



Web link: <http://knowledge.insead.edu/MissDaisy081113.cfm?vid=135>

### Surfing on rocks with 'Miss Daisy'

---- by Glenn van Zutphen ----

'A journey of a thousand miles must begin with a single step,' goes the ancient Chinese proverb. The modern-day, **Peter Schindler** version goes: 'A journey of 21,000 kilometers in a yellow sports car starts with a slightly eccentric Swiss national, driven to explore the Chinese countryside.'

The summer of 2007 was an unusual one for Schindler. After nearly three years of planning, the INSEAD alumnus (MBA 1993) started a "driving holiday" that would take him from Shanghai to Tibet and back to Beijing, tracing both the Yangtze and Yellow Rivers to their source.

Clearly, it wasn't going to be an ordinary Sunday drive. Sponsored by Nokia, he'd make the journey in a Caterham Super Seven convertible sports car that he named *Miss Daisy*. His purpose: to "discover" China and write a [blog](#) about it on a Nokia mobile phone, as part of a viral ad campaign for the mobile phone maker.



From Shanghai and the mouth of the Yangtze, he drove through a dozen provinces – Zhejiang, Jiangsu, Anhui, Jiangxi, Hunan, Hubei, Guangxi, Guizhou, Sichuan, Yunnan, Gansu and Qinghai – to the Yangtze's source in the Tibetan highlands of Qinghai.

From there, Schindler went via Lhasa, Tibet to the source of the Yellow River. The return journey was a bit shorter, but traversed Qinghai, Gansu, Ningxia, Inner Mongolia, Shaanxi, Shanxi, Henan, Shandong, Hebei and Tianjin before arriving in Beijing.

Making it more interesting was the fact the car was very low to the ground with, as Schindler describes it, "a match box" of clearance. "The journey basically turned out to be surfing on rocks. I had to mount a steel plate under it ... a very strong one," he notes. Eastern China was easy, because the roads are so well developed. "But the farther west you go, into the remote areas, literally there were days where I practically surfed from morning until night. I began to worry, day by day, whether I would actually make it. Not because of things breaking down, but because of the roads becoming impassible," says Schindler.

Just in case of trouble, Nokia insisted that a 'mobile garage' follow him on his 100-day sojourn with a spare engine, gear box, suspension and many other parts. Amazingly, he never used the emergency gear. The only thing that broke was a small, electronic sensor. "I was pulled out of ditches and pushed through rivers, more than once. Remarkably, a car from the 1950s, effectively,

designed for the race track ...I pushed it through China over the worst terrain you can imagine and huge temperature differences and the darn thing just kept running!”

Being the only one of its kind in China, his canary yellow *Miss Daisy* drew crowds wherever he went. Schindler talks of being surrounded by throngs of curious people when driving through towns with the top down. He says they always wanted to know three things: How much did the car cost? How fast would it go? Then, after a bit of thought, they’d ask what he did when it rained? He joked with them in Mandarin that he would “drive faster.” After a good laugh, he showed them the soft-top, stored in the back.



There were nerve-racking experiences as well. In one remote area, after having just picked up a female student hitch-hiker, the police stopped him. “I broke out in a cold sweat,” he recalls. “The (policeman) investigated me, he wanted to see every piece of paper and know everything about what I was doing. Finally, (after a long time of looking at the papers) he took out a little Kodak camera from his pocket and asked if he could take a picture? Basically all he wanted was his picture taken with my hitchhiker and the car!” Aside from that experience, Schindler says he was never hassled by the authorities, although he was often stopped by the police. After showing his Chinese driver’s license and car registration, they always let him go without trouble.



Across the thousands of kilometers, he had many people sign the car with a felt-tipped pen. At the end of the journey, basketball player Yao Ming presided over a gala charity dinner, where the car was auctioned to benefit the China Youth Development Foundation.

But Schindler’s adventures haven’t stopped with the conclusion of that journey. He now runs a company called [On The Road In China](http://www.ontheroadinchina.com) that, for several years, has guided driving holidays. “I generally offer a set of standard routes that have been carefully researched,” he says. “The distances are large, accommodation far apart and the roads are not good. So it took a bit of research to make it an enjoyable experience.” But he’s quick to add that if a customer wants a more adventurous experience, Schindler’s game to take them off the beaten path.

He and his wife have also just added a culinary trip through China to sample local cuisine and food culture. It’s a driving journey – during which clients “eat very well along the way.”

And Schindler’s advice to young, INSEAD entrepreneurs? “Become happy in life, it’s about pursuing your passions,” he says, admitting that might sound a bit of a cliché. “If you have a dream, don’t put it off. Go do it.”

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