

TEST 1:
READING

Part 1

You are going to read a magazine article about a rally driver. For questions 1–8, choose the answer (A, B, C or D) which you think fits best according to the text.

Driving in the desert

My family are farmers in France, and by the age of ten, I could manoeuvre a tractor into a field to pick up straw bales. For my driving test, I learned how to reverse into a parking space by practising between two tractors.

I'm the extraterrestrial of the family: I've always needed to prove that I can adapt to new situations. I'd never left France until 1998 – and then I went to Australia, the most distant country possible. I worked on a sheep farm there, driving a 4x4 all the time, and spent four months driving around the country on my own. That was when I first came into contact with the desert, and I wanted to return to it.

But it was my competitive spirit that drew me to the all-female Gazelles Rally in the Moroccan desert. I did it to see if I could survive in the desert and not be afraid. Taking part in the rally involves spending eight days in the desert, including two sets of two-day marathons when you're on your own overnight with your team-mate. The rally will push you to the limits of your physical and mental capacity, so it's very important to choose the right team-mate, to make sure you have the same goal and the same way of working. But the key thing is for you both to keep your courage and remain confident.

Participants – known as the *gazelles* – drive 4x4s, quad bikes, motorbikes or trucks, and use a compass and a map to navigate their way to marker flags that have been planted in the desert – always in places that are really difficult to get at. You have to drive up and down huge sand dunes, the highest of which are about twenty metres. Every morning at base camp you have to prepare your maps, by marking the position of the day's flags. Then you have to plan the best route to them. It takes time to learn how to do this, how to understand the landscape, because you are all alone in the emptiness – there are no landmarks, it is all just flat. On our first day, my team-mate and I felt quite frightened by it

– we thought we'd get lost. So we decided to drive in a straight line for half an hour in search of geographical features. Then we found some mountains.

It rained a lot during the rally, and the thing that scared us most was the thought of not being able to get out of the mud. Some women were stuck for about twelve hours overnight before the mud dried. My team-mate and I managed to get through, though, because we set off first, when the ground was less damaged. Each vehicle carries a satellite tracking system with it, and every half-hour the rally organisers use this to check on you: if a car isn't moving, they go to the rescue. Once, we were all alone in our tent in a storm, and feeling a bit scared. An official rally vehicle came and reassured us that we wouldn't be washed away.

I had great difficulty finding a sponsor – it costs about €6000 to hire a vehicle and €14,000 to participate in the rally, plus you have to hire safety equipment. It's always the people you least expect who help you most. The big dealers for four-wheel-drive vehicles refused to finance 68 what they called 'a girls' jaunt in the desert'. It was a small, independent garage that provided us with an 11-year-old 4x4 for nothing – and we didn't have a single breakdown.

Speed is not a factor in this competition. Men have a tendency to drive a bit faster than women. They're so sure they've chosen the right route that they're less good at anticipating problems. A man who was doing a television programme on the rally refused to believe that it was difficult or that women could sometimes be better than him.

I want to do the rally again next year. Taking part in it puts life's problems into perspective, and it's also a big thing on my CV: it shows people I can see a project through. When I meet the top people in my company now, I feel far more self-assured.

Choose the correct answer:

- 1 Why did the writer go to Australia?
 - A to further develop her driving skills
 - B to get practice in driving in desert conditions
 - C to visit members of her family who farmed there
 - D to experience living in an unfamiliar environment
- 2 In the writer's opinion, the ideal rallying team-mate is someone who
 - A will keep you from feeling afraid at night.
 - B can make up for any weaknesses you have.
 - C does not take the competition too seriously.
 - D will share your general aims and attitudes.
- 3 What does the word 'this' in line 40 refer to?
 - A driving in difficult places
 - B finding important landmarks
 - C deciding which route to take
 - D drawing flags on a map
- 4 The writer's greatest fear in the desert was that she might
 - A lose her way in bad weather.
 - B become stuck in wet ground.
 - C damage her vehicle in the mud.
 - D have to be rescued by other competitors.
- 5 What does the writer say about the cost of the rally?
 - A Hiring a vehicle was her biggest expense.
 - B Safety equipment was provided by the organisers.
 - C She was surprised that a small garage sponsored her.
 - D A new vehicle would have reduced her maintenance bill.
- 6 By using the phrase 'a girls' jaunt' (line 68), the big dealers showed that they felt
 - A unimpressed by the writer's driving skills.
 - B a lack of respect for this particular event.
 - C sure that the writer wouldn't complete the rally.
 - D an unwillingness to sponsor rallying in general.
- 7 According to the writer, men rally drivers
 - A fail to realise when something is about to go wrong.
 - B tend to feel overconfident when driving at speed.
 - C seem to have fewer problems with navigation.
 - D refuse to accept the advice of women.
- 8 In the last paragraph, the writer suggests that taking part in the rally
 - A has improved her career prospects.
 - B has impressed her superiors at work.
 - C is something that she will do every year.
 - D is creating certain problems in her private life.