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MONGOLIA-BOUND: Nigel Statham and Jordana Battis from Colchester with their car

Photograph: JAMES FLETCHER

Daring rally duo set for month-long desert trek

They face challenge with a 970cc-engine car

By Alexea Williams

IMAGINE driving 8,000 miles over 12 countries, taking in two deserts and five mountain ranges - with just a 970cc engine in your car.

That's the challenge awaiting Nigel Statham, 33, from Lexden, Colchester, when he takes part in the adventure of a lifetime - The Mongol Rally.

The race is the charity-inspired alternative to the famous Gumball Rally.

Mr Statham and his car-partner, Jordana Battis, 22, from Australia, will both give up work and attempt the anticipated four-week journey on some of the

world's most notoriously undeveloped roads in their Suzuki SJ 410.

They head off from London's Hyde Park for Mongolia, on July 22.

For each car which enters the rally at least £1,000 will be donated to charity.

The pair, who make up team Mongol Shoebox, will split their sponsorship funds between Essex Air Ambulance and the Cambridge Mongolian Disaster Appeal.

The event will be an intense experience, as participants will have no entourage of support vehicles, no marked route to follow and they will all be

driving cars which, under normal circumstances, would not be considered capable of meeting the challenge.

The pair decided against making things easier by

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altering the car.

Mr Statham said: "You would move away from the ethos, it's got to be hard or else it's no fun."

Another challenging factor is the lack of reliable maps for large areas of the route and as Russia does

not allow satellite navigation the pair will rely on a compass and good luck.

"It's really back to basics," Mr Statham said.

Mr Statham has worked with car engines in the past, when taking part in historic motor racing.

He said: "It is reassuring to have some mechanical knowledge, I would be nervous without it."

The intrepid pair estimates the total cost of the trip, excluding any charity donation, will be around £3,500.

Anyone who would like to sponsor the team should call 07739 807563 or email: donations@mongolshoebox.co.uk