



First Overland

Tim Slessor

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Why Not? After all, no-one had ever done it before. It would be one of the longest of all overland journeys – half way round the world, from the English Channel to Singapore. They knew that several expeditions had already tried it. Some had got as far as the deserts of Persia; a few had even reached the plains of India. But no one had managed to go on from there: over the jungle clad mountains of Assam and across northern Burma to Thailand and Malaya. Over the last 3,000 miles it seemed there were ‘just too many rivers and too few roads’. But no-one really knew ...

In fact, their problems began much earlier than that. As mere undergraduates, they had no money, no cars, nothing. But with a cool audacity, which was to become characteristic, they set to work – wheedling and cajoling. First, they coaxed the BBC to come up with some film for a possible TV series. They then gently persuaded the manufacturers to lend them two factory-fresh Land Rovers. A publisher was even sweet-talked into giving them an advance on a book. By the time they were ready to go, their sponsors (more than 80 of them) ranged from whiskey distillers to the makers of collapsible buckets. In late 1955, they set off.

Seven months and 12,000 miles later, two very weary Land Rovers, escorted by police outriders, rolled into Singapore – to flash bulbs and champagne.

Now, fifty years on, their book, ‘First Overland’, is republished – with a foreword by Sir David Attenborough. After all, it was he who gave them that film.

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Edgar Curtis:

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