

BOLIVIA 2023 THE WHOLE UGLY STORY

We finally got our containers released so now I can tell the whole story. I am posting this as a caution to anyone planning to run in Bolivia and to understand how we were lied, cheated and conned by a couple of incompetent grifters. They ruined the event for all 80 people and competitors that attended and did a great disservice to the land speed record community.

When I began planning for the event, I talked with Marcelo Alvarez who had been involved in our two previous land racing events. It was a handshake agreement that he would arrange for the services we needed, and we would only pay the actual cost of the services, which we agreed to. We discussed the event, and I asked him what he wanted to do the organizing in Bolivia. The amount was \$13,000.00 plus travel expenses. \$3,000.00 up front and \$10,000.00 when he successfully put on the event.

Marcelo's and Malena's incompetence was staggering. We arranged shipping to the port and Marcelo agreed to arrange all inland shipping and the return of the containers to the port.

When our container arrived, he had no permit to transport the fuel in our container. We were notified our container was being returned to the US in 3 hours. I called the American embassy, Marcelo and the FIM affiliate and somehow, the container was released. We asked for the containers to be delivered 2 days before the event was to start.

The containers had arrived at the port two weeks prior to the event. As in previous events, they were not able to get the containers to the salt on time. Because they couldn't get the containers there on time, 4 days of the 6-day event were gone. They did not send the packing list and invoice we had provided that listed everything in the containers to the Chile custom officials, just the bill of lading. This caused customs authority to question what was in the containers and open and unload the containers. The customs people hired people to make packing lists for each container. The cost for inland freight in 2018 was \$5,600.00 because of the mishandling of the shipment and delays it cost us \$18,547.00 for each container instead of \$6,340.00 we had paid the transport company.

Marcelo and Malena were responsible for returning the containers to the port after the event.

After the event, Top Oil had a booking available for return shipping of the container of \$4,400.00 from the port of Chile to Oakland California. The cost of ocean freight was \$4,300.00 from Oakland to the port in Chile. Shipping an ocean container is quite simple. You obtain a booking from the shipper; pay the cost and they pick it up from the dock and deliver it to the receiving dock. There are very minor dock charges when it arrives. Malena said no she needed to make the bookings in Bolivia and would work with the shipping company Jetstar Logistics in LaPaz. They have no website. We paid Jetstar \$5,100.00 for ocean shipping on each container. She put our container and Jamie's on the same bill of lading, so all billings were for both containers.

At least the containers were on the ship with ocean freight paid for and on the way home. As the ship arrived, we were shocked to be notified that the freight charges were freight collect in the amount just over \$23,000.00. We had already paid the shipping. The containers arrived in Oakland on November 12th. Marcelo and the logistics company kept saying they would try to correct it. In addition, Marcelo had put a lien on the containers until the evacuation flight charges and medical expenses were paid for Richard Assen. We had no responsibility for this. Jamie and I decided to pay Richard's events costs as he was injured. After Richard was injured, I asked Marcelo for

copies of the medical and flight bill so FIM insurance could pay the charges. Marcelo would not send me or the FIM the bill, he said the cost of the flight was \$4,500.00. Finally 6 weeks after the event I was able to locate the company that provided the flight. They sent me a copy of the bill and the flight cost was \$2,800.00. The company also provided the fire and ambulance service and the bill showed Marcelo had not paid any of the \$3,500.00 we paid him for ambulance and fire service. At this point I was no longer willing to deal with Marcelo, so Jamie began trying to get the containers released. Marcelo and the shipping company told Jamie they would try to get the shipping charges corrected. They kept telling Jamie they would get the containers released soon.

Our containers were sitting at the port accruing storage charges that escalated daily. Marcelo said he would release the lien and straight out the shipping charges if Jamie sent him \$4,500.00. Jamie sent the money. The containers that had been sitting at the dock for weeks were still not released. After sitting at the dock for 52 days the only way we could get them released was to pay \$66,365.00 which we did on January 2nd. We had paid \$10,200.00 ocean freight in Bolivia previously. So, what should have been \$8,800.00 to ship the containers home cost us \$75,165.00. Malena and Marcelo generated the Bill of Lading and made all the shipping arrangements.

There were a lot of other ways we got screwed:

Jim Knapp and I made reservations at the Palacio de Sal hotel in August of 2022 for \$160.00 per night. This is a first-class hotel with a fine restaurant and includes breakfast. We both gave credit cards and received confirmed reservations. I told Marcelo this. About a week later Marcelo called and said the hotel was canceling our reservations. How would the hotel know to call Marcelo? Marcelo tells us the hotel now wants \$450.00 per night. We receive notice from the hotel that our reservations were cancelled, and we can re-book at the higher rate. Marcelo then said he had a deal with the hotel we stayed in in 2018. It was a lousy hotel. He said they have made many improvements and have a new restaurant with a real chef and menu. And now it is a first-class hotel. It was anything but. He said the hotel would not take reservations directly and all must be booked through Malena. The cost was between \$200 and \$300 per night for rooms we paid \$61.25 a night for in 2018. They had to be paid in advance by wire with no refunds. There we 80 rooms booked. There was no restaurant, just tables and food so bad it would cause a riot if served every day to prisoners. While I was staying there, I checked the Palacio hotel. Lots of rooms were available at \$160.00 per night. I had paid for the best room the hotel had for Marcelo and Malena for 10 days. When I checked out of the hotel, I paid the room charges for meals etc. for all the rooms I had booked for ourselves and the official. Then I was handed a bill by the hotel for Malena of \$3,200.00 for additional room charges I just paid it and left.

Marcelo charged us \$3,600.00 for liability insurance required by the FIM and FIA. After my asking him repeatedly for a copy of the policy so I could send it to the sanctioning bodies. He would not provide it. Finally, just days before the event the FIA and FIM said they were canceling the sanction unless a suitable policy was provided. He sent me the policy. The premium was \$1,800.00 half of what we paid him. He said the \$3,600.00 also paid a medical policy in Bolivia that would cover the medical expenses for participants in case of injury. This proved not to be true. Right after the event I asked Marcelo for copies of the medical and flight bill so the FIM insurance could pay the charges. Marcelo would not send me, Richard, or the FIM the bill he said the Cost of the flight was \$4,500.00 which he wanted us to pay him. Finally, 6 weeks after the event, I was able to locate the company that provided the flight. They sent me a copy of the bill and the flight cost was \$2,800.00 not \$4,500.00. The company also provided the fire and ambulance service and

the bill showed Marcelo had not paid any of the \$3,500.00 we paid him for ambulance and fire service. The medical insurance we paid for did not exist.

He arranged for a push truck and said it was a nice Ford F150 crew cab for \$160 per day as with everything we paid in advance. Every light on the dash lit up. It would not accelerate without cutting in and out. Finally just quit. He did find another truck that worked.

On previous trips Marcelo provided cars and drivers that were total pieces of junk. I decided we would rent cars in LaPaz instead. Marcelo said he had much better cars and drivers for \$130.00 per day. Most of the vehicles he provided had dashes full of warning lights. Later said they are \$140.00 per day. Our driver told Rocky that Marcelo was getting a cut from each driver. Al Lamb had a car that the fan came off and hit the radiator. They wanted \$1500 damages from AL.

I received a call from Marcelo the day the containers were to leave for the salt saying we need to immediately send \$5,000.00 per container for a security bond. I sent \$15,000 for our container, Al Lambs and Jamie. Richard and Jim paid theirs. We had never had to pay a bond previously as paperwork submitted indicated it was for temporary import as exhibition goods. Malena said it would be returned 5 days after the containers left. Marcelo told Jamie that he was keeping the security deposits along with \$17,500.00 owed to me which he said would be available once the government made good the money that was deposited in a failed bank and which I had covered for the entrants that had sent deposits.

We paid \$2,800.00 for security at the salt at night. There was none.

Marcelo was paid \$2,000.00 for 4 porta potties for 6 days. They took two of them back on the 2nd day.

I had purchased and shipped to Marcelo a brand-new hydraulic unloading unit at his request. The cost was just over \$8,000.00. This was to avoid the cost of the crane to unload the containers. Marcelo called me the day before the containers we were supposed to arrive at the salt and said it was defective. He had it in his possession for 6 months and never bothered to test it or he didn't know how to use it. He said he would need to bring cranes from LaPaz at a cost of \$4,000.00. Because the containers did not arrive on time the cranes said they were leaving. Marcelo said it would cost another \$2,000.00 to keep them there, which I paid him, and he later charged us \$700.00 for their lodging.

In 2017 Andrey Rodriguez organized the event. He arranged for a crane to come from Uyuni to the salt to load and unload our containers. Andry said I would need to pay for them when they arrive. The cost was \$500.00 to unload and \$500.00 to load the containers. In 2018 Marcelo arranged for the crane to come out. Now it is \$5,000.00 to load and \$5,000.00 to unload plus what he said was another \$1,700.00 for previous year charges. At the time I blamed the crane company for taking advantage of us. It is now clear to me what happened. Marcelo knew we had no choice but to pay them because containers were arriving. And just like the hotel he made a deal with the crane company.

It is late on the 3rd day. When they arrived on the salt he failed to bring enough water for me to put the line down the track. I repeatedly told him I needed 125 gallons. He shows up with 75 gallons. We could not finish the line and it was getting late, so I had to finish it on the next day. Day 4. I paid him for two propane heaters which he did not bring. The water pump froze in the line making

machine and ruined the pump. By the time we got the pump fixed and the course set up, the day was over. It left 2 days for the event.

On the 4th day we were ready to run. Marcelo told us he would be able to supply all the ice we need. We asked him where the ice was, he showed up with two small bags and said that is all there is available. Not even enough for one run on our bike. Rocky our rider asked our driver if he knew where to get ice. We gave the driver \$80.00, and he returns an hour later with two large ice chests full of commercially packaged ice. Marcelo later charged us \$300.00 for ice.

Marcelo had a metal timing building Reg Cook had sent over. The timers told me they do not want it they are fine with a popup. I told Marcelo not to bring it, he did anyway and charged us \$2,500.00.

Early on I paid Marcelo \$6,800.00 for permits from the government. When the FIM asked for documentation saying we had permission from the governing body to run the event. I asked Marcelo for copies of the permits or receipts. He told me the government does not provide receipts or copies of the permits.

The final attempt to extort money from us came on the return bus trip. Malena has convinced us the best way to travel to Uyuni was by luxury bus. It was a miserable trip. The seats were comfortable, but the 7-hour trip was really 9 hours. We were to be served food on the way. The food on the return trip consisted of a 4" by 4" piece of stale bread with a dry paper-thin piece of ham and cheese. There were about 25 people on the return trip. We had booked a nice hotel in LaPaz to stay in overnight until our flights left at 2:00 AM. Because of the late start leaving and the long bus trip it was 10:45 PM before we got to within 1 ½ miles from the hotel. My son was looking out the window when the bus stopped, and he saw a man get out of a beat-up car wearing a vest that said Police. He had no uniform or badge. Malena went out and met the person and after a conversation she told me that we did not have permission to continue the last 1 ½ miles to the hotel. I asked why and she said we would have to pay and went back out to talk to him. The hotel manager had called me earlier to see if we were still coming as we had prepaid for the rooms. I had his number. I called and told him what was happening. He asked me to give the phone to Malena, which I did. I do not speak Spanish but could tell a heated conversation was going on. Next, I am told we can go on in and paid nothing. When we got to the hotel Malena, who had been with every step of the way wherever we went disappeared. Never stepped foot in the hotel and we never saw a taxi leave. Must have gotten a ride home. They live in LaPaz. The hotel knew our situation kept the restaurant open for us. No one checked in after we ate, so we left directly for the airport at 12:30.

Jamie Williams, Jim Knapp and I are working on returning to Bolivia in 2024. We are in contact with a person who comes highly recommended to organize the event. His name is Marcos Soto who lives in LaPaz. He has spent the last 15 years working with movie and video productions, organizing things in Bolivia. Hopefully this will be part of Reg Cooks "Kiwi Can Do event" with FIA and FIM sanctions.

I sent this to all the participants and asked them to let me know if anything was inaccurate before I distributed it. All agreed it was an accurate description of what occurred.