from Glasgow airport and headed to the Ben Nevis Inn - a ridiculously picturesque pub at the foot of Peak Number 1 - to fill up water bottles and stomachs before the metaphorical starter whistle. Ben Nevis sits at 1,345 metres above sea level and would take about 5 hours to climb and as it was a 3-hour drive from Glasgow, it gave my brother and his wife time to discuss how best to tackle it.



I, meanwhile, was getting to grips with the world's most expensive luxury SUV; sitting tall and proud in the driver's seat I enjoyed the opportunity to look down on a passing Range Rover, not something you do every day. It's often said that some cars have 'stature', or 'presence' - well driving the Cullinan feels like you've simultaneous been sworn in as POTUS and ordained by Queen Elizabeth herself. It's hard to deny that I didn't enjoy being at the wheel of this regal monster truck.

Parked up at the foot of Nevis, the Cullinan certainly turned some heads - it's a divisive car that's sure for and the petrolheads amongst you will be aware of Chris Harris's assertion that it looks like a Chinese knock-off. Well, during this trip I was both told that the designer should be shot and that it was a masterpiece - better to split opinion than go for nothing, I guess.

With the timer started and the requisite 'before' photo taken the hikers were off, leaving me and Michael to take the Roller to a nearby petrol station - with a fuel economy that would make NASA nervous, this was to be a frequent occurrence. Tracing the coast Michael and I wafted the effortless V12 through the stunning Scottish countryside, stretching its 6.8 litre legs before returning for collection. There was something viscerally contradictory about how powerful and yet how quiet the car was - like watching a lion's roar come out as a whisper. I'd





being straight-legged. Jolted from sleep, boots on, porridge inhaled, backpacks on and they were off again - a little jaded but Rolls Royce rested.

Peak 2 was Michael and my chance to try and grab some sleep - my body at this point was throwing me a 'err...sorry, what?!' look, as after forcing it to stay awake, I was now forcing it to sleep, something it didn't do with ease. However, stretching out across the now vacated vast back seats, certainly helped. The-living-room-like comfort clearly had the desired effect as we were only woken by the returning hikers tapping on the windows to wake us. All equally bleary-eyed and scrambled (Scafell Pike had been pretty brutal by the sounds of it) we pulled together and hit the road - next stop Snowdonia and I had to be there by 12pm, a 4 1/2-hour drive according to the sat nav. I was fairly sure the V12 would shave a few minutes off that.



often get out and leave the car running as I hadn't realised that the engine was still on.

Back to Ben Nevis to collect the intrepid pair (who had made the climb in decent time but looked a little weather beaten from the summit) and set off on the first of two big drives. This one went through the night (10pm to 3am) and would require a high average speed and laser focus from me to get to the Lakes by the ideal start time.

At first, I thought just doing the driving would feel like a slight cop-out, but this drive proved that it was an integral part of the challenge and a genuinely discombobulating endeavour. Fueled by an oceanic supply of caffeinated drinks (coffee good, Red Bull better, Grenade Energy drink not good - not good at all) I hit the pedal and ploughed through the British countryside like an aircraft carrier down the Thames. With the long bonnet and Spirit of Ecstasy ahead of me I felt like Horatio Nelson ahead of a whole naval fleet surging towards Scafell Pike for Peak Number 2.

As we snaked through the final approaches to Scafell Pike, I turned to check on the hikers to make sure they were ready to hit the slopes. Any queries about rear space or comfort were quickly answered as I saw them fast asleep, stretched out in cavernous luxury. My brother is 6'2 and he wasn't far off



We arrived at Snowdon seemingly minutes later thanks to the all-conquering 5-star tank and having not booked a parking slot (seems a few other people had also fancied climbing that day) had to mount a minimal curb, partially blocking a rather treacherous road and offload the hikers. There is a worrying tendency to become rather entitled in a car like this - I often found myself ignoring 'no parking', 'no turning', or 'no entry' signs. 'Rolls Royce coming through...' was our battle cry.

With the 24-hour marker approaching we waited with bated breath to see if our intrepid climbers would make the deadline. Michael and I got caught slightly short when my brother called me, as we were guiltily enjoying a cold beer, to let us know that they were nearly back at the collection point! Shocked at their speed we jumped in the Roller and roared back up the hill - trampling anything in our

path. A genuine feeling of achievement from all and not a dry eye in the house. A picturesque ‘after’ photo and it was time for all to find somewhere to celebrate and eventually rest our heads.

Thankfully awaiting us at the end of this adventure was the stunning and suitably regal Palé Hall Hotel on the outskirts of Snowdonia.

We all enjoyed a glass of champagne, a hearty meal and a couple of customary Negronis - however the celebratory finish line was to be short lived as one by one we fell like flies to the expected fatigue. We all felt like we’d done a long-haul flight; the sleep was random and short-lived and we’d eaten and drunk with no logical pattern - don’t get me wrong it was certainly a Business Class long-haul flight.

We resolved to have our 3rd Negroni ‘to go’ as we retired to our aristocratic suites. There was some dramatic irony in switching on the TV to see Tom Cruise hanging off the side of the Burj Khalifa in Mission Impossible 27 (?) - knowing Dubai, I wouldn’t be surprised if there was also a Cullinan waiting for him when he reached the bottom.

I think we all agreed that ‘The 3 Peaks 24 Hour Challenge’ was a wonderful experience and one to highly recommend - and should you suddenly invent the next Instagram or sign with Manchester City then you should definitely do it in a Rolls Royce Cullinan Black Badge.

With thanks to:

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