

# An incredible trip: 10,000 miles with a flick of the wrist

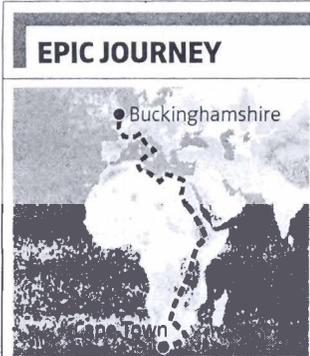
Quadriplegic Colin Javens is raising £1m for charity by driving to South Africa. **Danielle Gusmaroli** reports

It is proving to be a tough odyssey on many counts. But quadriplegic Colin Javens is showing steely determination to overcome the mental and physical strains of driving 10,500 miles from Britain to the southern tip of Africa.

The 25-year-old, left paralysed from the shoulders down after breaking his neck in a diving accident five years ago, is relying on a tiny movement in his right wrist to steer a specially adapted Land Rover from Buckinghamshire to Cape Town. If all goes to plan, Mr Javens will be able to boast a world first for someone with his disability.

Doctors estimate he has a 50-50 chance of completing his challenge to raise £1m for spinal injury research, which he plans to donate to Stoke Mandeville hospital in Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire.

Speaking from his camp in Gallaba in Sudan, he says: "The trip has been both exhilarating and exhausting. I am experiencing a lot of strain on the spine as a result of sitting in the driver's seat all day, which is causing doctors some concern. But so far it has been an incredible journey and the stamina is holding up well. We have covered great mileage in the past few weeks to try to make up lost time.



I am determined to get to the finishing line."

The blue four-wheel drive, into which he is hoisted every morning, is currently making its way over the Sudanese border with Ethiopia. An accident in Italy, which left him with severe burns to the tops of his legs, has put the six-month expedition a week behind schedule. Mr Javens was forced to retreat to his tent to rest for seven days after spilling a cup of scalding tea held between his legs while cruising the Amalfi coast in Salerno.

The plan is for the six-strong support team, including a doctor, mechanic and navigator, to set up camp in Kenya, Tanzania, Zambia and Botswana before reaching Cape Town in April.

In the eight weeks since he set off, Mr Javens has driven through

Jersey, France and Italy where, from Naples, the team caught a ferry across the Mediterranean to Tunisia. It was while driving along the north coast of Africa that he remarked on the "eye-opening" difference in attitudes to people in wheelchairs.

He says: "Sometimes in the UK when I am wheeling down the street people avoid eye contact or completely ignore me. It was completely different in Tunisia, Libya and Egypt, where the expedition team and I were invited into numerous households for breakfasts of chapatis.

"I don't know if it is because the Arabs are not used to seeing white people in wheelchairs, or whether they are impressed with my hand controls, but they have been enormously friendly."

Although his biceps are still functional, his triceps are not and he has minimal movement in both arms and hands. With his right wrist held in a sling, he steers the wheel while using his left shoulder to push and pull a highly sensitive accelerator lever. Beside his left elbow is a touch pad that he nudges to operate the indicators, wipers and horn.

Mr Javens has raised £260,000 so far and is halfway to his destination. He says: "I am doing this to prove that with determination anything is possible in life."



Colin Javens in his specially adapted Land Rover: 'So far it has been an incredible journey'

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