

'Friends rallying for an epic drive'

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Four lifelong friends have set off on a 1,500-mile drive across Europe in a fund-raising rally for cancer research. Josh Sananes, Josh McCarthy, Callum Merryman and Connor Aleman, who have grown up in Leicestershire, have joined nearly 500 other students for a six-day rally across Europe from Dover to Croatia. The friends will drive hundreds of miles each day on the Student Gumball Rally before joining the other 150 teams for parties at stopovers in Germany, the Czech Republic, Hungary and Croatia. Organisers say the rally is dedicated to raising cash for the Teenage Cancer Trust. Yesterday, the teams raced 250 miles through France, Belgium and Holland into Germany for the first stopover at Cologne. The Rothley students all attended Loughborough Grammar School before splitting up to head to university. The foursome have now graduated but applied for the rally while they were still studying. Ex-Manchester University student Josh McCarthy said each car's crew would compete for a first prize of £1,000 through completing yet-to-be announced tasks in the most stylish way. He said: "Rumour has it the tasks will be getting funny photographs at various landmarks across the countries." "We think we'll be heading out in fancy dress as Jedi from Star Wars." "It's going to be really good fun but really draining. It's hundreds of miles each day. The 400-mile stretch between Cologne and Prague will be really hard." "A lot of people seem to be forgetting about the drive back. It's a 3,000-mile round trip." Birmingham University graduate Josh Sananes said the Leicestershire lads would take on the drive in Callum's four-year-old Volkswagen Polo, as no vehicles with an engine size of more than two litres are allowed. He said: "Usually gumball rallies are for supercars, but it's the first-ever student rally and they want to keep more powerful cars out to make it fair." "It's for a good cause as well. We're handing over as much of our sponsorship as possible after the petrol costs, which I think all the teams are doing." A spokeswoman for the Teenage Cancer Trust said: "We are so grateful to them and to all involved in the Student Gumball Rally. They will really help us to make a difference." The team has been sponsored by skate shop Magic Toast, in St Martin's Square, Leicester.