

CLASSIC DRIVER

The Rolls-Royce Corniche that rallied the Paris-Dakar is looking for a new home

Lead

Sure, it may not be the most conventional car to tackle one of motorsport's harshest rally events, but in 1981, two Frenchmen loaded up their Rolls-Royce Corniche with champagne and oysters and tackled the Dakar Rally. Now, this icon heads to Aguttes on Wheels' upcoming sale.



It takes a special kind of person to willingly compete in an event such as the Paris Dakar rally. During its humble beginnings, it was seen as a rag-tag bunch of wannabe explorers using the open dessert terrain as a chance to legally speed, but within a few years of its inception, its popularity and grandeur grew, turning it into one of the most important events in motorsport's history. During those earlier years, a pair of wealthy French playboys, Thierry de Montcorgé and Jean-Christophe Pelletier, felt the Dakar needed some extra publicity, and after a few too many glasses of rouge, a plan to convert Thierry's Rolls-Royce Corniche into the ultimate all-terrain land yacht was hatched. The rest, as they so often say, is history, and now this incredible piece of automotive and advertising history is ready for a new adventure, as it heads to [Aguttes on Wheels' upcoming Autumn Sale on December 1st](#).

While it's incredible to see the car in its freshly restored form now, this rugged Corniche very nearly wasn't to be. During the pair's preparation, Rolls-Royce had gotten wind of the outrageous idea of an off-road variant of their stately cruiser, and promptly ordered Thierry and Christophe to choose another brand for the job. It was in fact legendary design house Christian Dior that managed to convince Rolls to agree to the plan, as Thierry and his co-driver had reached out to the fashion brand with a sponsorship proposal. Incredibly, they obliged, and labelled the car with 'Jules' stickers to help promote their latest men's fragrance.



Once all the stars had aligned, Jean-Christophe's beloved Corniche underwent a real makeover. Over the course of three months, its original chassis was removed and replaced with the ladder frame from a Toyota HJ45 Land Cruiser, both because of its famed sturdiness and because it just so happened to have a similar wheelbase. Along with the chassis, the Corniche also borrowed the Toyota's four-wheel-drive system and transmission, while the power was delivered by a beefy 5.7-litre Chevrolet crate V8 engine imported from the US. Despite looking virtually the same as those chauffeur-driven Roll-Royces that littered Knightsbridge, all that remained from the original car was its windows, bumpers, dashboard, and front grille, with the rest of the body being crafted from lightweight fibreglass in the shape of the original Corniche.



Everything was ready for the 1981 Paris Dakar rally, and as Thierry and Jean-Christophe lined up alongside nearly 300 cars, trucks and bikes, their hard work and determination was about to pay off. In true playboy fashion, the car may not have had air-conditioning, but the pair made space for some champagne and oysters for when the going got tough. Tomfoolery aside, the rugged Roller wasn't just there to make up the entry list or fulfil some marketing duties, and halfway through the rally, it sat in an incredible 13th place. Their luck would turn following a crash that damaged the steering system, and an 'illegal repair' deemed by the organisers denied the duo from scoring points, but did allow them to finish the rally.



After bringing the Corniche over the finish line, the story was complete. To date, Jules remains one of the event's craziest machines ever and a perfect example of marketing meeting motorsport. Much more than just a racing car, a prototype or even a unique Rolls-Royce, Jules is a symbol of an era when anything was possible. In fact, we are such fans of this creation, [a few years ago we were lucky enough to spend some time with Jules and the Aguttes team in some polar opposite conditions to the deserts of Dakar](#). Now boasting a fresh restoration totalling over 150,000 euros, it is ready to steal the show at just about any event around the world, from the Dakar Classic to Pebble Beach, Goodwood Festival of Speed to Tutto Bene!

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