

Pirate racers back from epic journey

by GARETH BUTTERFIELD

CHARITY racers Hannah Barton and Kev Woolley have just returned from their epic trip from Ashbourne to Prague — in a £100 banger.

Hannah, who suffers from manic depression, knew that the 1,500 miles would be a challenge, but she was determined to raise both money and awareness for mental health charity Mind.

The challenge was part of a series of gruelling fund-raising rallies, all in clapped out cars worth less than £100, called Street Safari.

Hannah and Kev, from Mayfield Road, have competed in Street Safari events before, but never tackled a full 1,500 mile rally.

They set off from London and were quickly across the Channel and into France. Kev said: "Once in Boulogne the challenge was easy — drive to Calais, check in to the hotel, then walk to the Holiday Inn and register for the rally.

"As this was our third rally we knew the routine. The organisers check driving licences, MoT certificate, log book and insurance details are all checked to make sure the car can be legally driven then you could collect your event T-shirts and ID badge with team name and team number.

"Our main challenge that day was to drive to Interlaken in Switzerland — a very long drive. We headed off towards Rheims — passing other teams cars, horns blaring and waving to each other but very soon the field thinned out."

The couple eventually reached the Swiss border at around 6pm where they were confronted by the customs officials fascinated by their car's flames and flowers paint-job and flashing lights.

At around 9pm they arrived in Interlaken and found their hotel where Hannah had a well-deserved early night and Kev hit the town with the other competitors.

Italy was the next destination and the couple headed for Milan before driving round Lake Como towards Bormio.

Kev said: "The day was a long one — by the time we had reached Bormio, Hannah was tired, hungry and very stressed — not a good state for a manic depressive.

"We found our hotel and headed into town to the local pizzeria for a well deserved hearty meal but it was too late. Hannah went into one of her mild manic states — talking 13 to the dozen, very excitable and very clumsy.

"After the meal we went to the official rendezvous to sign in. By this time Hannah had become withdrawn and after a quick beer we went back to hotel.

"On the way back she started crying — she hated the rally, she wanted a normal holiday, she hated me, she hated the sat nav because it was always wrong and she wanted to buy a paper atlas because she could work one of those.

"You cannot reason with a manic depressive in that state — I made the mistake of trying which made things worse.

"But next morning, after a good night's sleep and a huge breakfast, the world seemed a much better place. Hannah was almost normal again and last night's grief had been forgotten."

Hannah and Kev then headed over some of the highest, twistiest sections of the Alps,



JOLLY KEV ...
back home
(above) and on
the road (left)

limping their 1992 Rover 820 along 60 degree hairpin bends and steep mountain roads.

Finally, the end was in sight for the couple — Austria was their only obstacle, and Prague was not far away.

They finally arrived at around 6pm that evening.

Kev said: "We found our luxury hotel, checked in and handed over the keys to the valet so he could park our old banger in the hotel's secure garage. We had made it!

"We settled down with a beer each and promised that tomorrow we were going to go sightseeing — walking round city or going

by bus or tram — anything but driving!"

Hannah and Kev are still collecting money and are appealing to Ashbourne families to dig deep and donate as much as they can.

Anyone wishing to make a donation can call into Mind in St John Street, Equatorial in Victoria Square, and the Dovedale Gallery in Dig Street.

Gift Aid donations can also be made online at www.justgiving.com/teamroversreturn and Hannah and Kev plan to descend on the town in their pirate outfits to collect money from Saturday night drinkers.