

## RALLY

### 17TH ASIA CROSS COUNTRY RALLY

# LUCKY 13

BY FRED M. KRUGSMAN

**I**t was a five-day battle from Day 1 on Aug 12 along the rough and tough jungle tracks and green padi field gravel roads in the kingdoms of Thailand and Cambodia in the 17th edition of the Asia Cross Country Rally.

And at the finishing line in the emotive shadow of the world-famous Angkor Watt in Cambodia, Thailand's Nuttapon Angritthanon and co-driver Kittisak Klinchan in their Toyota Vigo (Hilux) were the clear winners.

Nuttapon, better known as "Joob" to his Thai fans, controlled this tough off-road event from the start in his car No 13 working together with his co-driver like clockwork and swatting away adversity to run out winners.

Just turned 25, Nuttapon is already a legend in Thailand in the Super Car and Pro Racing series where his skills borders on the "daredevil" but within the limits of the safety zone.

The Asia Cross Country Rally may not command the glamour of the Dakar, Dubai or Safari but it is just as tough and the plus point is that it is affordable for regional teams and a steal for other.

While the bulk of the crews arrived from Japan there was a seven-strong Thai contingent as well as an entry from India and a celebrity Taiwanese entry, actress Roslyn Shen.

There were 10 bikers from Japan, four from Cambodia, and three each from Korea and Thailand.

Twenty-six vehicles and 20 motorcycles and dirt bikes lined up at the ceremonial start, just several metres from Pattaya's famous "Walking Street" for the 1,200-km journey over rugged and highly demanding roads and tracks to Angkor Watt.

As the event director Tadayuki Sasa said: "Enthusiasm for cross country rallying is increasing in every country in Asia, including Thailand and Cambodia."





Flagging off in Pattaya, they passed through agricultural and cultural locations and ancient landmarks.

All 26 teams and 20 riders assembled at the Bira International Circuit and from there they went on a 30-minute drive northwards to a dirt-bike circuit in Sriracha for the first Special Stage over 2.2km.

Chamnan and Cholanat in car No 12 clocked a remarkable 2 minutes 48 seconds to emerge the fastest.

The next day was a 400-km drive northeast to Sa Kaeo with SS2 set midway between the towns of Tha Takiap and Khao Chakan,

It looked like that the Thailand teams had the advantage as they finished among top five ranking. Vehicles started SS2 at two-minute intervals and wound their way through various plantations, across some gravel roads and deeper into



After the Pattaya flagoff, the rally wound its way across dusty terrain and through agricultural and cultural landmarks.



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A Mitsubishi Triton leads the convoy through an unpaved village road.



Local lorry adds colour.



The mandatory bevy of beauties.

plantation areas.

After the last vehicle started, there was a 30-minute break before the dirt bikes started the SS.

The Asia Cross Country Rally is throwing up a distinct learning curve for new drivers and riders: navigation. They ran in farming areas and jungle with some muddy parts, and that was a problem to some cars but the bikes had no problem at all.

The fastest rider was not the one who finished first but whoever was good in navigation got a top ranking. The rest that got lost learned something new.

Joob, 25, showed his prowess over the 2.2km stage in 1:57:16, an impressive time on this rough stage.

Day 3 was another 400-km drive, with SS 3, from Phra Phloeng to Soi Dao, set to be the longest day of the rally with a total distance of 226.46km.

Japan's Kinya Morikawa and Masahiko Uchida in their No 2 Land Cruiser 80 won the special stage in 2:55:27, 3.5 minutes ahead of the second place finisher, followed by another five Thai teams.

Day 4 took the crews from Sa Kaeo across the border in Cambodia and to Angkor Watt on a 265.11km run with the

timed section, Svay Chek to Bayon, being 173.09km.

The cars passed attractive landscapes with endless padi fields and crossed little Cambodian villages where the children were having a blast watching the colourful racing vehicles, cheering and waving them on.

The terrain would change too, gone was the clinging mud and deepwater crossings, now it would be high speed, but with absolutely no room for any error.

Japan's Kinya posted a blistering time of 1:38.17 in his Land Cruiser, almost 13 minutes ahead of Chamnan and co-driver Cholanat in their No 12 Mitsubishi Triton, but more importantly shaving rally leader Joob's lead by 18.29.

Joob was running the race at his pace and he explained that managing the gap had been the order of the day. "SS 4 had so many big jump and holes," he said. "I wanted to save my car for the final push."

In the battle of the bikers, one of the riders commented: "The race was short, only 140km with a high speed route. The high speed on gravel and bumpy roads that go straight forever reminded of the Dakar riders, and my KTM 690 reached 170 km/h in some stretches.

"However, it is very dangerous on the bumpy stretches,

The blue and white Toyota of Nuttapon "Joob" Angrithanon leaves a dusty trail.



Diesel powered.







especially when you hit a deep hole at 100km/h. But it was a blast to race here, especially on the Cambodian terrain, this is so different, so fast."

That brought the tired drivers and riders and their battered machines into the final day, a 72.22-km timed section that started at Angkor Watt and looped in a big circle before returning to the world famous landmark for the finish-line ceremonies.

The 72-km SS from Puok to Tani was no different than the previous day with high-speed bumpy roads. Kinya managed to be placed second overall, 4:30 seconds behind Joob.

The battle royale between Joob and Kinya was the uncompromising SS 5 where the hard terrain promised to be cruel to the drivers. It was a fight to the finish where driver skills and knowledge, and vehicle strength would have a bearing on the outcome.

Joob wasn't getting carried away even though he held a four-and-a-half minute lead and the advantage of knowing the terrain.

"I have to do my best to win," he said before the final push. "There can be no room for error and I hope I will suffer no punctures or mechanical issues."

It was to be 72.22km of tension as all Thailand awaited their overall victory winner.

Joob did not disappoint. He blasted through the last SS, fast, calmly and without any errors, in 39 minutes and 47 seconds. Kinya took the flag in 40:33, his best, with everything to gamble for, was almost a minute adrift of the No 13 blue and white Toyota Vigo of Joob, a number that proved to be lucky for the Thai ace.

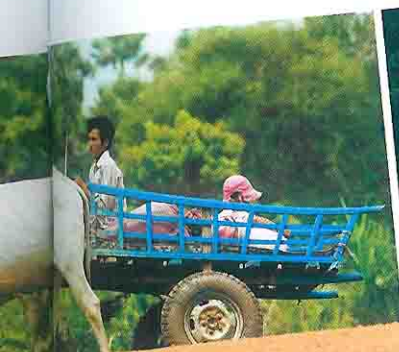
"Lots of people may not feel well with this number (13), but for me I think it is good," said a tied Joob.

The Thai champion also paid tribute to machine: "As long as my car is running no one can beat me."

It had been an exciting race and Tadayuki promised that the 2013 will be better with additional categories.

Top 3 finishers: 1 Nuttapon "Joob" Angritthanon- Kittisak Klinchan (Thailand) – Toyota Vigo (Hilux) 8 hr 52 min 45 sec; 2 Kinya Morikawa-Masahiko Uchida – Land Cruiser 80 (Japan) 8:58:1, 3 Chamnan-Cholanat (Thailand) – Mitsubishi Triton 9:7:38.

✦ Contact Krijgsman at [xtreme-adventure.com](http://xtreme-adventure.com) if you are interested in participating in the 2013 Asia Cross Country Rally.



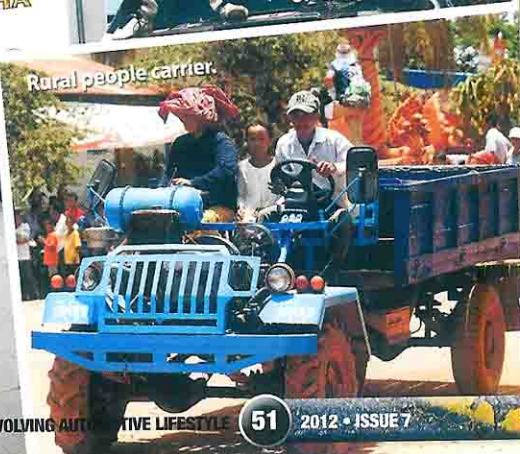
Bullock powered.



Roadside repairs.



Joob and Kittisak on the podium.



Rural people carrier.

