

Atticus

Guest writer: RUSSELL MILLER

Perelman to Peking

AS THE INTREPID American balloonists landed in France last week, yet another epic adventure, also to be led by an American, reached an advanced planning stage in London.

Mr S. J. Perelman, the noted humorist and traveller, could be found closeted in his hotel room in Kensington checking his navigation equipment for the journey of a lifetime—overland from Paris to Peking in a 1949 MG tourer.

So far his navigation equipment only extends to a few press cuttings and a slim volume which is alleged to include details of the roads between here and China, but then Mr Perelman is anxious to avoid the trap which befalls so many expeditions — over-preparation.

Thus it is that his car, which he purchased some 30 years ago in Bangkok (where else would S. J. Perelman buy an MG tourer?), is being tuned by a team of mechanics "drawing heavily on the inexpert advice of bystanders."

On the provisions front, Mr Perelman says he has already purchased some cans of iron rations and a bag of nuts and raisins for one of the party, who happens to be a vegetarian. In addition, he is ensuring he is in the peak of physical condition for his arduous ordeal by strenuously avoiding press-ups.

Like all the great adventures of our time, this one has not been without its setbacks. Mr Perelman, who has reached the fine age of 74, originally selected as his travelling companion and mechanic a blonde amazon from Pine Bluff, Arkansas.

"She knew zilch about engines, but she was a dazzling creature, six feet two inches of dimpled beauty," Mr Perelman explained. "I think she was in love with a white hunter in Kenya and hoped we might be passing through."

Unfortunately, this lady secretly proposed writing a book about the trip, a proposition that did not go down well with Mr Perelman when he heard about it at a cocktail party in New York. The blonde was hastily replaced by two Englishmen—Mr Eric Lister, a London gallery



Al Hirschfeld

owner, and Mr Sidney Beer, an MG expert—who are nothing like as pretty but at least have no literary pretensions.

The three men in an MG plan to leave London some time next week. From Paris they will take what Mr Perelman calls the "southern" route across central Europe to the Balkans, down the Aegean coast of Turkey, into Iran and Pakistan and then into China, all being well, via the fabled Karakoram highway.

Mr Perelman has visited all these countries before, but then he has been everywhere. He followed up writing the film script for *Around The World In Eighty Days* by doing it himself and recorded his experiences in a book titled *Westward Ha!* Later, he went round the world the other way and wrote *Eastward Ha!*

So far the only title Mr Perelman has conceived for his forthcoming trip is the rather formal "Anglo-American Paris to Peking Expedition."

He is confident of reaching his objective. "I have a perhaps totally unfounded belief," he confessed, "that the Creator will look after me. I have been told that if the car breaks down it should not be too difficult to repair and I can't see why anyone should want to try and hold us for ransom.

"Should provisions run short, Mr Lister, the vegetarian, can live on roots and berries. As for Mr Beer and myself, I am told that worms are terribly good nourishment if you are really driven to it."

Atticus readers need lose no sleep over the safety of Three Men in an MG. Reports of the progress of the expedition will appear in *The Sunday Times*.