

Swiss man drove through 18 countries in Volvo to get to Melbourne

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Coralie Chanel with Lukas Baumann and his beloved 1996 Volvo celebrate the Melbourne Cup at the Flemington Racecourse members car park last week. CARMELO BAZZANO N20ME101



Volvo driver from Switzerland Lukas Baumann.

FROM dodging suicide bombers and jail cells to holding the Melbourne Cup aloft, Swiss adventurer Lukas Baumann is not your average Volvo driver.

The 38-year-old horse lover has achieved a bizarre ambition to drive his beloved 1996 Volvo station wagon from his small hometown near Zurich to Melbourne in time for last week's Melbourne Cup.

Since beginning the epic journey in March, Mr Baumann has driven 36,000km through 18 countries, including some of the most volatile nations on the planet.

And, except for a bit of river damage in Nepal and a turbocharger issue in Turkey, the trusty Volvo never skipped a beat.

"In Switzerland, we say the same thing about Volvo drivers as you do in Australia: they drive on Sundays, they are retired old men and they hold up traffic," Mr Baumann said.

"But to me it's just a very, very trustworthy car and I would never have done the trip with a four-wheel drive."

But it wasn't all smooth sailing.

"We had a really sad part in Iran on the border to Pakistan where we had a suicide bomb next to the place where we stayed and 50 people were killed," he said.

"I had to go outside and move the Volvo and it was a huge mess and there were lots of dead people everywhere on the street."

Mr Baumann and his first "co-pilot", Australian radiographer Shaun Rolevink, were then given a full military escort as they drove through Pakistan, but even that failed to keep them out of trouble.

"For some reason the escort just dropped us off at a prison one night and we were so lucky that night was the one night in a month that the supervisor was calling through and he arranged to get us out the next morning."

From there the duo drove to Bangladesh via countries including India and Nepal, where the Volvo suffered damage while crossing a river more suited to a four-wheel drive.

"We had to drive at not much faster than walking pace for 600km until we could get it fixed," he said.

In Thailand, a Swiss friend became his second co-pilot and they travelled through Malaysia to Singapore where the Volvo was shipped to Perth, arriving early in September.

In Perth Mr Baumann's sister Sabine took over as co-pilot until they reached Broome, where he was introduced to French backpacker Coralie Chanel who joined him as he continued following the coast to Melbourne.

"I have had the best week in Melbourne," Mr Baumann said while at the Oaks Day last Thursday.

"Not only did I get here in time, I actually got to hold the Melbourne Cup before the race so that was a great thing."

After two weeks in Melbourne, he will this week refuel his Volvo for the next leg.

"I will stay in Australia for a couple of years and probably then I'll drive home," he said.