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DRIVING an ambulance 10,000 miles across mud tracks and unknown terrain, Duncan Johnstone may experience more than just travel sickness. Organisers of the Mongol Rally warn participants that they put their "short-term and long-term health and even their lives at risk" by signing up for the event. For six weeks, Duncan, his girlfriend, Colleen Gillespie, and their friend, Sophie Cullen, will be exposed to such danger as they travel to and through Mongolia – covering the distance of a third of the way around the world.

They expect to cross two continents and 15 countries and will try to avoid the accidents and border disputes which organisers say have happened in the annual event's seven-year history.

The trio, who will also be joined by three other friends at different stages of the rally, are taking part to raise money for charity. And, as participants are encouraged to drive in unconventional vehicles to make the experience more difficult, they have chosen to travel in an ambulance. Duncan, 35, of Stepping Lane, Derby, said he had signed up because he wanted to take part in an "adventure". He said: "It's been something I've wanted to do for quite a while and, when I first decided to go for it, it was all about going on an adventure. But then, the more I read up about it, the more I realised that it was really about doing something for a good cause and it is this combination of things which mean I'm really looking forward to it."

On Saturday, July 23, Duncan, Colleen, 30, also of Stepping Lane, and Sophie, 30, formerly of Derby but who now lives in Bristol, will set off on their journey – along with 200 other vehicles – from Goodwood. They will travel through France, Germany, the Czech Republic, Poland, Ukraine, Russia and Kazakhstan, before arriving in Mongolia and heading to its capital, Ulan Bator.

Duncan, an engineer at Lorien Engineering Solutions, in Burton – which is sponsoring the ambulance – said they could be driving for about six hours a day and either camping or staying in cheap hostels. He said: "We have quite a bit of choice on the way we go and it doesn't matter how long it takes us to get there but we're aiming for about six weeks.

"We'll all be cooped up together in the ambulance a lot and, when it comes to eating, Colleen's a vegetarian and one of the people joining us only really likes burgers and chips, so that will be interesting."

The group, called Team Rover, have raised about £4,500 so far and hope to raise an extra thousand. It will be split between the Little Lives premature babies appeal, in Milton Keynes – because Sophie's nephew Ethan, now three, was born at 25 weeks – and the rally's official charity, the Christina Noble Children's Foundation to help youngsters in Mongolia. They will also leave their eight-year-old ambulance, which has already travelled 257,000 miles and was donated by the Essex Ambulance Service, in Mongolia to be used by the country's health services. Duncan said: "I think a lot of people will be doing it in more sensible vehicles but doing it in an ambulance seemed like a real challenge.

"I don't think there are really many roads in Mongolia and I'm not sure how much tarmac there will be, so it should be quite tricky. We've also had to sort out a lot of visas, international licences and insurance for the trip, plus do lots of fund-raising events, so we've had quite a lot of preparation to do as well. The event was set up by a group called The Adventurists, which describes the event as the "world's biggest road rally", with "bad roads, no roads and the most almighty amount of trouble."

The group explains to participants they are entirely on their own with no support and how "some individuals who undertook previous Mongol Rallies have been permanently injured, disabled or have even lost their life" in accidents. Duncan said: "I'm just the sort of person who wants to do this. I'm an adventurous spirit and, if the opportunity is there, why not?"

To sponsor Team Rover, visit www.teamrover.co.uk.