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Tom Foster - Editor

Tuning a bike is tricky and something I enjoy. When I say 'tuning', I mean taking a bike and trying to get the best out of it. It's not just searching for horsepower. There's a great deal to be gained from looking at all factors affecting a bike's performance.

For racers there's an easy way to measure success: lap times. For recreational riders it's far more difficult, and I used to get really frustrated with some of the things I saw people doing. Usually I'd see a rider adding several kilos of dead weight to a bike and looking smug because they'd fitted something they didn't understand, and probably wasn't going to help them ride faster, smoother or with greater safety. These days there's a lot of stuff called 'bling' that falls into that category, and I think if it makes those people feel good about

their bikes and riding, it's a great idea.

The rider is still the main limitation on any bike from a moped to an exotic, Dakar-ready race special. It's a good rider who can feel where the bike's strengths lie and capitalise on those strengths, and, at the same time, understand a bike's specific weaknesses and compensate for them. Is there anyone among us who hasn't had their arse whipped by a rider on a much smaller-capacity, clearly far less-capable bike?

It's because the other rider has the ability to understand what the bike can and can't do, and make the most of what's available.

I haven't been gifted with the kind of talent that naturally lets me make those assessments, but over many years I've had a great deal of excellent attitude pounded into my unresponsive noggin by very knowledgeable people. I now consciously look for the assets and shortfalls of bikes, and of course, with bike-testing

being a big part of my work, that's a good thing. It also helps me set up a bike to work well with the way I ride.

One of the aspects of performance tuning I've learned is that there's a considerable overlap between bike hardware and the rider's mental state. There's a strong psychological factor in any rider's performance. If a rider believes he has an advantage, he does. So if bolting on equipment a rider doesn't understand or can't use makes him feel more confident, there is, within reason, some benefit there.

The best demonstration I've ever seen of the principle was a race team testing pipes. Both riders were world class, but the team tech was a wily fox. The riders tried a few different pipes and couldn't agree on which one was 'best'. After a long day with no consensus everyone headed for a shower and a good night's sleep. Overnight the tech took the stock pipes, blasted the paint off them, welded some fake seams, and the next morning told the riders he had something very special and secret for them to try. Both riders rode the bikes with the stock pipes, turned in their fastest lap times, and demanded to be allowed to use the 'secret' equipment, no matter what the sponsorship deals were.

It still makes me smile, but there's a valuable lesson in the story. Sometimes a mental tune-up can far outweigh the advantages of any amount of mechanical or electronic performance gear, and

sometimes that mental tune-up can be a result of a solid belief in equipment which in fact makes no difference to the bike.

So these days I barrack for anyone who fits anything to their bike, no matter how heavy

or loud that bike ends up, if they believe it makes them a better rider. It may not suit me, but if it works for them, it's a good move.

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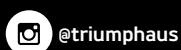
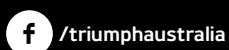
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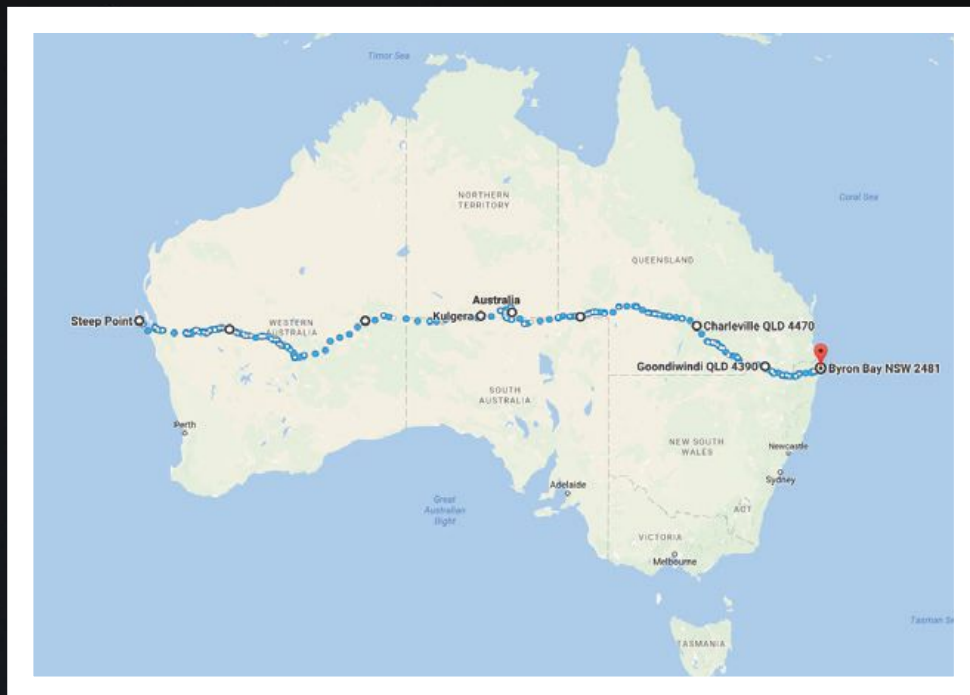
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For the RECORD

When John 'Homer' Hudson found some travel plans snookered he decided to use the time to have a crack at the across-Australia record.





John Hudson is no stranger to *Adventure Rider* Magazine readers. He's been a KTM team Safari competitor, kicked off the hugely successful APC Rallies and staged the logistically staggering ADVX ride in 2015. These days John rides for an outfit called advmaps and is knee-deep in planning and running the 2017 ADVX ride from Brisbane to Cape York.

All set for the KTM Rallye in New Zealand, John was a little nonplussed when family commitments meant the Kiwi ride was a no go. With his ticket already booked the Gold Coaster decided, in the very best traditions of adventure riders the world over, to improvise and innovate. He still had a few days free and could swap his air ticket to a different destination. He pondered the situation as he blasted his 990 through an eight-day recce ride to far-north Queensland and made a decision: he'd have a crack at the Steep Point-to-Byron Bay across-Australia run.

All systems go

The KTM was blasted into Workshop 2000 and mechanic Marcel was given a full 24 hours to scrape off the eight days of accumulated crap and crud, sort out an ignition problem and deal with a few other issues. The next day the bike was ready, but Marcel hadn't been told the calibre of adventure in mind. When he found out he shook his head and handed over a list of spares to carry.

The long-term weather forecast showed temperatures along the route were expected to drop to around 30 degrees, so the bike was loaded on a truck and dispatched to Perth.

A good fit

Alongside the usual injuries endured by long-term competitors, Hudson had done some serious shoulder damage 18 months ago and friends and family were concerned at his fitness level for a ride as tough as the crossing. Scott Britnell, the current record holder, was younger and in far better physical shape. Scott had also done some very careful and well-measured planning and had tyres, wheels and fuel dumps organised to minimise weight on his KTM rally bike – a bike that was substantially lighter than Hudson's 990.

John had considered all these points. The time of year wasn't perfect and fuel drops would have made the desert a lot easier, but there was no time to organise those things. It wasn't the record he was chasing so much as the adventure of making the attempt and discovering if he had the ticker to complete the ride. The record, if he could snatch it, would be a bonus.

Snooze

After landing in Perth, Hudson picked up the bike then rode north to overnight in Geraldton, giving time to think through his strategy. The next day was a run to Steep Point ▶

Main: The Byron Bay lighthouse is the eastern-most point of the Australian mainland and the aim of any west-east crossing attempt.

FOR THE RECORD



The guys from the Compass Run – see www.compassrun.com.au – were happy to lend a hand at a refuel.

Point and the following morning, at 5:00am, the adventure began.

A group of riders who'd heard of the attempt were waiting at the Overlander servo and performed like a MotoGP crew, fuelling the bike and supplying water. Meekathara rolled into view about one hour ahead of schedule and a day of serious riding followed. The KTM990 answered all the questions asked of it, and at 5:00pm bike and rider arrived at Carnegie Station. Good mate Stuart 'Woodsie' Woods had called the station, so a meal and refuel were waiting and handled in double-quick time.

John headed on to the 500km Gunbarrel Highway section and 11.30pm found him through the tortuous run. Just outside Warburton he allowed himself a tight five-hours sleep.

So far, so good

Thanks again to Stuart Woods, the Warburton fuel stop was open and waiting at 6:00am. A massive 70 litres of fuel was loaded on to the 990 and a couple of travellers supplied water when the servo was found to have none.

The next section was 780km, a little-known route directly to Kulgera.

At about the 400km mark the track became very wet and slippery, then simply turned into a lake for 20km. Fortunately, a sandy bottom allowed a crossing. Mount Dare hove into view at 5:00pm and Hudson was four hours ahead of schedule. Once

again, thanks to Woodsie's logistical talents, he found a hearty meal waiting and the owners of Mt Dare fuelled his bike and had filled in his desert pass. After only 10 minutes or so the ride continued.

The fast stop at Mount Dare meant Hudson managed 150km into the desert before sundown and things were looking very good. At Purni Bore the tyre pressures in the Motoz Tractionators were dropped to 13PSI and then the soft sand – and the trouble – started.

Pinned

The bike, including fuel, water and camping gear weighed about 300kg. Temperatures had been in the mid-40s the week before and the sand was incredibly soft. And, of course, it was dark.

Within the next 50km the KTM had hit the deck seven times and severely drained the rider's energy. He'd already done 1300km that day and was badly fatigued. The Tractionators were eased down to 10PSI and that resulted in a pinch flat on the front. During the tyre change the bike fell off the centrestand. That meant the bike had to be left on its side and the brake callipers pulled off to have any chance of putting the front wheel back in.

All this took time and energy. In a cruel twist of fate another fall left Hudson pinned under the bike for 30 minutes. He had to dig his way out.

Keep on keeping on

Exhaustion made a short sleep and some recovery time a necessity, then Hudson set about getting out of the desert in one piece, dropping the bike another six times that morning and losing a pannier in the process. By the time he arrived at Birdsville he'd resigned himself to a failed attempt. There was still 1700km to go and only 17 hours remaining to match Scott Britnell's time. To top everything off, his riding jacket was in the missing pannier.

After half a can of coke and with a road-house cabana jutting from his helmet like a big cigar, Hudson pressed on. Making the most of the daylight was vital, but hard riding had to be balanced against tyre wear. The next 800km were covered without incident, but as the darkness closed in coming into Charleville the KTM nailed three kangaroos in the space of three hours, one of which ruptured a fuel line.

Stuart Woods was called and quickly filled in on the situation. He organised someone to meet Hudson out on the highway with a jacket, 20 litres of fuel and a toasted sandwich. The bush telegraph was in full swing and a fightback was on.

Silly 'nana

Back in civilisation most watchers had now gone to bed thinking it would be close but couldn't be done. John rode all night on dirt tracks, telling himself it hurt less hitting the dirt than bitumen. ►



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FOR THE RECORD



At 1:00am Stuart Woods met the tired rider at Goondiwindi and proudly presented him with a banana, pointing out it was good energy food.

Hudson is allergic to bananas.

They quickly shook hands, refuelled and the dash began again.

A bluetooth headset proved its worth when phone calls from friends and family helped Hudson stay awake. At about 4:00am he hit severe fog and was forced to sit on 70kph. The gloom also made the road look very slippery, even if it wasn't.

As the sun came up Hudson was powering on, thinking how awesome it was to still be in the fight. A bird then hit him in the face, and a phone call alerted him he'd turned his SPOT off for 30 minutes. Those watching thought he was stuck outside Tenterfield.

The throttle stayed open and he was soon only 40 minutes from the Byron Bay finish.

Your turn

The sidestand went down at the Byron Bay lighthouse, the easternmost point of the Australian mainland, 70 hours and 33 minutes after leaving Australia's most westerly mainland extremity, Steep Point.



Image: Wilkinson Photography

The previous best time for a similar crossing was 72 hours and 10 minutes. It marked a phenomenal achievement.

Hudson said his biggest challenge was whether he had the willpower to enter the desert at night on the big bike knowing how hard it would be, and what the consequences could be if he were pinned underneath it. He feels the record will probably not stay in place for long, but believes he's shown Australia a low-budget, live-off-the-land approach could still be successful.

In the future John suggests those who consider this ride

- ☑ Ensure they have two forms of emergency communication in case one fails
- ☑ Include the French Line in the Simpson Desert and the Gunbarrel Highway

Above: The trusty 990 coped with everything: falls, kangaroos, lake crossings, flat tyres...it's still going strong.

Left: KTM team Safari competitor, originator of the APC Rallies and ADVX, John Hudson now rides for advmaps and attacked the Steep Point-Byron Bay crossing when he found himself with some unexpected spare time.

- ☑ Have as much support as wanted because it will add to safety, and
- ☑ Get well insured and have the right permits.

John is happy to make available the GPX file, but suggested aspiring crossers do the ADVX Cape York ride next year first. It's the only ride he knows of as tough as this crossing, but on ADVX there'll be a support network in place. That makes ADVX Cape York an ideal event to sort riders and bikes for the challenge of the Steep Point/Byron Bay crossing.

The riders who've tackled this – people like Phil Hodgins, Scott Britnell and John Hudson himself – will offer advice because they know how high the risk is.

Some may not listen to the advice. The desert will do the talking to those people.

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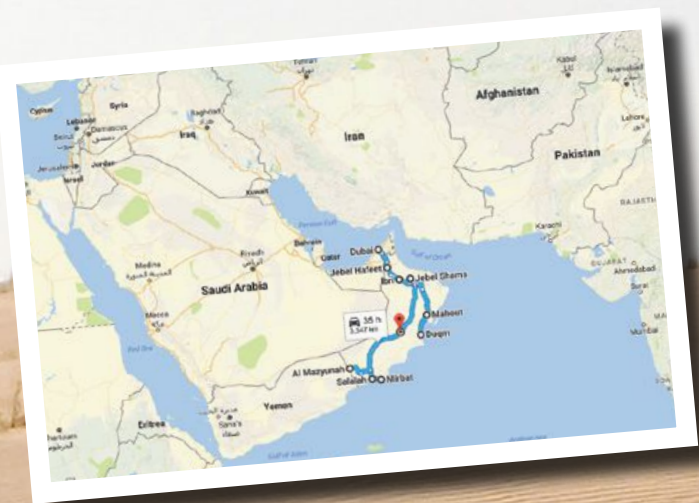
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Above: A recce ride made for some back and forth, but was all stunning nevertheless.



From the land of
Sinbad the sailor

The Sultanate Of Oman

Words and images: Brett Hart

Winter in the northern hemisphere allows riders to venture into the natural beauty of the Arabian Peninsula's south-eastern coast. Brett Hart grabbed the opportunity and discovered an adventure-riding bucket-list.

A few quick-fire emails to local riders saw myself and Torsten from Dubai on KTM's, and Stuart from Qatar on an Aprilia leaving Dubai early for the UAE/Oman border crossing of Jebel Hafeet. We were ready to venture into the far-flung, unexplored – by us – corners of the region. Our first night at Ibri, about 150km from the border, offered the best lamb curry and cold Tiger beer to be found anywhere.

Next day, courtesy of Stuart and his

Garmin Basecamp skills, we cut diagonally across central Oman to the oil and gas metropolis of Farhoud, the last fuel available before entering the Empty Quarter and hopefully making it out the other end some 500km away to the south.

Even with long-range tanks there wasn't much room for error.

A wrinkle in the plan

We reached Farhoud in good time after a 140km stretch of dirt, only to be told by the local police that, due to rule changes, we weren't welcome in Farhoud or the northern reaches of the Empty Quarter because of oil and gas assets along the proposed route.

Bugger. That wasn't the start we were after.

Over a hastily convened lunch of dahl, chicken curry, chapatti and fresh orange juice we decided to head for the coastal town of Duqm instead, some 450km to

Left: Little or no traffic and amazing views everywhere.

Below: Must've been hump day.

Below middle: "You want fries with that?"

An open-air butcher on the seafront at Dalkut.

Bottom: Wadi country.



THE SULTANATE OF OMAN



the east. Our original route would have seen us reach Duqm after having exited from the Empty Quarter, but our re-arranged itinerary meant we'd be there a day early.

You little ripper! I reckoned that would give us another day on the beach.

Little did I realise what Stuart had in store for us over the next few days, though. After a meal and a beer at our favourite haunt in Duqm, the Frontier Bar, we camped for the night and enjoyed some well-deserved rest.

Time and tide

Next morning we headed out early to the northwest and into wadi country.

For those not familiar with a 'wadi', it's a generic term for a dry water course. They can range in scale from a creek bed a few centimetres in depth to something that could well resemble the Grand Canyon.

Oman really can't be compared to any other destination I know of, but this particular wadi country probably best resembles the American midwest.

After traversing through some spectacular vistas we then headed on to a 60km stretch of beach and past

what are known locally as The Sugar Dunes, named for their pure, white colour.

As the day neared an end, we headed across salt flats and through small fishing villages before reaching our overnight stop at Mahout. It'd been a long, challenging day as we hit the nearest fuel station, and dinner that night consisted of fresh prawn curry and sweet chai before we bid another day goodnight.

It was just as well the tide was out. This day wouldn't have been the same otherwise.

Sky high

For a couple of years we'd been talking about traversing the Wahiba Sands, a 180km stretch of sand desert that extends from north to south through central Oman before emerging on the Sea Of Oman.

This day was the day.

After a breakfast of egg burji and chapatti and checking out of our humble digs we made for the northern entrance of the Wahiba Sands. Unfortunately, the water-pump seal on Stuart's Aprilia had become an issue so our traverse of the



Left: Dramatic coastlines abound.

Above: A fast-food restaurant, Oman-style.

Bottom: Oman offers a huge variety of terrain.

Wahiba had to be postponed. We ventured some 40km into the Wahiba to reach our overnight accommodation at the 1001 Night's Camp, which was truly a unique experience. The site rests among huge dunes, some over 200m high, and under the clear night sky they made for an incredible experience.

Jumper leads

After a buffet breakfast fit for a king we retraced our steps out of the Wahiba and made our way to Jebel Shams, at 3120m, one of the highest mountains in Oman. The ride consisted of near-perfect bitumen for two-thirds of the way up, then a 40km section of dirt and amazing views of the valleys below. Being so high up, temperatures can drop to below 10 degrees of a night and there'd even been a light dusting of snow once or twice in the past.

Best not to forget that pullover!

Drive by

Next day we caught up with Torsten at our fabled 'Tiger Stop' at Ibri. Stuart had to bid us farewell after five days of riding as work beckoned back in Qatar, so Torsten took over the reins.

I'm extremely fortunate to know these guys. They're both very capable riders with many years of experience. Both had competed in numerous Desert Challenges within the Arabian Gulf, and there isn't much these boys don't know about off-road riding, that's for sure.

Myself and Torsten had originally planned to ride to Salalah, at the very southerly end of Oman against the border with Yemen, some 1200km away. However, feeling tired after having been flogged by Stuart for the previous few days, I managed to convince Torsten it might be best if we trailered the bikes instead. I suggested we'd feel much fresher



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THE SULTANATE OF OMAN



by the time we got there. Thankfully, Torsten agreed.

Back on the bikes

We arrived at the sleepy, historic, coastal town of Mirbat at about 3:00pm after deciding to follow the newly completed Muscat-Salalah coast road. To try and describe the engineering that had gone into completing this section of road is nigh impossible. The cost to the Oman government must surely have exceeded the national GDP. And what an absolute rip-snorter of a road they created. I have no doubt this section of road is some of the best riding country anywhere in the world, with little to no traffic and stunning coastal vistas. Not only does this coastal route now extend to Salalah, but also to the border with Yemen, a distance of some 250km. Riding terrain in Oman varies greatly, from beaches to mountains and deserts, with plenty of top quality bitumen to soak up as well.

After checking into our digs in Mirbat, we unloaded the bikes and prepped them for a few days in territory neither of us knew.

Crabs

Rising early, we left Mirbat and stopped at a roadside restaurant for breakfast and fresh

camel milk before heading into the hills above Salalah. Once again we were blown away by the twisting roads and smooth asphalt that greeted us at every turn.

One thing we quickly picked up on was the amount of stock wandering with no boundary fencing to keep them in check. Camels, cows, donkeys and goats all had free reign over the rich pastures in the hills. We stopped at Tayq sinkhole before continuing to Wadi Derbat, which has its own unique ecosystem, and then onto Ayn Razat Spring, where fresh, cool water is literally pouring from the mountainside. Knowing sundown wasn't far away, we headed for the coast and Mugshayl Beach for the night. We camped on the sand with only the crabs and dolphins to keep us company.

Gunning it

The further south from Salalah, the more dramatic the coastline becomes.

Once again we were in awe of the engineering on this coastal route, with only the Swiss Alps comparable in our minds. As we wound our way slowly but surely towards the Yemen border we passed through military checkpoints where our details were noted and enquiries made as to our route. We explained our intentions and

no further questions were asked.

The Omanis are surely some of the most hospitable and dignified people anyone's ever likely to encounter.

As we wound our way down the escarpment, I started to get that uneasy feeling in the rear end that meant low tyre pressure. Sure enough, the rear tyre had picked up one hell of a puncture. The thing is, the 990 Adventure rear wheel is a proverbial bitch to get the tyre off, and although we'd soon removed the wheel, we gave up trying to remove the E09.

That meant a two-up run to the nearest village, Dalkut, where we found Khalid, a seasoned hand with tyres of all shapes and sizes and the air compressor to prove it.

After a quick look around Dalkut, we doubled up again and returned to my stranded bike. Before this delay we'd envisaged being 150km inland from the coast and well on our way into the Empty Quarter – or 'Rub Al Khail' – by the end of the day. Now we needed to re-assess

Top: Only the Swiss Alps are comparable.

Below left: Wadi country behind Duqm.

Below: The author absorbs some history in the Sultanate Of Oman.



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THE SULTANATE OF OMAN



our travel plans. Torsten was scheduled to start the Desert Championship in only a few days time.

Being male, ignorant and blissfully unaware of our true situation, we decided to ride like wild banshees and gun it for the next two hours and make for the Oman/Yemen border crossing of Al Mazyunah. Coming from the coast and the huge, breathtaking, limestone escarpment we left behind, we entered into what resembled another planet. Dry, flat terrain and ancient gullies greeted us where the border roads were hardpacked dirt, kept in good order by the Oman military. After a few wrong guesses with the Oman Tourism map we finally made it to Al Mazyunah and had a good chance of getting into the Empty Quarter early next morning.

Rub a dub

After an interesting night camped outside of Al Mazyunah and being woken by the Oman military to explain what we were doing in their backyard, we eventually found our path north into the Empty Quarter. The Oman Tourism maps just can't match up to Stuart's Basecamp skills, that's for sure.

I can't compare to anything else the feeling and sense of riding through isolated stretches of nothingness early in the morning. It's exhilarating, inspiring and peaceful. We experienced this on our way to Qubbat An Nasr, and on arriving at the isolated police post we wondered if

Above: The sand was no problem once the big KTMs were up to cruising speed and on their bow plane.

Top right: Khalid and Torsten wrestling with the 990 rear wheel.

Right: Travelling light and fast and sleeping rough.

Bottom left: Border roads were hard-packed dirt.

Bottom right: Date palms and oasis.

we'd taken the wrong turn somewhere. It genuinely looked deserted, although a beat-up old jalopy was parked at the front door. We shouted and sounded the bike horns to alert anyone that maybe within earshot, and, slowly but surely, two Omani police rose from their slumber and greeted us with Poratha and sweet chai. These were very welcome indeed, as we'd yet to have breakfast.

After chewing the fat with them in broken Arabic and English we understood our destination of Hishman and the Rub Al Khail was 40km to the north, although there was no visible road or path. The Omani police roughly described the terrain and direction and, sure enough, we picked up some tyre tracks heading in the direction they described. Initially the sand wasn't too soft, and once we had the big KTMs up to cruising speed and on their bow plane, we made quick work of the section. In the distance we could make out the silhouette of the start of the big dunes and soon the entry to the Rub Al Khail was upon us.

We'd made it!



It's there for everyone

The small town of Hishman greeted us as we made out the date palms and oasis that would have allowed this small community to establish itself in the days of the camel trains. Torsten and myself congratulated each other on making it to the Empty Quarter as we'd set out to do, and slowly but surely headed back to Salalah and on to Dubai.

This trip was expeditionary in nature. We travelled light and fast, sleeping rough and indulging in plenty of local cuisine along the way.

If you'd like to experience Oman at a more relaxed pace and soak up its hospitality while exploring the country, book a tour with Turkana Motorcycle Adventures. They can show you the amazing and stunning Sultanate Of Oman.

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Words and images: Michael Treloar

The Stirling

Mike Treloar believes only a fool or a good mate would trust him to plan a ride. Steve Hayter must be a good mate, then. The pair headed off to enjoy south-western WA.



With no rush to get going it was late morning before the two of us left the south-west coast of WA. Fingers of cold crept through my jacket as we got into the groove.

Nannup, about two hours south, was our first stop – Steve needed caffeine and to check his phone.

From Nannup we headed past One Tree Bridge and on to some of the best bike roads in WA. The run south to Walpole put a smile on our faces as we snaked up and down

through farmland before the first majestic karri forest towered over the narrow blacktop. If I were to ride a sports bike on these roads the red mist would overcome my desire to live another day, and I'd surely need my blood group tattooed on my forehead.

The extra horsepower of Steve's 1200GS over my 800GS was obvious as he so easily pulled away. In the past I'd said he needed a big engine to compensate for the smallness of his man bits, but that may not be true. I saw how well-suited the big bike was to those roads and could see the point. The only face-saver I could hope for was some sand or single tracks.

Shiny wet corners in the shade of tall trees saw the occasional flick of the traction-control light on the 800's dash. There was little traffic, a cool bite in the air and life was good.

Bank on it

The farmland soon gave way to forest, and after 30km of narrow, winding roads we turned east, leaving the blacktop for forestry dirt. Off went the ABS and traction control and we swooped through plenty of ups and downs as the road crossed one creek after another.

The destination for the night was east of Mount Franklin and we were well into the afternoon when ►



Top: A large excavator had dragged a massive karri log across and blocked the road.

Map: Three days around one of the most scenic parts of the Australian mainland. Two good mates had a great time and met some challenges.

Left: The author, probably waiting for his offside, Steve, to finish another phone call.

Right: Off with the ABS and traction control.





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a rough road made of large, fist-sized rocks turned into a slick old forestry road. We could've done high speeds on those tracks, but it was far more pleasant sitting on 80kph and taking in the ever-changing forest vista – mostly thick karri forest with Tea tree wetlands in between.

Plotting the route on the Garmin paid off. It was easy to lose any sense of direction in the thick, damp forest once the sun was behind the clouds, but the pink track on the Garmin showed the way and we weren't to be put off by a mere 'road closed' sign. We pressed on along a track that hugged the side of Mount Franklin as it dropped down to the river, and then we found the reason for the sign. The bridge was gone. It was now just a pile of timbers beside the track.

With the river running over a metre deep there was no option but to back-track, but we decided that could wait for morning as the riverbank was a perfect camping spot.

Logjam

In no time we had the tents up and drinks and nibbles by the fire were the order of the day. It was nice to get the boots off, lean back in a chair and watch the bird activity in the forest canopy high above us. A comfy night was on offer as both bikes sunk into the soft moss beside our tents...fortunately they leaned on each other rather than fall over.

That was what the ride was all about: remote serenity, not a sound other than the river gurgling by and birds high in the forest canopy.

Not for long though. Despite our remote location, the distant rumble of a heavy truck approached, and after some prolonged, unidentifiable activity, we were once again left in silence.

What we didn't know was a large excavator had been unloaded and a massive karri log dragged across the road, blocking us in.

Windjammer

Because it's my version of the story I'll skip over dropping Steve's dinner in the sand and mention the long night listening to the loudest snoring I've heard in a long time.

In the morning we discovered the log barricade, and, the excavator operator not being in evidence, had to dig and bush-bash past the obstacle. Anything



Left: In spring the Stirling Range becomes a carpet of colour as the wildflowers bloom, and in autumn it shows its shades of green.

Above: It was nice to get the boots off, lean back in a chair and watch the bird activity in the forest canopy high above the first night's camp on the Franklin River.

Right: The bridge was just a pile of timbers beside the track.

bigger than a bike would have been in for a long wait.

Backtracking past the road-closed sign we faced either a long diversion to get back on track or heading for the small town of Walpole. Steve was keen to check his phone again, so Walpole it was. I chatted to a bus driver who was doing the Albany-to-Perth coastal run without a single passenger while Steve did deals over the mobile.

Time was getting away from us. The Stirling Range was our goal for the second night, so bitumen to Denmark was the go. We missed some great dirt-road riding, but with the asphalt twisting its way inland following the south-coast hills, we didn't feel too bad.

Halfway between the two towns I saw an approaching semi trailing a fine mist. Experience had taught me I was soon to be covered in a layer of animal excrement, so ducking low I hoped it was sheep, not pigs. A coating of sheep shit isn't desirable, but it's a massage with moisturiser compared to pig crap.

Sheep it was, so, much relieved – and more than a little whiffy – we continued on to Denmark. I had the best coffee of the trip while Steve spent his time on the phone.

Crunch time

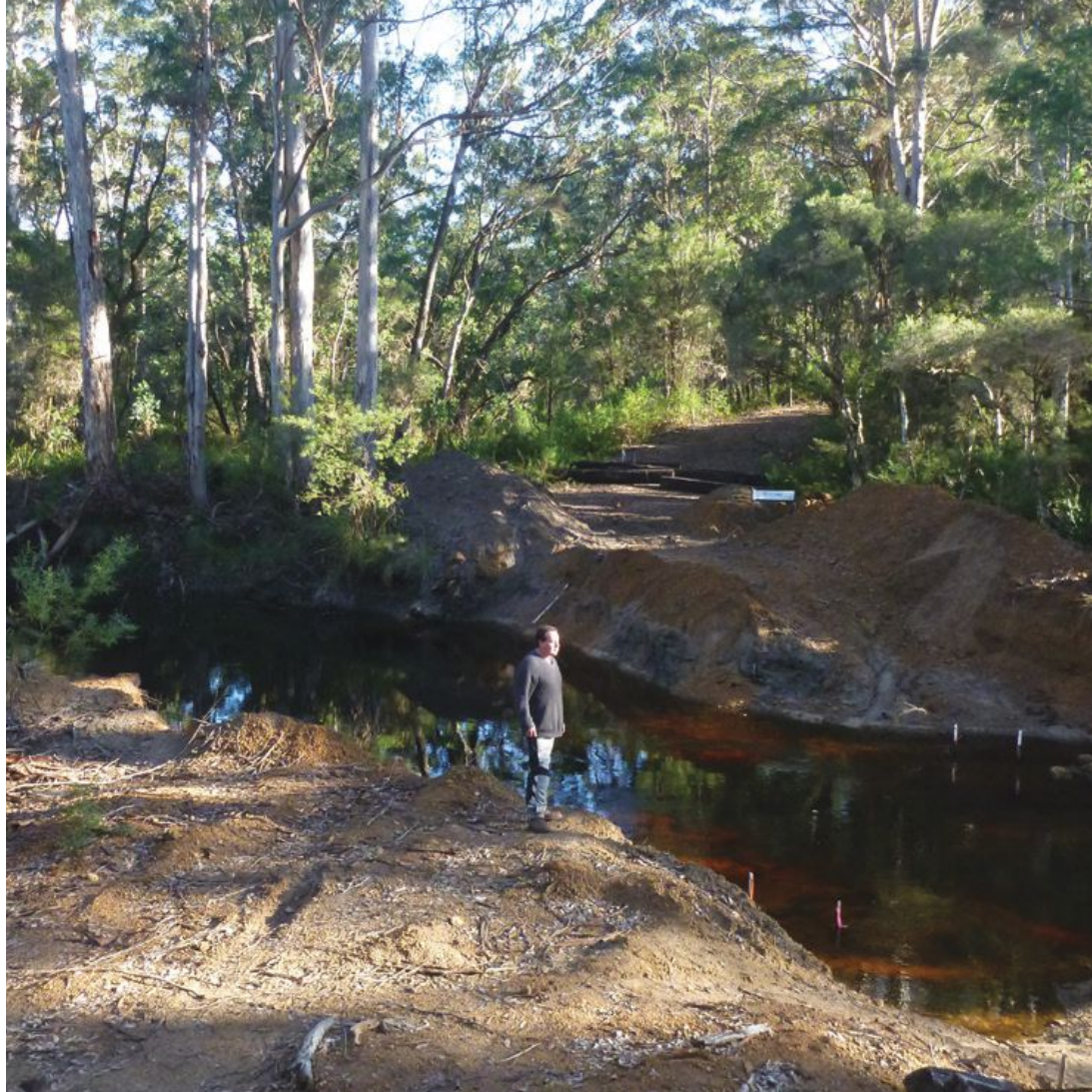
Albany is one of the most spectacular

towns in Australia. It sits in a cradle of steep hills and vivid, azure ocean with snow-white beaches. Everything an adventure rider would need abounds. But Albany locals have a saying: "If you don't like the weather, wait a minute. It'll change." It couldn't have been more true! Fortunately the BOM radar allowed us to avoid the worst of the rain.

From Albany the Stirling Range punctures the flat horizon, becoming a deeper blue as a rider approaches. Once again the big 1200 flew off, leaving me far behind, and once again Steve flew past the agreed turn. I couldn't catch him so I waited at the junction, watching road trains carting grain to the port of Albany rumbling by.

The plan was to take a track on the south side of the mountain range, but after 20km our route was blocked. Not wanting to spread the plant-killing fungal disease Dieback which has decimated the bushland of WA, we backtracked again, heading right into the middle of the range then turning north.

The Stirlings are a rolling band of hills and mountains, with jagged cliffs making up the top quarter. Riding the range is like being on a large roller coaster. Low vegetation covers it all except the dry gully beds that ►



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support a variety of small eucalyptus and mallee trees. Come spring the whole place becomes a carpet of colour as the wild flowers bloom, but as we were in autumn it showed its shades of green.

We camped that night in a wooded gully, and while the wind roared through the tree canopy above we nestled into the shelter below. It was still too breezy and dry for a fire though, and from the look on Steve's face as he ate in the growing darkness I got the impression he preferred his food without the occasional crunch of sand.

Fussy bugger!

Sew what

Waking before dawn to the sound of heavy rain wasn't a good start to the day, and it was made even worse by having to pack, dress and get on a bike in the continuing downpour. Steve's cheap tent leaked like a sieve, and he dumped it in the first bin we could find. It must've been the first time in years he actually camped in the rain.

I'd put on my new wet-weather gear,

and with my helmet on and earplugs in I thought I heard Steve say, "You look terrific!" which I thought a bit strange. It was only later when I saw the pictures I realised he was saying, "You look like a tosser!"

Fluoro gear can do that to a rider.

Low, grey, fast-moving clouds cut off the mountaintops, but the bleak weather didn't last. We were soon standing on the 'pegs, enjoying sunshine and blue skies, and heading north through what turned out to be a surprisingly large national park. There was plenty of wildlife, and along with the occasional washaway it meant we kept to a leisurely pace.

North of the Stirlings the real wheat belt unfolded before us. The only bush was on the road reserve, where gnarly red gums with their dark, flaky bark contrasted with the smooth white trunks of the wandoo trees. Salt scarred many of the lower-lying paddocks.

The rainfall had been patchy. Every farmer seemed to be out seeding, either bathing us in a fine dust as they dry seeded or filling

our nostrils with the lovely smell of freshly turned damp soil. Sheep nibbled on the little bits of green while their white lambs played around them. The air was cool but crisp and it was a good time to be alive and on a bike.

Separated

The old town of Cranbrook popped up after an hour and marked the end of the dirt on this trip. It also meant we were heading home.

The town had seen better days. Most of the old shops had long since closed their doors and only the general store was open. There's a mix of sadness and charm in these dying country towns. They're almost a time capsule of past decades, with faded old signs hanging above boarded-up shopfronts and big empty thoroughfares where a dog has little to worry about as it meanders down the middle of the main street.

We motored on to Franklin for an early lunch and the obligatory phone calls by a wood fire in the only eatery. Franklin's a different town. It's still small, but it's obviously getting a lift from the wine and olive farms surrounding it. This was the last fuel for quite a while, and for some reason I decided not to fill up.

Another conversation resulted in confusion and saw Steve and I separated. That was the end of our travelling as pair and I rode home solo.

Capacity

Wouldn't you know it? About 50km out of Franklin my fuel light came on.

I dropped my speed to 70kph and found it to be a lovely way to travel. I was doing a lot of maths with each passing mile. Travelling slowly turned out to be a wise move as the area was full of wildlife, and the smell of rotting road kill was constant. Half way to Boyanup one of the few cars I'd seen coming towards me cleaned up an emu 50m in front of me. I rode through a cloud of feathers before I could even react.

The country I passed through was fabulous rolling, green farmland, with big expanses of forest, the odd freshwater lake and so few people. I'll be back there to explore, for sure.

Arriving in Boyanup on a Sunday arvo found the whole town closed except one fuel outlet, and I managed to squeeze 16 litres into my tank – which has a 16-litre capacity. Talk about travelling on wind and hope.

A quick check of the BOM radar showed a



Left: The only bush was on the road reserve.

Above: The author's 800 came into its own off the bitumen. On the tar the 1200 would disappear.

Below: A leisurely pace turned out to be very enjoyable.

large cold front, heavy with rain, approaching the west coast, so the last 150km turned into a race to beat the weather.

Home base

Travelling bent low over the tank I flew towards Donnybrook as the clouds above became heavier. I made one last stop to load up on apples at a farm stall and as I got off the bike a cop flew past! Phew. Those apples saved me a lot of money. It was the only cop seen in over 1500km.

Donnybrook sits in a valley and is WA's apple town. It's a great spot to stop for a break, but on this day the race between me and the rain was on. Hunched low over the tank I gave the 800 all the right wrist I dared, flying over the last few hills. I'd just pulled into the garage as the heavens opened up with rain so heavy my dog wouldn't come over to greet me.

Later in the evening I heard from Steve, who'd made it home safe and dry too.

Though we did have to bypass some fabulous country, it was a great trip. Next time the plan is to have more time in one place. **ADV**



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Off-road test



BMW F800GSA

Believe it or not, an even better bike for 2017.

Image: Craig Bernard

We admit astonishment. We were such huge fans of BMW's F800GS Adventure we were expecting a c'n'g makeover for 2017. For the uninitiated, 'c'n'g' stands for 'colour and graphics' and before the recent wave of technology advances, c'n'g upgrades were fairly common as an excuse to call a bike a new model, especially in off-roaders.

But that's not the case with the F800GSA. We should've realised after six months or so with the excellent 2016 F800GS that we were in for some real change on the GSA.

The tough thing to try and explain is, the changes themselves aren't huge. It's that the result feels way out of proportion to some relatively small tweaks.

Smooth

We can cover a lot of ground by saying the mechanicals on the 2017 F800GSA are give or take unchanged from 2016. The parallel-twin, liquid-cooled, 798cc motor with its twin overhead cams is the same, as is the six-speed box and chain drive to the rear wheel. BMW marketing material points out a new end cap on the stainless-steel pipe, but without some careful dyno runs we can't be sure that's making a lot of difference to the performance.

What's making all the difference – as far as our seat-of-the-pants impressions go – is the ride-by-wire throttle and ignition remapping.

We loved the way the motor felt and responded on the previous models, but we know plenty of owners were unhappy about a jerky or sudden initial response from low throttle openings. That's definitely gone now. This motor is as smooth as butter from the first touch of the twist grip and offers a very predictable and usable power



delivery right through the rev range. It still offers a stronger punch at lower revs than up near the redline, but that's an absolute gift in off-road situations where a rider's trying to juggle his way through a tricky situation.

That's the single thing that hit us most about the new GSA. The throttle allows extremely precise rider input, and the motor's response to that rider input is very smooth.

Why not?

With ride-by-wire now doing the bizzo we were a little stumped as to why the 800GSA wasn't allowed cruise control as well. We don't see it as a big deal, but we admit to feeling a little let down. On the plus side, the 800GSA offers two modes: 'Road' and 'Rain'. Our test bike had the optional 'Dynamic' upgrade so we had 'Enduro' and 'Enduro Pro' modes as well. Rain has a more gentle throttle response, and Enduro and Enduro Plus offer more wheelspin and less aggressive ABS. We spent a lot of time in Enduro Pro mode – which shows up on

the dash as 'Enduro +' – and we reckon we could pretty much live with the bike in that mode for everything except extremes like deep sand. It felt great. The rear ABS is switched off, the front is quite aggressive, throttle response is sharp – as opposed to 'a little lazy' in the standard Enduro mode – and in nearly all situations the traction control allowed the rider to make decisions right up to the very point of idiocy. At that stage we were glad the bike took over.

There have been some c'n'g updates and we liked them. To put it in a nutshell, the GSA kind of feels like a mini 1200GS. The shape of the front end, screen and air-box cover made us feel as though we were on a more compact version of the flagship dualsporter. We think it was mostly the shape of the plastic components after being used to the slim F800GS, and we grew to like it a lot. ▶

Top: The bike feels a little like a mini 1200.

Below left: As smooth as butter from the first touch.

Below: The pannier racks shape around a 24-litre tank.





Image: Craig Bernard

There's also a new design to the instrument cluster, including a Malfunction Indicator Light. We were worried the light would indicate in our direction every time we went near the bike, but apparently it doesn't work that way.

Set and forget

ABS is standard, as it is on all BMWs, and Automatic Stability Control and Electronic Suspension Adjustment are optional. We had the ESA, and we honestly couldn't

feel a great deal of difference in the settings. We caught ourselves thinking, "Yeah. Maybe that's softer/harder," but without a set of controlled conditions and repeated runs we couldn't swear to it. We can't even remember which of the three settings we left it on.

We did wind up the preload on the shock to the max, and it's easy. Thanks to a hand adjuster on the right-hand side of the bike it's a simple matter to wind that puppy up or down as the situation or bike load dictates. We wound it up all the way for maximum preload because we were gaunching the centrestand into the deck on G-outs. The rear became noticeably firmer, and to be honest, we liked it.

It leaves no room for adjustment with a luggage load or pillion of course, but we had neither of those things during our time with the bike.

We actually felt the stock suspension was pretty good for the bike's intended purpose. We rode the bike for a couple of days on the GS Safari, and we reckon that's exactly the type of terrain and riding the designers had in mind for the 800GSA. Under those conditions, the overwhelming majority of owners will find the stock suspension good. We offer as justification for our behaviour that if you give us an engine as good as this one, with a noticeable improvement in throttle response, well...we're going to have a go, aren't we?

Top: The F800GSA is a premium dualsporter.

Below: Spotties! Brilliant!



Build it

There's a heap of BMW-branded accessories for the 800GSA. Here's a rundown...

- ✓ Alloy cases, including two cases, carrier and locks \$1359
- ✓ Alloy topcase, including backrest, luggage rack and lock \$1004
- ✓ Inner bags for alloy panniers \$400
- ✓ Inner bags for alloy topcase \$200
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- ✓ Seat, low, black (860mm) \$539
- ✓ BMW Motorrad Navigator V including mount kit \$1526
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At sensible speeds, especially sightseeing and enjoying some undulating, well-used dirt roads with the occasional cattle grid and rocky creek bed, the suspension front and rear coped well.

All bikes should have brakes as strong and as nice to use as these. We've long thought BMW was the first to really sort out its ABS, and we felt it worked extremely well on this bike. Braking was excellent front and rear.

Still love it

We've often said how much we enjoy the 800GSA. We were a little distracted by the GS earlier this year, and for a moment our loyalty to the Adventure model might've wavered, but now there's no doubt in our minds at all. This bike is still one of the front-runners in the adventure market for us. As much as we enjoyed riding the old model, the new throttle set up lets us enjoy this model even more, and that's saying something.

The ergos feel the same to us, and details like the enduro footpegs, the flip-over brake pedal, engine crash bars and spotties (which we didn't try at night) are big bonuses to an adventure rider.

Of course, the biggest bonus of all is the 24-litre fuel capacity. We're not sure what the range on the new model will be, but 450km was safe before the throttle mods, and there were plenty of reports of 550km and 600km from a single tank on the old model on both this ride and the GS Safari Enduro. We wouldn't be surprised if the range has increased again on the new model.

The F800GSA is a rocket on the road, comfortable over long distances, very capable off-road, and a very refined and high-performing package.

It's still right up near the top of our 'Bikes We'd Love To Own' list. ▶

Top: Still one of our favourite adventure bikes.

Below: More protection is part of the GSA package.

Below right: Love that flip-over brake pedal. It makes it so easy to set for sitting or standing. The footpegs are a sensible size and shape.



BIKE SPECS

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Engine type: Water-cooled, four-stroke, in-line, two-cylinder, four valves per cylinder, two overhead camshafts, dry-sump lubrication

Displacement: 798cc

Bore/stroke: 82mm x 75.6mm

Compression ratio: 12.0:1

Rated output: 63kW (85hp) at 7500rpm

Maximum torque: 83Nm at 5750 rpm

Engine control: BMS-KP

Emission control: Closed-loop, three-way catalytic converter

Clutch: Multi-plate wet clutch. Mechanically operated

Starter: Electric 0.9 kW

Transmission: Constant mesh, six-speed gearbox

Rear-wheel drive: Chain

Frame: Tubular steel, engine self-supporting

Front suspension: Upside-down Ø43mm telescopic fork

Rear suspension: One-piece cast, double-sided aluminium swingarm

Brakes front: Hydraulically activated twin disc brake

Brake rear: Hydraulically activated single Ø265mm disc brake

Fuel capacity: 24 litres

Length: 2305mm

Width including mirrors: 895mm

Seat height: 890mm

Total length: 2305mm

Weight, road-ready: 232kg



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2017 GS Safari

The BMW GS Safari is one of our favourite events. The organisation is superb, we're always treated like VIPs, and, best of all, the riding is brilliant. Even when we think we know an area reasonably well, we're always happily surprised at how the GS Safari team can find new trails and roads we've never seen.

Aside from that, the comfort of knowing the team surrounding you on the ride includes BMW techs, riding instructors, doctors, a tyre-changing crew, sweep vehicles and 180 or so BMW enthusiasts is hard to beat.

For 2016 *Adventure Rider Magazine* was rapt to be invited on the GS Safari Enduro – see issue #19 – and had a ball. To test ride the 2017 F800GSA, BMW Motorrad organised for us to ride the first two days of the GS Safari, kicking off on Queensland's Gold Coast, stretching down into northern NSW for an overnighter at Tenterfield, then heading back into Queensland to finish up in Toowoomba.

It's country we thought we knew well, but we were left in awe at some of the fabulous backroads the GS Safari team uncovered. It was glorious.

Routes were available on a supplied route sheet with a detailed map and as GPX files for those who wanted them. The route was also arrowed with the bright-orange fluoro arrows which are pretty much a signature of the GS Safari these days.

We write a lot about how good the GS Safari and Safari Enduro rides are, and we expect we'll be writing about them for a long time to come.

We hope so, anyway.

Thanks BMW Motorrad. You guys really know what dualsport riding is all about.

ADV



1: Shane Booth (left) and Chris Urquhart, BMW Off Road Rider Training coaches, ran a school before the GS Safari kicked off. Craig Bernard was there as well, his shoulder completely recovered after the GS Safari Enduro mishap.

2: Briefings were scheduled every night. Miles Davis held the crowd's attention. The video crew is for a five-part series being made for free-to-air television.

3: Craig 'Benno' Bennett, spinning spanners, overseeing the technical care of nearly 200 bikes, and looking like he was loving it. We're so jealous of that Triple Black GS. That's the second time he's showed up on one of those.

Main: Rocky River Road near Bonalbo was glorious. The riding was a little technical and the scenery a lot mindblowing.

Left: The morning of the second day. How could you not stop and take a pic?

Above: Toonumbar Dam near Kyogle. Another great pic opportunity. One of many.



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Tubeless repair

Advances in technology mean we can all enjoy standards of performance that wouldn't have been out of place on world-championship road-race bikes not too long ago. But no matter how flash the performance of your newest, most exotic bike may be, a good, old-fashioned flat tyre is the same shitty,

pain-in-the-bum problem it's always been.

A lot of big-capacity bikes run tubeless tyres these days, and in the case of a straightforward puncture, the repair can be fast and fuss-free. BMW Off Road Training instructor Craig Bernard received a warning from the tyre-pressure alert on his R1200GS. He pulled over to check and, sure enough, found a nail

driven through the carcass of his rear tyre.

His repair had him going in short order and was a good demonstration on the process of repairing a punctured tubeless tyre. We were lucky enough to be standing around and wanted an excuse for not helping, so we snapped a couple of pics.

Here's how it's done...



1. First locate the problem. In this case it was a nail. Don't remove the object yet!



2. Get all your repair gear laid out and ready to use. Craig carries worms, but whether you use worms or plugs the process will be mostly the same. Make sure the worm is threaded through the applicator or the plug inserted in the gun ready to go. Make sure the glue is open and ready to use.



3. With everything ready, remove the nail, screw or whatever from the tyre carcass. You want to keep as much air in the tyre as you can – that's why we said to leave the nail in there until everything was ready. As quickly as possible, use the reaming tool to ream the puncture hole. Treat that baby rough. Give it a right good scraping, but get it done fast. Some plug kits say the puncture won't need reaming. Do whatever the instructions in your kit direct.



4. Whack a big dollop of glue on the worm. Shoot some onto the puncture if you want. There's no such thing as too much glue. Then drive the worm/plug in through the tyre carcass. Make sure the plug or worm goes completely through the tyre. Once completely through, pull the insertion tool back and clear of the tyre.



5. If you've done the job correctly you'll have a short tail sticking out of the tyre and glue all over creation. Dribble some water from your CamleBak or drink bottle over the tail to ensure it's sealed. If it hasn't, keep sticking plugs or worms in there until it is sealed. It's not uncommon for an ugly repair to need several worms or plugs.



6. Trim the plug tail. Don't try and trim it level with the tyre carcass. Leave a few millimetres sticking out, but no more than a few millimetres.

If everything's gone well you can then pump the tyre back up to pressure and catch up with the field.
If it hasn't gone well?

You may need to abandon the whole plug-style repair and fit a tube. That's a much tougher job, and we'll deal with that next issue.

ADV

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Remember this?



Built using the DR650SE motor, the Freewind offered high levels of comfort with legendary reliability. This one also has a big-bore kit installed.

Suzuki *Freewind*

In 1996 Suzuki released the DR650SE to enthusiastic Australian punters. The bike is still around today and it's more popular than ever. That same year, Suzuki released a milder, more road-oriented dualsporter called the XF650 Freewind. The XF650 went the way of the wind, but there's at least one very nice example still around.

Mal McConnell's been part of the Australian motorcycle industry for a very long time. He's raced road and off-road motorcycles – and won – he was a pioneer competing on quads, he's owned bike dealerships and he's managed race teams. He's still a keen competitor.

But after all those decades nurturing a passion for motorcycles and fierce competition, Mal and his



Above: Mal McConnell is a big fan of the Freewind, and is very happy to have a great example.

wife Karen have settled down a little. They're still in the thick of things with their on-line store Adventure Bike Australia, and while we were ordering a few parts Mal jolted us back to the mid-1990s when he told us he had a Suzuki Freewind.

"I believe the XF650 was probably before its time," said the happy Gold Coaster. "When you think about it, it was probably pretty modern back then with its nice speedo and smooth finish. It happened before



anyone took any notice of, or even cared about, adventure bikes."

Mal and Karen had Suzuki dealerships going back to the early 1980s, and for the few years the Freewind was available they didn't sell many, but Mal thought the bike was a great concept. "A lot of people thought it odd to ride a half-looking-road-cum-trailbike," he laughed. "They couldn't get their head around it back then. I rode one and it was great in the tight, bumpy stuff. I rounded up sports bikes on the road back then, and I do the same today."

When a Freewind became available in good shape a few of years ago, he grabbed it – original 1996 green-and-white Queensland numberplate and all. Even by today's standards he feels the Freewind is a great all-rounder.

"I love the thing," he said, gazing lovingly across several other immaculately cared-for bikes in his garage.

"It does everything. I pillion on it all the time and I do overnights via back-roads. I'm trying to keep it to more road-going stuff and not wreck it, but it's still a great back-roads tourer available at a budget price."



Above: A digital speedo! That was a big deal in 1996 when the bike was released.

Above right: Dougal spent four years riding his Freewind around the world with his wife as a pillion.

Below: Good protection for the rider and high comfort levels.

Good financial sense

Mal's Freewind is in great condition. It's kept clean, shining and well-serviced, and while it's mostly still stock, Mal did fit a Procycle 790 big-bore kit, new tyres and had the suspension serviced. For a bike that cost a measly \$2900, complete with an incredibly detailed service history, paperwork and even brochures from the time, this thing looks and feels mint. We know how it feels because Mal was busting for us to ride the bike and see what he'd been enjoying.

We had a grin a mile wide when we returned. The Suzuki was so damn smooth and civilised. It was a blast in the Gold Coast traffic and scooting around some small backroads. The digital speedo and the smooth, vibration-free feel was balanced nicely by the throaty induction roar and punch in the small of the back when the throttle was cracked open. We could clearly see why Mal became so animated when he talked about the Freewind.

The motor is very clearly and obviously a DR650SE unit, right down to the pipe, and that can only be a good thing. Parts and maintenance on a bike like this one would be as about as affordable as these things could be, and the comfort level is very high.

A winner

Just to fill in a few historical facts, the Freewind was available in Australia in 1996, 1997 and 1998. It retailed then for around \$9600 plus on roads and Suzuki marketed



Image: Mal McConnell

the bike as 'The Escape Machine'. A pair of Mikuni BSR32s feed in fuel – we grinned like fools when we pulled on the choke – and, stock, the 644cc four-stroke single fed its power through a five-speed box. As we said, it's pretty much the same mechanical spec the DR650 still runs today. Fuel capacity is 18.5 litres in a plastic tank hidden under a cover with a glossy paint job.

Mal has favourite memory of Dougal, a customer who pillioned his wife 130,000km around the world on a '97 model and took four years to do it.

We love seeing a bike that holds great memories being ridden looked and after, and this Suzuki clearly qualifies.

Is Mal a happy owner? We reckon he is.

He set up a Freewind banner on his fence for us to see when we arrived, and pointed out, "It has a bit of cult following in Europe, and I think it's something special having such a nice one sitting in my garage."

ADV

Basket case

Do you have something a bit wild or different in an adventure bike? Or maybe a basket case you've nursed back to its former glory? We'd love to see it and tell the story. Send an email to tom@maynemediamedia.com.au and tell us about it.





Words: Craig Thompson.
Images: Angela Bruce

Bali by the Backroads

Third time's a beauty!

Craig Thompson and partner Kim had a hectic year at work and knew just what they needed – a motorcycling tour of Bali. They knew this because they'd already ridden the Britton Adventures tour – twice.

Bali By The Backroads is a great little break away from reality. Mike and Angela of Britton Adventures have been visiting Bali since the 1980s, and the Bali they know and love is not one of tourist-filled beaches, pub-crawls, and wall-to-wall shopping stalls.

Instead we spent the days riding small lanes, roads, and trails to see, first-hand, the day-to-day goings on of life in Bali.

As on our previous Bali tours, our fellow riders were loads of fun. Some we already knew from the adventure-riding scene in NZ, ▶

Top: Bali By The Backroads tours small lanes, roads, and trails to see the day-to-day goings on of life in Bali.

Below left: The atmosphere encourages lighthearted behaviour.

Below: Riders travelled alongside rice paddies and other plantations, and right into the heart of rural Bali.



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BALI BY THE BACKROADS

while those we didn't gave us an opportunity to make some fantastic new friends. We all shared the desire to have a good time and a great motorcycling adventure holiday in Bali.

Even though we'd been on two previous Bali By The Backroads tours we were delighted to find the route included loads of new riding for us. Mike and Angela's friend and colleague, Wayan Sammy – he's a Balinese Sammy Davis Junior lookalike – was our lead rider and guide. Apparently he's the master at hunting out new roads and trails, and in 2016 he didn't disappoint. His scouting had added more than 10km of narrow jungle trails, new even to Mike and Angela. These trails took us alongside rice paddies and other plantations, and right into the heart of rural Bali.

Drink it in

One particular trail was well off the beaten track and not widely used, and it was on this section there was an incident. The group had stopped and Peter was taking a photo when suddenly a large banana palm toppled over right on top of him, knocking him over and pinning him to the ground. Fortunately he'd kept his helmet on and this certainly was a factor in him not being seriously hurt. It took several of the others in the group to remove the tree so Peter could get up. He was winded but okay.

The tour wasn't just about riding, though. One day we visited a seaside chocolate factory in an idyllic setting of quaint bamboo buildings and giant swings suspended from waving coconut palms. On another day Wayan's wife and daughter cooked a delicious, authentic Balinese lunch and served it to us in the family's compound. We also took a ride up to and around one of the bigger volcanoes on the island. On our return journey we stopped and sampled Cafe Luwak – the world's most expensive coffee, made famous in the movie *The Bucket List*.

Evenings were spent dining out at some of the island's many amazing restaurants, road-tested by Mike and Angela over the years. The local beer, Bintang, proved a popular thirst quencher, although some of our group were more inclined to be seduced by the array of tropical cocktails on offer.

Can't get enough

The accommodation was incredible. We stayed at places where we stepped from our own room to a private swimming pool and a lush tropical garden. At one destination we had wide sea views and at another we watched squirrels romp about in the mature trees that lined the ravine where the hotel was situated.

"Aren't you bored with doing the same tour three times?" some of our friends asked. The answer is a firm, "No". If money were no object we'd probably join Angela and Mike in Bali every year!

ADV



Above: A wild turnout. The kids look like they're loving it, though.



Above: Bamboo's strength, flexibility and four-year growth cycle make a great, renewable and versatile building material. The Balinese are masters of bamboo construction.

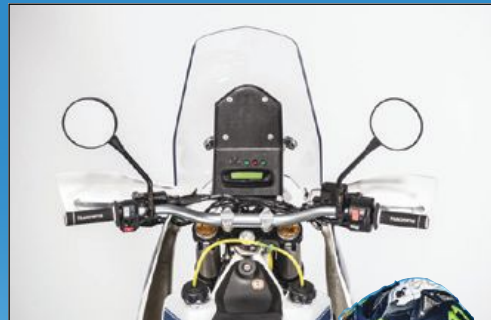
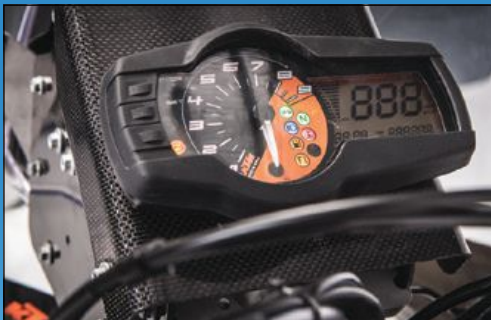


Above: Accommodation was incredible. Settings like this one in Amed were breathtaking.

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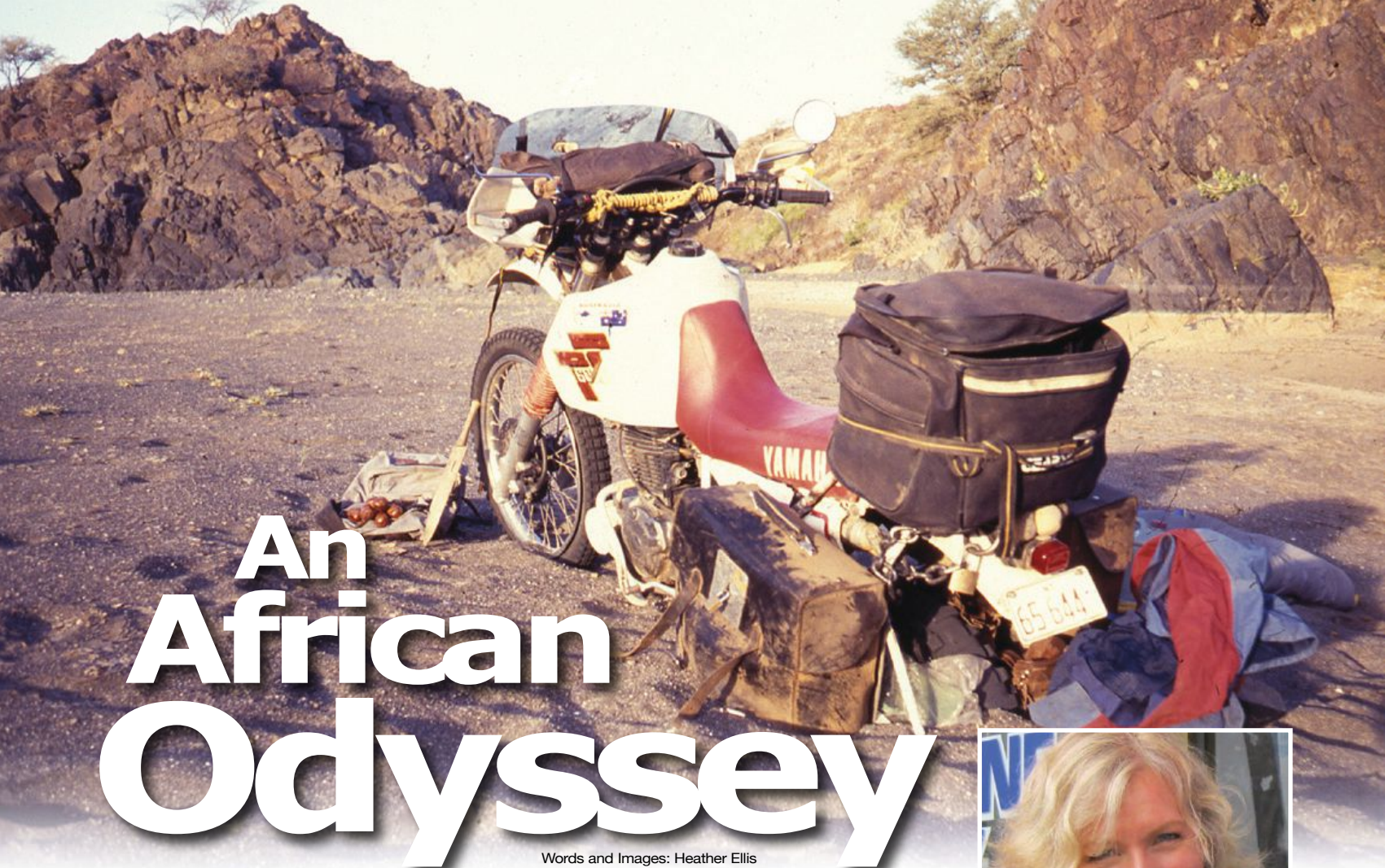
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An African Odyssey

Words and Images: Heather Ellis

A ride across Africa became an extraordinary adventure that changed Heather Ellis' life forever.

The snap decision was a light-bulb moment at a barbeque in Australia's Northern Territory. As soon as I blurted out, "Wouldn't it be great to ride a motorcycle across Africa," I knew I'd do it.

The year was 1992 and I was working at the Ranger uranium mine on the fringe of Kakadu National Park in the Northern

Territory. This was before the plethora of websites, blogs, magazines and books filled with every detail one needs to embark on a motorcycle adventure. Even so, once the planning began (a process of 12 months), everything fell into place and the philosophy of 'everything happens for a reason and everything will always work out' became a central theme for my journey: a friend gave me a dog-eared copy of Ted Simon's classic motorcycle travel memoir *Jupiter's Travels*; a German motorcycle traveller who'd just ridden through Africa turned up on my doorstep and his advice was invaluable; and when I bought my new Yamaha TT600, right there on the shop floor was a second-hand frame and set of



Top: The TT600 bogged in a dry riverbed in Northern Kenya.

Left: Loading the TT600 on to a cargo ship in Fremantle for the 10-day voyage across the Indian Ocean to South Africa.

Below: The author and Kaoru from Japan with her Suzuki FX200 on the shores of Lake Malawi. She was the only other woman encountered travelling alone by motorcycle.





later, mechanically-minded boyfriends to maintain and fix my bikes. It was this lack of knowledge that caused me the most fear about my trip in those early days of planning. But the idea to travel Africa by motorcycle gripped my very soul and nothing could deter me, not even the barrage of doubts from friends ►

heavy-duty leather panniers for \$500. It was custom-made for a Swiss guy who'd just finished his ride around Australia. With a few minor adjustments the frame and panniers fitted the TT600 perfectly.

Sum of the parts

Realistically, I should've chosen a smaller, lighter bike. The TT350 had nearly the same power as the 600 and would've been much easier to ride. The TT600 was also kick-start, but with auto decompression I soon mastered the art of firing up the beast.

It proved to be the perfect motorcycle for Africa. Its single-cylinder, big-bore engine had more than enough grunt to carry me and my gear up and over mountain roads, through mud and sand and over rocks on roads that resembled goat tracks. With a dry weight of 120kg it was also light enough, once I'd off-loaded my luggage, to cross rivers in a canoe or be hoisted up on top of a truck or train. I also fitted a 21-litre Acerbis tank which, depending on fuel quality, gave me a range of 450km.

It was the very last of the pure enduro models and at the time was the bike of choice for the Paris-Dakar. With its deep, almost primeval sound that said 'power and strength' this bike became my companion, my loyal friend and my protector. Yes, we made 'the bond'.

I was also lucky enough to receive support from Mobil, Yamaha and Tsubaki. Mobil provided free petrol and oil from depots throughout Africa. Yamaha supplied a bevy of spare parts and Tsubaki provided four motorcycle chains.

Service centred

I'd ridden motorcycles since I was eight years old, first growing up on a sheep station in outback Australia, then on a farm on the east coast, and more recently exploring the hidden gorges of Kakadu. But I'd never travelled on a motorcycle and I had no mechanical skills. I'd always had my dad, my brother and,

Top left: Outside the Cold Drink Hotel, Loiyangalani, near Lake Turkana, northern Kenya.

Above: Hitching a lift with fisherman on Lake Turkana, Northern Kenya.

Below: On the mud highway from Bukavu to Kisangani. There was always someone to help.





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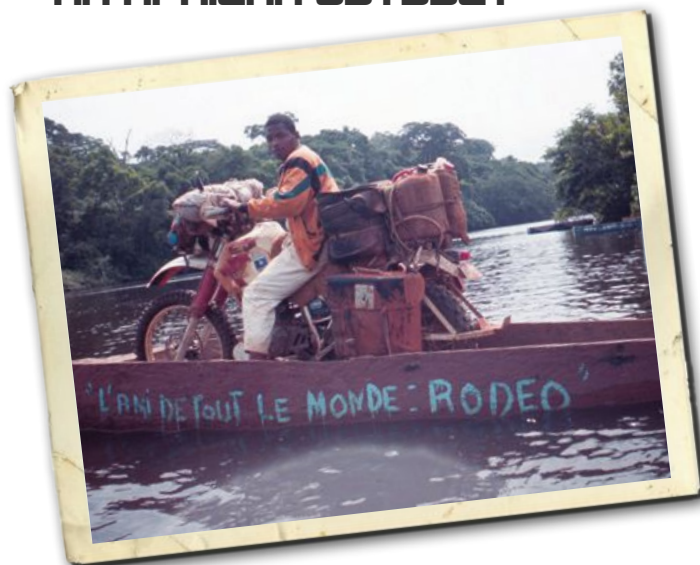
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and workmates (from my travels through Africa and Central Asia I soon learnt the basics of motorcycle mechanics and today service all my own bikes).

Stand alone

I must admit it was with a great sense of relief I found a travelling companion two months before departure. A workmate decided to join me, and even though we hardly knew each other, I thought our common desire to travel Africa would make us suitable travelling companions. Not so. For five tension-filled months we travelled from Jabiru, down the West Australian coast to Perth, boarded a cargo ship in Fremantle for the 10-day crossing to Durban in South Africa, then rode north to Kenya. We parted ways in Nairobi. He went by cargo ship to Europe from Mombasa and I ventured into Africa alone.

And this is when my odyssey really began.

A word here about travelling companions. Back in 1993 there were quite a few people travelling Africa by motorcycle. In fact, at one campsite on the shores of Lake Malawi, there were 10 – four Australian, one New Zealander, two Swiss, one German and two Japanese (the only women being one of the Japanese and myself). Cape MacClear in Malawi is one of those key meeting points for travellers of all descriptions. Another was Victoria Falls in Zimbabwe and also Mama Roche's backyard campsite in Nairobi, Kenya. When I arrived at these places, it was just accepted we'd hang out together. We were motorcyclists: we were of the same 'tribe'.

These days it appears there are literally hundreds, if not thousands, travelling the world by motorcycle, including many women.

So if you're worried about travelling alone, don't be. You won't be alone for

long. In fact, I suggest you're better off alone as you'll have a far more interesting experience, and a far richer cultural experience, as the locals will be less inclined to approach when you're with another rider or in a group. They'll think you're always okay because you've got a friend. But when you're alone, they'll want to help you. And this is 'ubuntu'. It's a Bantu word from South Africa that literally means 'I am because we

are', or the universal bond that connects us all as one. It became the title of my book because it encapsulated the very essence of my journey. Rather than harm me, people always wanted to help me and offer me food or a place to sleep. This kindness of strangers echoes many travellers' experiences.

In a word

I first came across the word ubuntu in Cape Town when a young African woman asked me, "White woman, why you travel Africa?"

Her voice demanded my attention, as if it were the voice of one who rallies others to fight, and, this being a year before apartheid ended, I thought she may have something to do with the anti-apartheid movement.

"I felt drawn here," I replied. "There's a kind of humanness to Africa we don't have in the west."

"Ubuntu," she'd smiled knowingly. "You will find

the way of ubuntu as you travel Africa. The African people will help you."

From the very beginning of my travels, and especially once I was on my own, my journey quickly unfolded as a spiritual exploration of a search for some greater, unspoken meaning. This too is not uncommon for those that travel independently.

Girl's guide

There are no distractions when you travel alone and I believe when this happens you begin to search for meaning in how events unfold.

As my journey progressed I began to search for meaning in the coincidences and chance encounters that came my way with frequent, almost daily, regularity. I soon began to accept these, which only fed my positive attitude. Because no harm ever came to me, I didn't expect it to. Without another to ask, "Should I go this way or that way, do this or that," I relied on my intuition to help me make all my decisions.

But this isn't to say I always made the right decisions.

I was riding to Lake Turkana, an alkaline lake surrounded by inhospitable desert and scrubland, where my intention was to see



Top: Crossing the Ntem River at Gabon into Cameroon. The author was nervously sitting in another little boat being rowed across this river.

Above right: Hot, tired, thirsty and not showered for days, but blissfully happy at a rest stop in Mali where herders were watering their cattle.

Right: Fifteen months and countless punctures developed the puncture-repair expertise. There's not much tread on that tyre.



the fossils of our early ancestors. I wanted to stand on that very spot where we all came from. But to do so, I was advised to take a guide, and we negotiated a fee of US\$150 which he would waive if I took a short detour to search for sapphires. According to the guide the detour was no more than 50km. It became an eight-day adventure that left us dehydrated and weak from hunger until we reached the lake and were rescued by Turkana fisherman.

No cheating

After risking my life and surviving that experience, I questioned what I was doing in Africa. I considered going home, but the moment I thought about doing that I couldn't give up. My only thought was an overwhelming sense of expectation for my journey and what I would discover. I rode on through Uganda and across Zaire, one of the most lawless and difficult-to-travel countries on the planet. I rode through West Africa and then to Mauritania. All up, after starting in Australia in February 1993, I rode 42,000km through 19 countries on my slow meander into the soul of Africa. And while I encountered many challenges, wild and remote places and extraordinary people, I was embraced by all. I was shown ubuntu. But there's a twist to this story and the final pages of the book will leave you numb. Staple the pages shut so you aren't tempted to read the ending!

Just the beginning

Everything I awakened to through my motorcycle travels across Africa has never left me. That journey continues today.

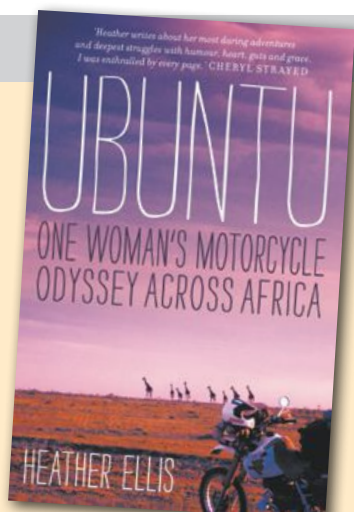
I've become an advocate for motorcycle road safety as a member of the Victorian Government's Motorcycle Expert Advisory Panel, as well as advising the government on road safety measures, our aim is to also change public perception of motorcycling from one of temporary Australians to one of being part of the solution to traffic congestion. I am also a founding member of the IRG (Independent Riders Group), a motorcycle road-safety political lobby group. If you want to get involved, you can find out more at www.facebook.com/IndependentRidersGroup/

These days I live in the Yarra Ranges where some of the best motorcycling roads are right on my doorstep. Tomorrow, (in about 10 years when my three boys are grown), I'll dust off my beloved TT and our odyssey will continue. We'll ride from South to North America and beyond.

Just like Africa, we will go where and when the wind blows us. Our journey, once again, will be a slow meander as we explore further that search for some greater 'unspoken' meaning.

ADV

If you'd like to get some detail on Heather's life-changing ride, *Ubuntu: One Woman's Motorcycle Odyssey Across Africa* is published by Nero/Black Inc and is available in all book stores and online for \$29.99. You can also purchase a signed copy, and read more about Heather, including an excellent detailed rundown of equipment and preparation, at www.heather-ellis.com.



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RideADV WR250R

The hardest-working WR250Rs in the country are probably the ones used by RideADV to recce courses. Main man Greg Yager himself can spin a spanner and ride a bit, so when it comes to preparing Yamaha's tiddler 250cc four-stroke for serious, fast-paced adventure work – with emphasis on the 'work' – Greg's got the holeshot (as our motocross chums would say). Yamaha Motor Australia had Greg build a bike as a model for Yamaha customers to work from, and *Adventure Rider Magazine* was lucky enough to get a look at it.

There's a market building in small-bore adventure bikes.

New releases at the recent industry showcase, EICMA, had most of the established brands offering some kind of 250cc or 300cc off-roader in variations ranging from fun dualsport bikes to semi-serious rallye lookalikes.

Yamaha's well in front of the pack. The WR250R has been around since 2008, and although

it was offered originally as a trail-bike alternative to the race-ready WR250F, it's proven itself nearly as capable as the enduro bike and all-but indestructible. The 250R also has big service intervals and, weighing in at just over 135kg, it's won itself a legion of fans – including the staff of *Adventure Rider Magazine*.

There are plenty of great Yamaha genuine and aftermarket accessories available, and the stock bike itself is a ball-tearer. It's a great

platform to begin working on any number of specialist builds, but we're all about adventure, and so is the chainsaw-carrying, big-distance-busting Greg Yager. We had a good chat to Greg about the WR250R back in issue #07, but we were keen to find ▶



Insert: We had a close look at Greg Yager's RideADV WR250Rs in issue #07.



out what he'd discovered over the past couple of years of – it has to be said – some hard riding on the WR250R.

Quick twist

We were lucky enough to get a short ride on this WR250R, and ad man Mitch grabbed the opportunity to run the bike at the Southern Congregation, so we can say

with absolute confidence it's a cracker. It's incredibly nimble, has a real enduro feel about it, and it had us busting to point it at some tight single trail or hang the rear out on loose gravel. It has that kind of feel.

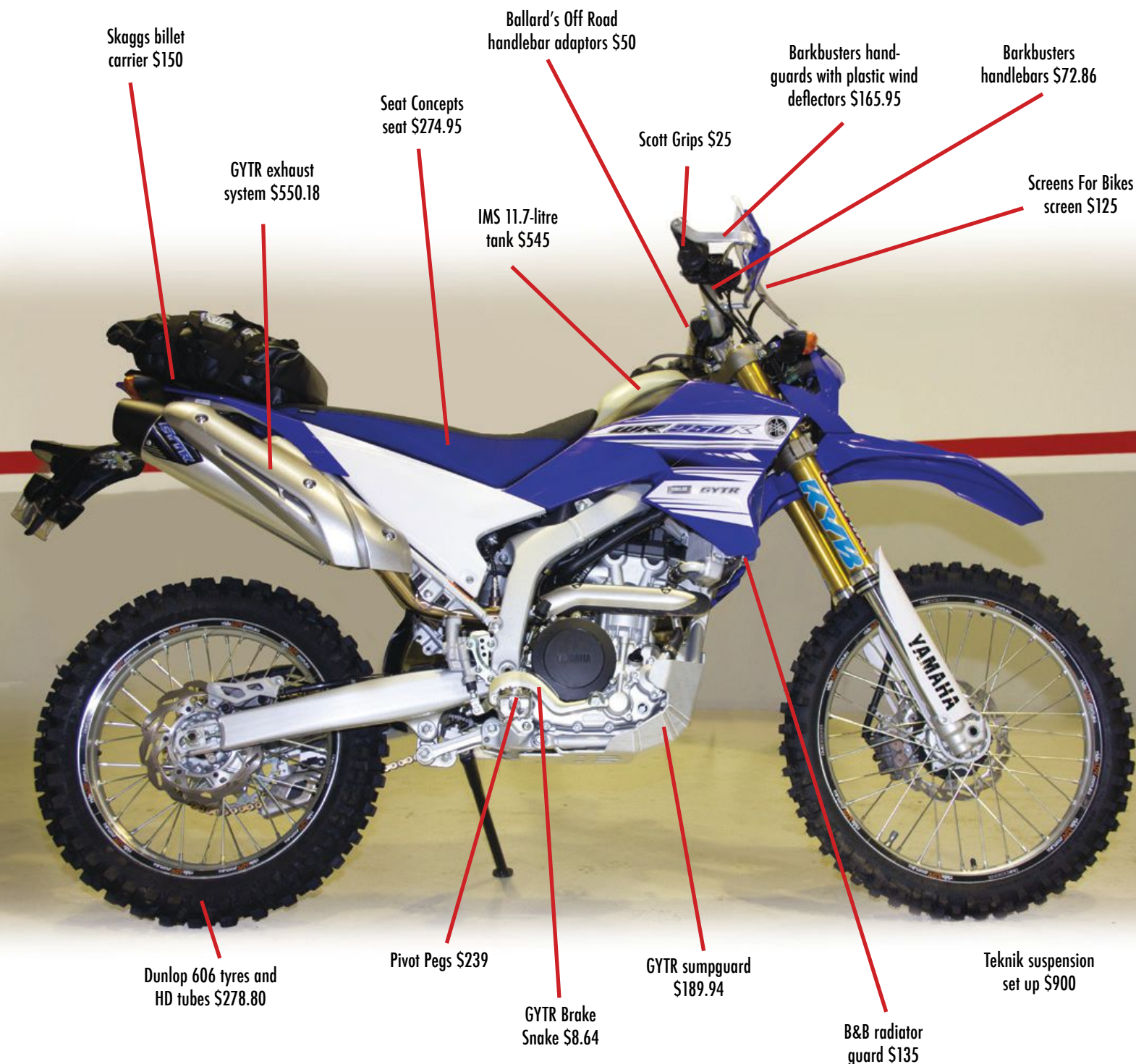
We also know from personal experience that although some may turn their nose up at a small-bore for long distance, the bike will go forever. The durability of the motor

is amazing. It can be run flat-stick for days at time and it'll just keep on delivering.

Big loads and pillions will slow it up some for sure, but we bet it'll outlast most riders.

So in the real world the WR250R is a very credible option as an adventure bike. Not only that, it's a massively rewarding and fun bike to ride.

Try and tell us that wouldn't suit you. **ADV**





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Cherry pickin' 2017

There's some great new adventure bikes available in 2017, more than we've ever seen. We challenged the manufacturers to pick one single adventure bike from their range that had them excited. Then we asked them to tell us why that bike was special for them. We thought we knew the market, but we were taken by surprise at some of the choices...



Ducati

This was one time we were confident we knew what was coming. Ducati released the Multistrada 1200 Enduro in 2016 and we loved it. There was no way the company would back a model released last year when they had the new 'Desert Sled' Scrambler model for 2017, right?

"It has to be the Multistrada 1200 Enduro," said Ducati Australia's permanently cheerful CEO, Warren Lee.

"The Desert Sled with its classic 1960s-'70s off-road style looks great and is a super fun bike to ride, but for any serious adventure riding, the Multistrada 1200 Enduro is still the bike to have."

Warren's just completed what sounded like a great adventure ride on his own Multistrada 1200 Enduro, including deep-water crossings and some tough going, so we're not likely to argue.



BMW Motorrad

We thought this would be a tough one. Nobody loves to talk about BMWs more than National Marketing Manager Miles Davis, and we were pretty sure he wouldn't be able to limit his conversation to a single model. We must've caught him in a mellow moment.

"We've just announced the new R1200GS Rallye X model," rumbled the master of the skills demo.

"It has 1200 GSA suspension, which means longer struts and a GSA Telelever arm, and that gives extra travel. The Dynamic ESA suspension electronics have been tweaked as well, and one of the features in that is an automatic ride-height adjustment.

"It also comes with no centrestand, no pillion 'pegs, a one-piece enduro seat and a smaller screen.

"In my experience on the bike in the last two Safaris, the extra travel combined with the electronics makes it by far the most off-road capable GS we've ever had. It feels more like a trailbike than a normal 1200 would. It's much more forgiving and more playful when it comes to hitting rough ground."

As we write this Rallye X is expected to go on sale in the first quarter of 2017 at a recommended retail to be advised. ▶



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KTM

KTM Marketing Manager Greg Chambers is a busy little Vegemite, and while we couldn't get him on the phone he did respond via email. Here's what Greg told us...

"The KTM adventure models in 2017 are very exciting as they're a new generation. There are two new models that Aussies can get excited about, the 1090 Adventure R and 1290 Super Adventure R.

"Since I can only talk about one I'll go for the flagship!

"The 1290 Super Adventure R takes KTM values to the adventure market with 160HP on tap! Thankfully the electronics package is state-of-the-art, so you can choose when and where to unleash this huge amount of power. Electronics as standard include Motorcycle Stability Control (automatically combines perfect rear brake when front is used), switchable lean-angle sensitive ABS (on, off, off-road), Motorcycle Traction Control (sport, street, rain, off road), Cruise Control and a keyless ignition system. Optional electronics include Hill Hold Control, Motor Slip Regulation, Quick Shift and KTM My Ride, which has bluetooth

connectivity to receive calls or play your favourite music. Make no mistake though, this is a real adventure bike. Behind all the state-of-the-art technology there's a 23-litre tank, light weight of 217kg dry, fully adjustable WP 48mm front suspension and PDS rear suspension, both with heavy duty springs. Combine that with a proven chassis and 21/18 spoked-wheel combination with Continental TKC 80s and you have the ultimate adventure bike!"



Suzuki

We managed to track down Suzuki's Marketing Manager Lewis Croft on a very busy morning. We explained what we were after, and he said quickly, "That's easy. It's the V Strom 650."

We were sure it'd be the V Strom 1000 S. But no. We're a year out of date again. Lewis said he was flat out and would call us back, then hung up.

The 2017 650 unveiled at the recent industry show in Cologne lifted the cover off a new 650 V Strom 650 and 650XT, with a new traction-control system, new instrumentation, low-RPM assist and a stack of other gear that adventure riders will love. The 650 now follows the styling of the 1000. As Lewis said, "There's synergy there. The V Stroms live together with their styling."

So the Suzuki staff are all frothing over the V Strom 650. It should be in Aussie dealers in May.

Please note these images show the European models. Aussie bikes may be a little different in some aspects.





Kawasaki

The folks at Kawasaki are holding their breath for the new Versys-X 300, due in Australia in mid 2017. Milo Dokmanovic, a fairly reserved and understated sort of bloke as marketing people go, became very animated when the Versys was mentioned.

"Essentially the Versys-X 300 will create a new category," said Kawasaki Australia's Marketing Assistant.

"It's just under 300cc, and it's an adventure-touring style motorcycle. There's not much in the market in that space at this time. All the feedback we received, especially when the bike was unveiled at the recent Moto Expo in Melbourne, has been very positive. There's a lot of excitement about this model.

"There'll be a huge range of genuine accessories available that'll suit the adventure-touring sector, we're confident the bike will be offered at a competitive price point, and we think the Versys-X 300 will take off in Australia.

"It's 296cc, six-speed, has an extremely light clutch, has heat-management technology to disperse heat away from the rider, long-travel suspension, a gear-position indicator, and although the seat height is quite low, the Versys-X 300 looks like a much larger bike.

"It all makes the bike very appealing to learners and new adventure riders." ▶



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Triumph

Nigel Harvey is bloke permanently in motion, and when we caught him he was just back from a five-day ride in Tasmania and was cutting laps at Phillip Island. And people think we have a good job!

"The Explorer 1200, especially in the XCX and XCA configurations," said Nige as screaming multi-cylinder engines came and went in the background. "That's the exciting thing for 2017. Once customers have the opportunity to go on a prolonged test ride, which is something we have planned for 2017, they'll realise how capable those bikes are, both on the tarmac and in the rough stuff.

"That's what I'm really excited about in 2017," glowed Triumph's go-to-Market Executive. "It's getting bums on Triumph seats and seeing people discover how good that bike is, how capable, durable and sporty it is, and how dynamic the ride is."

Nige was also redlining with excitement over plans for the 800 in 2017, but wasn't allowed to tell us anything, so the 1200 gets the nod...for now...



Yamaha Motor Australia

Sean Goldhawk – 'Geez' to those who know him well – had a big surprise for us. We were expecting a talk-through on Ténérés.

"We're very excited about the Tracer 700," said the likable Communications Manager.

"It'll be launched in February 2017, and we're sure that while it's on the soft end of the adventure range, it's going to be a really good thing for dirt-road touring.

"It employs the MT07 engine, which is the parallel-twin with the 270-degree-crank. It's a lightweight, punchy motor. The bike has full weather protection, comes with panniers standard and has knuckle guards. So it has an adventure, sharp-edged look, and at less than 200kg ready-to-ride, we're sure it's going to work well in Australian conditions."

The price of the Tracer 700 wasn't available as we were putting this issue together, but by the time you read this your Yamaha dealer should be able to tell you.

"It's related to our MT range," said Sean, "and that would indicate the bike will be sharply priced and very good value for money."





SWM

SWM was one company that didn't have a surprise for us. Steve Carrington, Marketing Manager at Mojo Motorcycles, importers of SWM, gave us the answer we expected.

"The new Super Dual will be a flagship model for the brand," said Steve from Mojo's Victorian headquarters, "and the pricing at which that bike will enter the market, along with the optional GT Pack, make it very exciting for us. It'll be highly affordable."

"We expect the Super Dual to be on sale in February, and price is expected to be \$9990 plus on-roads."

The optional GT Pack will consist of a pair of Givi panniers, pannier racks and two LED driving lights. The images here show an overseas model with the GT Pack fitted. There may be some small changes for the Australian market.

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Major Mitchell Trail

Ray Lindner and a couple of friends tracked down some history and found a great reason to go riding.

In researching 'The Trail' we were amazed to discover in excess of 70 monuments and plaques in recognition of Mitchell placed by the communities that thrived following the discoveries along the route, many of them erected 100 years and more after the expedition. We decided to ride in 2016 to celebrate the 180th anniversary.

To the Brim

I set off on my Triumph Tiger XC with Andrew Percy on a BMW 800ST and Mark Staniec on a 1200GS, all of us loaded up with camping gear. Time was tight, so the plan was that Mark and I would ride the rougher terrain meeting up with Andrew where the trail joined the bitumen. Using this method we could cover a lot more terrain each day, and it worked really well for us. By the time Mark and I got back to the blacktop Andrew had found and photographed several monuments and points of interest on his route, and as it turned out, Andrew did take his 800ST on two of the dirt sections.

I'd seen many signs throughout Victoria directing tourists to the Major Mitchell Trail, but I remained ignorant of the significance of the route. I did know of the Major Mitchell cockatoo, and I reckoned there must've been flocks of them along the roads to which the signs were pointing.

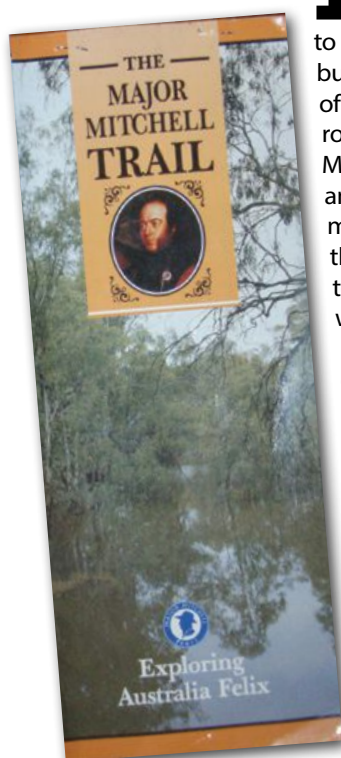
In 2011, ride companion Andrew Percy happened upon an exhibition in Castlemaine, Victoria, by local artist Eliza Tree. To commemorate the 175th anniversary of Australia Felix – Major Mitchell's expedition south of the Murray – Eliza, accompanied by her Jack Russell dog,

followed The Major Mitchell Trail, keeping to roads suitable for her old Subaru wagon.

We quickly became enthused with the idea of riding the trail and reckoned we could probably get closer to the original trail on two wheels than the artist had on four. Not only would we be sharing a ride with like-minded persons, but we'd be learning a lot about history and doing some orienteering at the same time.

Reprint

We'd managed to get hold of a tourist guide published by the Victorian Department Of Conservation And Environment back in 1990. The booklet is no longer available and the department no longer exists, so after our ride of the Major Mitchell Trail it was our intention to try and get this booklet reprinted and made readily available.





Words: Ray Lindner and Andrew Percy. Images: Ray Lindner, Andrew Percy and Mark Staniec

Leaving Newport in Victoria, we set off via the Sunraysia Highway for Mildura, the starting point of our 'real' ride. Although better than the Calder Highway it can be a rather boring route, so we decided on viewing the painted wheat silos at the hamlet of Brim in western Victoria.

The railway station at Brim closed long ago, but the silo paintings by Brisbane artist ▶

Main: On Mt William in The Grampians, searching for monuments and markers on The Major Mitchell Trail.

Top: This plaque at Mt Arapiles is typical of many along the route in honour Mitchell and his findings.

Map: A bit of backtracking due to flooding, but fairly close to the route used by one of Australia's great explorers.

Right: The ST actually did a couple of the dirt trails, but mostly stuck to alternate tar routes to make meeting points.



MAJOR MITCHELL TRAIL



Guido van Helten have well and truly put the hamlet back on the map. There are now plans for more wheat silos to be painted in a similar way, thus creating a Silo Trail.

Getting into Mildura close on dark we lodged at a motel which was walking distance to a great range of eating places. At the Spanish Grill we enjoyed great food, downed a couple of craft ales and then headed back to the motel for an early night. We'd covered 522km.

The real ride

Mark and I crossed the Murray River to NSW to commence our search for the first monuments. Andrew departed later and rode the Sturt Highway directly to Euston. He crossed to Robinvale on the Victorian side of the river where we'd planned to regroup.

Mark and I rode along the Sturt Highway through towns like Gol Gol and Trentham Cliffs in our search for Tapalin Mail Road, which we hoped would lead us to Mt. Dispersion. After a couple of indecisive moments where we didn't want to believe what our GPS units were telling us, we left the highway on what was not much more than a track leading in towards the mighty Murray River. Ultimately this turned out to be the right decision and may well have

been an early entry to the route. After riding trails for a few kilometres we joined what became the real Tapalin Mail Road which had left the highway further on.

We thought we may have a real problem on our hands when Mark's GS wouldn't start after stopping for a photo on a remote track, but technology came to the rescue. Mark was carrying an emergency-start battery pack and the bike once again roared to life. It was later discovered a battery terminal was a little loose.

Found!

We located the first of many monuments to Major Mitchell.

We reached Mt. Dispersion to find it not much more than a hillock with a probable

Top Time was tight, so the plan was the Tiger and the GS would ride the rougher terrain and meet up with the 800ST where the trail joined the bitumen.

Top right: The first of many monuments to Major Mitchell, Mt. Dispersion

Right: Direction to the crossing where Mitchell first crossed the Loddon River, having fashioned a bridge over a fallen tree, then having the river rise 4.3m overnight.

Below right: 1836 Expedition map

Below: Mt. Dispersion





elevation of maybe 25m. There were a couple of farm buildings nearby, but little else on what would generally be viewed as a flood plain.

Why was it called Mt. Dispersion?

Apparently the local indigenous people had been tracking the exploration party and it was here the tribal warriors were dispersed – thus the name given to the landmark.

Locating the first of many such monuments was a great moment. This was truly a great way to ride as it had such purpose. We were at that site on May 22, 2016, just a couple of days short of 180 years after Mitchell's party had stood on the same spot. Not only were we having a great ride, but we were learning some great history, visiting new places and orienteering all at the same time.

Sign language

We rode on and met up with Andrew in Robinvale, then rode the Murray Valley Highway towards Swan Hill. Mark and I diverted in an attempt to locate an area known as Passage Camp on the banks of the river.

We rode many rough tracks toward the river but couldn't find a spot marked as having been used during the expedition. We must've been very close and got to ride great tracks through majestic river gums, thus tiring my Tiger which decided to lay down in the shade for a while.

Well...that's my story anyway.

Others might say I had a fall, but the bike reminded me Mitchell's horses must've taken similar rests, so it was all in the keeping with the spirit of the expedition (I hope readers believe my story).

We found on much of the journey that where once signs at, or directing to, remote locations were clear, the maintenance had been limited. It wasn't surprising given the government department that initiated the trail no longer exists. Maintenance of signs is something we plan to try and rectify.

The Major Mitchell Lagoon was off the Murray Valley Highway before Swan Hill, and they once again took some finding due to a lack of good signs. But locating the lagoons did provide some great gravel road and track riding. We then found Gillick's Reserve, which is very close to the highway and well signposted.

The reserve boasted an extensive Major Mitchell Expedition information board that included a plaque advising Mitchell was there on June 18, 1836. It would really be a great camp spot.

Bunking down

Andrew rode on to Swan Hill where we met up again and viewed another monument. Accommodation that night was in the tents, and although we got some rain, all moisture was gone by morning.

The facilities at the Big 4 Riverside Camp Park are truly first class with a great kitchen, televisions for campers (as it happened the MotoGP was on) and ultra clean. A walk to town for some Asian take-away food and a sixpack to share provided a great finish to our day of discovery. Swan Hill was named by Mitchell during the

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expedition due to incessant noise from swans in the vicinity.

Our ride covered 281km for the day and gave a truly great range of terrain and riding surfaces.

Park nearby

Our first stop on the second day was Kerang.

We knew there was a monument/cairn in Kerang, and that it was in the local park, but we just couldn't find it. As the tourist information centre was directly opposite the park we went and enquired. They knew nothing about Major Mitchell or what had become of the monument, even suggesting the council may have removed it during a park upgrade.

Further inquiries around town led to the local museum-cum-men's shed where all manner of old equipment was being restored by a great band of older guys who were really enjoying their time. One of the guys was the local historian who knew more about Mitchell and his expedition than anyone else we met on the trip. He quickly directed us to the monument we'd been searching for. It was in a second park area no more than 200m from the tourist centre, and it's actually one of the largest monuments on the Trail.

Mountain of Hope

Having finally solved that mystery it was time to ride on.

Lunch was in Cohuna at a café directly opposite a park where a Mitchell monument was situated. We asked the staff about the significance of the monument and they replied they had no knowledge of what it was about. This wasn't unusual on our trip, and it's our belief the trail could be a great tourist drive if promoted. It could bring much-needed income to many small communities.

Riding then took us through the hamlet of Leitchville, after which we had a great gravel ride to Mt. Hope, a significant lookout used by Mitchell.

I have to admit to having never heard of Mt. Hope prior to this ride, but it was truly a highlight of the trip. This mountain of huge rocks is a sight to behold.

Not only had Mitchell climbed this on June 28, 1836, to view the surrounding areas, but it's also the site of the very historic Mt Hope homestead, an area where Burke and Wills camped on September 1, 1860.

Bird strike

After leaving Mt. Hope on our way to the Loddon River, travelling quiet country lanes

through Pyramid Hill, Yarrawalla and Jarklin, Andrew hit a galah – actually the galah hit Andrew – while travelling at close to 100kph. Thankfully the bird was the only casualty.

We were close to the point where Mitchell first crossed the Loddon River, having fashioned a bridge over a fallen tree, then having the river rise 4.3m overnight. But he made it safely across. Fortunately we had a better bridge and were once again on great gravel through open farming country.

What was amazing to us city folk was coming across a country garage that had obviously been abandoned years ago. It must've been a store, post office, mechanical repair facility and petrol station, and it still had stock on shelves and cars parked that were being worked on prior to abandonment.

If had been in a city it would've been plundered.

Top: The amazing view from Mt. Hope.

Below left: Our elusive monument in Kerang.

Below: Abandoned garage along the route.

Right: The prisoners must have suffered the cold in this drafty lock-up of the Harrow log gaol as a component of their punishment.



From there it was on to Wedderburn and a Mitchell campsite at Fenton's Creek, another monument at Kooreh and overnight at a pub in St. Arnaud.

Monumental

We visited the Kanya area where Mitchell had camped during July 1836 and viewed another monument.

What was most surprising at that remote location was that it was also the site of the Bolangum Inn, which has only some mud-brick ruins left.

Consider this: there's not another house in sight, yet the Bolangum Inn was famed as a fundraiser for The Royal Children's Hospital Appeal during the period from 1949 to 1970, and was the State's top hotel fundraiser in 1962 and 1964. The gods must have smiled on the Western District farmers during that period to allow such generosity.

Callawadda and Stawell both had monuments, and we travelled through Halls Gap and the Grampians Park, Mt. Zero, Green Lake, Natimuk, Mt. Arapiles and on to Harrow for a night with the great folk who run The Hermitage Hotel – of course there's a monument there, too.

If you've never had a night at The Hermitage put it on your list. It's a favourite and offers accommodation in refurbished shearers' quarters.

More to come

The evening of the third day saw the weather close in and the forecast was bleak. So reluctantly the decision was made not to head towards the coastal region – where the weather was predicted to be far worse – but to head back to Melbourne.

Prior to departing Harrow we visited some of the many local historical points, including the old log gaol. The prisoners must have suffered the cold in this drafty lock-up as a component of their punishment.

Leaving Harrow we located another Mitchell monument and found a reference to a campsite displayed on a sign adjacent to the Glenelg River, and we visited another campsite and monument at Glen Thompson.

The heavy rain in May which shortened our first attempt to complete the Major Mitchell Trail basically persisted though the Victorian winter and peaked in early September with widespread flooding in western and central Victoria – just where we needed to be. It was the wettest Victorian winter in 30 years.

There have been very few rides in 40 years of motorcycling that I enjoyed as much as this one. Having points to discover, and to learn both some history and geography of my home State, has been most rewarding. There were very few areas where I could say the ride was really challenging, but when I spare a thought for the expedition party I feel a hint of what a really tough group it must've been.

We look forward to completing our ride of the Major Mitchell Trail, and when we do, we'll look forward to sharing it.

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KTM Rallye New Zealand

Around 80 riders and 24 support staff blasted their way through the Shakey Isles for New Zealand's first KTM Rallye. Richard Ebbett was there, and he had a roostin' good time.



Words: Richard Ebbett. Images:
Paul Lance, Geoff Osborne,
Jeff Mawston, KTM NZ



Riders arriving at Papamoa for the first KTM NZ Adventure Rallye were greeted by a very bright (orange) and tranquil image. KTM's pit tents and big bikes were lined up with the stunning beach and sea as a backdrop.

Once sign-on and scrutineering were done and GPS info loaded, everyone was set for a few days of wicked riding. Speeches and dinner were followed by a couple of beers and laughter and I left early to stay at a mate's place in the Welcome Bay hills.

Getting started

At 8.00am we met for a group photo before setting off in waves. It must've sounded awesome! The rally thundered through the beautiful bush with Rotoma lake in the background, approaching the first Breakout (optional hard) section which looked like a terrain test. People were tightening their luggage and checking tyre pressures, apparently preparing to go hard.

I didn't stop. I clicked down a couple of cogs and stood up for maximum attack, but as soon as I backed off I could feel the rear was high and the front low. I'd set the bike up for two people. But I wasn't stopping. I backed off a bit, didn't brake so hard and was soon smokin' past punters. Ha, ha!

I knew the area we were headed for and boosted off the track to meet my son at his school in Ohope. I read him a couple of books and rejoined the crew in Opotiki, hoping to track down another mate, but he was over the Back Of Beyond, servicing farm quads.

Just in case

During a late lunch I met Justin and Mark from Colorado. These two were helping with navigation via the REVER app. They said I could join them as we were about to go through the Motu in the Eastland Region, into the heart of the Wop Wops (*Kiwi for "The Outback" - Ed*).

We met the sweeps and medics as we stopped to look at sights and it was here my bright idea of going off the track was put to my riding team.

"Let's do the Otipi Track into the heart of the Motu

Main: 'Breakout' sections were tougher and optional.

Top right: Author Richard and wife Lisa tackled the tough going and had a ball doing it.

Below: 80 riders and 24 support staff ready to leave NZ's east coast and head west on the first day.



River!" I suggested. "Maybe just a tease, not the whole thing."

The sweeps reinforced we'd be on our own and we were sweet as.

Well, we lost about 90 minutes undrowning Mark's 1190. Bugger.

The river was only the start of a rocky 4WD track that went uphill for ages. We battled to the top to get an idea of the vastness of the area, then

headed back. Mark was keen to have another crack at crossing the river, and hell, I was in there knee-deep with wet boots ready hold the big girl up when he made the attempt.

Bed hopping

Back on the main route to Gisborne at Toatoa the Motu drizzle was wet but not too cold. We raced along gravel roads past big farms and steep ▶





bush country, past a mate's place who was out, busy working on the farm as he should be, then onto the main road to Gisborne.

That was when we realised we'd lost Greg.

We doubled back to find him out of fuel. We sorted that and hustled on to the holiday park, arriving at around 6.30pm. I left the lads to book in and shower while I rode straight to Smash Palace, the iconic bar, for the evening feast. I was hungry and this bar was a whole story in itself. Old, derelict bike parts and a DC3 aeroplane hung outside above the outdoor stage, while inside was a fish tank, indoor stage and a very cool bar. It's unique. I had a much-needed feed and a few beers before heading back late to the holiday park

where I found reception closed

Hmm. I couldn't remember which room I was in. I knew I was staying with Brian Leatham so I stalked him on Facebook and tried a PM. No reply.

Hmm. I tried KTM's Rosie and she phoned straight away. "You can bunk in with the Birchy crew," said Rosie.

Chris Birch! Mint (*Kiwi for 'frickin' awesome!'* - Ed)!

Home visit

The next day kicked off with porridge and a chia-seed, coconut-cream brekky followed by photos with the bike next to Captain Cook's statue. We rode out at 8.30am.

It was a big, 460km day past rivers,

big farmland, native bush and lake Waikaremoana in the middle of nowhere. There was heaps of gravel, some of it loose and roly as. The scenery was stunning and we rode past, horses and broken-down cars, waterfalls, massive trees, sweeping gravel roads, people living off the land in little villages and some traffic before hitting the tarmac to Taupo.

I reminded myself I needed to check in

Above Just another road in NZ.

Top right: More national enduro terrain for the Breakout sections.

Below left: More of this great terrain.

Below: Land of the long white cloud.



at the destination or the organisers would panic. With 80 riders to be looking after, I guessed I'd be a little on edge too.

After dinner we fuelled up for the next day, the home of the 2006 ISDE in the back of Tokoroa. Taupo is where I live and have my suspension business, MotoSR, so I was able to take care of a few small jobs on the bike before sleeping in my own bed.

Two-up

With the Mrs – Lisa – on board for the next few days I could go for a more aggressive throttle setting as I had more grip and less wheelspin. The mods to my bike meant it was more balanced and worked great for us two-up.

Everyone gassed up and got some snacks while Lisa and I went next door to Beez Neez Flashpackers cafe and were treated to awesome friendly service and great food. I had had two days to acclimatise and knew I needed to go easy on Lisa, so we rested while I twisted a couple of clicks and tweaks to the shock.

We came to the first Breakout section and found 1.55-metre-tall Taka, the only Japanese rider, getting a real ear-bashing from the *Kiwi Rider* guy, Vege. "Stop being



a pussy and give it some jandal (*Kiwi for 'thong' or in this case 'boot' – Ed*)!" Over big roots, ruts and a muddy bit, the 1190 would've been a handful to the mighty Japanese pilot, who actually shipped his bike over for the event.

This dirt section proved to be the eye-opener for the day, with heaps of riders electing not to make the attempt. But the hearty that did were rewarded with shouts of respect and accomplishment from keen onlookers as they heard a bit of second- or third-gear rev limiter when we arrived at the top of the slippery hill two-up.

Fast facts

- ✓ 80 riders
- ✓ 24 support staff
- ✓ Five days (with a three-day Rallye option)
- ✓ Papamoa Beach to New Plymouth, with overnight stops in Gisborne, and two nights each in Taupo and Tauranui
- ✓ 1700km total
- ✓ Riders from: New Zealand, Australia, Japan, USA and Wales

An easy one

Once out of the bush and forestry we hit Tokoroa for a wee stop and pie.

From Tokoroa we blasted into the forestry again we were obviously late at a gate as the sweep crew had missed us in town. I was just cruising, not being too tough on Lisa.

We looped behind Waipapa Dam and Mangakino then back to Taupo past more rolling farmland with rocky formations busting out of the ground.

We had another great feed and caught up with more friends as the KTM flags



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waved outside. The national road racing was on the same weekend in Taupo, so there were plenty of people about.

The next day was set for Waimiha and more national enduro terrain for the Breakout sections. But it wasn't to be a big day. I think about 280km.

Checking in

With saddle bags fully laden for overnighting we stopped for photos along the way to the food-and-fuel stop at Whakamaru Dam. Lisa and I stopped for a cuppa and watched people roar up the gravel road.

One of the Aussie's was so keen to pass people he missed the first Breakout section on the old tram track they used to take logs out of the bush. Man! This was one hell-of-a-slippery section. It wasn't for lack of grip from the tyre, but because any grass in contact with the tyre just peeled off the clay underneath. The dirt was moving beneath the wheels, held together by the grass and pine needles. It was bloody good fun, and after the second Breakout we had to shed some layers. Man it was hot! We stopped, wearing near nothing but our boots, and aired out. Adventure-riding gear is awesome, but when you're riding in tough going, especially two-up, you get hot!

We enjoyed a bit of a snack and a rest before heading into at Taumarunui along a real tight and narrow – possibly first gear – winding gravel road up to mint views. The gas from the reserve tank wasn't

travelling into the main tank quick enough and had started to burble, so we stopped and parked the rear wheel high. Dave Darcy, the video fella, hopefully caught the wood pigeon swooping noisily out of the bush up in front of us as he followed us down the hill.

We checked in with the organisers then scooted on to our accommodation, for a mint night in comfort after a real good feed.

Last day

The final day was set to be a difficult one with not big distance, but tight, slower riding through the famous Whangamomona area. It's called 'The Forgotten Highway' because it's real out of the way and takes in a big gravel loop beyond Ohura and past Mount Damper. In fact, it went right past the beautiful Mount Damper falls nobody knew were there.

Then it was on to another Breakout section of greasy green grass. It wasn't difficult, as long as the rider didn't use too much throttle – although, the Aussie's were letting their tyres down and roosting up a storm. They were loving having to go up but then back down to have another go.

Again we got hot and stopped at a beautiful vista of super-steep, rugged farmland which stretched to the far horizon. The Colorado lads came past shouting, "This is ridiculous! It's like a golf course!"

Yeah mate. That's NZ farming.



Left: Lunch stop on the fifth day, the Whangamomona Pub.

Top: Trevor Lacey won the event's Muppet Award by filling his 1190R with diesel.

Above: Colorado boys Justin (left) and Mark assisted with navigation on both GPS units and smart phones via the REVER app.

Bloody great ride

After lunch at the Whangamomona pub was an optional Breakout section to the 'Bridge To Somewhere' built in the 1930s. The road hadn't been maintained and just living out there was too hard during the depression. This road/track followed the river and had a solid papa clay surface and two tunnels. It was okay, but would be slippery as in the wet. Six sturdy individuals battled the kilometres of mud bogs to actually get to the bridge.

Surrounded by native bush and solid walls of glacial-formed smooth rock faces, we were in our own movie setting. After the gravel the tarmac roads felt like a road-race track, but, weary and aware of the locals, I thought it better to conserve our fuel and rolled into New Plymouth at 250km with the fuel light only just shining on the 950SE.

That night was the final prize giving and speeches mixed with more beers, good food and thank-yous. Big thanks to KTM NZ and Australia for the organising of this massive event. It was a bloody great ride with like-minded dudes who generally looked out for each other and talked it up at the bar every night.

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Words and images: Colin Bayman

Thailand

Seven Perth riders took on a five-day ride through Thailand's north.





Arriving a couple of days early after a full day of travel with a stopover in Bangkok, the tour guys were at the airport to greet us and provide the transport to our lovely four-star hotel. We spent the weekend eating, drinking and sightseeing.

The old section of the city is surrounded by a moat with plenty of restaurants and pubs, and we even took a half-day pushbike tour to help ease us into the many cultural changes we were experiencing. There was also a street nearby that came to life at

night and where the girls appeared far more friendly than the average Thai people.

It may have been the dim light and shadows, but I'm sure I spotted a few adam's apples. ▶

Left: A river crossing, Thai style.

Above: The twisties on the mountain roads went on forever.

Below: Howard (Joe Average) looking forward to five days in the saddle.





Exhausted

Monday morning couldn't have come around quick enough and it found us booted up and out front of the hotel choosing bikes.

The lead rider, Noah, was on a 650 BMW and we chose between five Kawasaki Versys 650s and two Honda 650Fs. The bikes were all late models in perfect condition, had new rubber and were obviously maintained to a very high standard. They also had lots of bling fitted that's readily available at giveaway prices in local shops. One of the boys picked up a slip-on Akrapovič pipe for \$80.00.

The riders brief was just that – very brief – and we hit the road.

Organised

I was prepared for a laid-back adventure ride, but that's not what went down. The roads weren't what I expected.

While some sections were slower and ridden quietly so we could take in the stunning vista, most times we were on the gas, accelerating hard out of each corner and braking late into the next. Noah could

throw a bike around but was happy to ride at our pace regardless of what speed we chose. If we got up close to the ride leader he just opened up the throttle until he pulled away a little, no matter what our speed.

During each stop we'd give each other a dressing down about riding a little slower and safer, but it wouldn't take us long to get back in the groove on the fantastic roads, often pushing the limits. We even covered one of the best 10 bike roads in the world – Road 1148.

It was hard to fault any of the riding with the roads and freeways getting better as the days were counted down. Most of the area was quite mountainous and the twisties went on forever. We were moving around on the bikes so much we didn't even look like getting monkey butt.

But don't think we had to ride like Valentino Rossi on this tour. Our hands control the throttles and we could take it at our own pace.

An expat named Russ rode sweep with his Thai girlfriend as pillion on a V-Strom and he stuck to the last rider like glue.

The support vehicle towed a trailer with a spare bike and our luggage it always pulled up moments after we did regardless of the road, the speed or how hard it may have been to pass.

One down

We expected some wet days seeing as we were riding at the tail end of the monsoon season, but we only got rained on twice. On the first afternoon the heavens opened just long enough to soak us, but not long enough to stop and put on the wet-weather gear supplied by the tour guys. On the fourth afternoon we approached a storm that looked like it'd been made by the special-effects department of a movie studio. Noah pulled over and with a big smile said we'd better put on the wet-weather gear. Within five minutes we were in monsoonal rain. My visor had fogged up and large bolts of lightning lit up the dark sky while loud cracks of thunder seemed straight overhead. We rode very slowly and there was nowhere to shelter. I simply followed the tail light in front of me and hoped he wasn't about to ride off a bridge. Fifteen minutes later we'd ridden through it and back into the sunshine. It was actually a pretty cool experience.

The hotels were all decent three- and four-star domestic, tourist-style places and we all went the single-room option. It's a good move when you're travelling with a bunch of snorers.

Breakfast was Thai-style and lunch and dinner at a local outlet with Noah ordering the local favourites. Beer and coffee were at

Top: Author Col's eyes were alight with excitement leaving Chiang Mai on the first day.

Below: Left to right: Steve, Martin, Joe Average (Howard), author Col, Peter, Roley and Brad (Seven-tenths).

Top right: Roley takes the Versys down the ramp on to the barge.





our own expense, but were very cheap and it was difficult to spend a \$100 during the ride.

We asked to keep the tourist stops, and in particular the temples, to a minimum and for the focus to stay on the ride. With nearly 2000km in five days we were more than happy with the balance, and the stops were all interesting and worth the effort. We even got to cross a large lake on a barge towed by a small, diesel-powered boat with an extraordinarily long shaft connected to the prop. Riding on to the barge was a little tricky but we all made it without falling in.

With only one small off during the entire ride parking the bikes at a restaurant (I won't mention that it was my brother, Roley) we all made it back to Chiang Mai in one piece.

Generous with the truth

Brad said he would only ride at 70 per cent the entire ride. The boy lied!

Howard said he was just Joe Average. Joe Average must be very quick as he often disappeared out of sight and took a while to chase down. Pete lied too. When pulled up at a set of lights and asked for a drag he shook his head and said no, but dropped the clutch and got the front wheel in the air when he spotted a hint of green.

That's just cheating.

Steve said he doesn't drink much. I now have no idea what 'not drinking much' means.

Martin was the quiet guy who didn't turn out to be too quiet after a beer or three, and we're still making fun of Roley for his little step off – and we probably will for some time to come. As far as Colin (that's me) was concerned, I was very sensible all round.

A ride with Big Bike Tours in Chiang Mai is probably the best 45000 baht you could spend in Thailand. Throw in a cheap Asian airfare and a few dollars for your own personal bad habits and you'll have a ride you won't forget in a long time.

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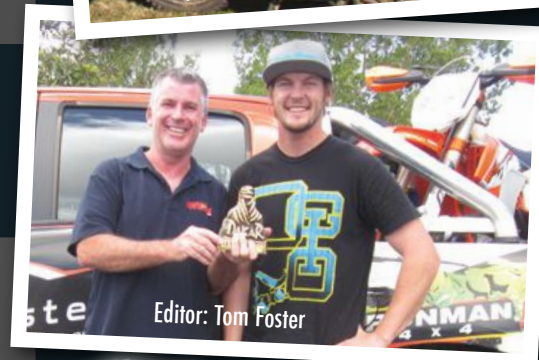
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Words and images: Karen Ramsay

Leader of the pack

Karen Ramsay is ready for anything.

Husband Dave and I have quite different views on riding preparation.

I'm more of a jump-on-the-bike-and-find-out-halfway-through-the-trip-the-tyres-are-bald type of person, where he's a plan-and-prepare-for-just-in-case type. We do try to compromise. We both have our own theories on why we should choose one or the other.

Dave likes to be prepared, organised and self-sufficient if a problem arises. My idea is that you can't prepare for every eventuality and something or somebody will turn up to help. I see it as a way of meeting new people. Dave, on the other hand, likes to be the person who can help out someone else.

What I'm saying is, there's probably no right or wrong here, but if you go riding with an ill-

prepared bike and always rely on others, unless you're sleeping with them, they're probably going to get a bit tired of bailing you out. Conversely, loading your bike with enough spares, tools and equipment to fill a trailer can wear a bit thin too – especially if you need to haul the bike upright at some stage.

Don't get the wrong idea; I don't pack light by any means. I just seem to take a whole lot of different spares – spare shirts; spare pocket-knife; spare pens... things like that. And I'm a last-minute packer, which means I just chuck stuff in as I'm racing out the door.

My 'must haves' are: phone charger for the bike, spare tube, pocket knife with the lot, assorted tools I can use, cable ties, gaffer tape, fixomol (sticky bandage) and painkillers.

Standout

A recent ride with a group of people was unusual in that we had two separate incidents requiring electrical wire. We'd never even considered taking electrical wire. To be truthful, I probably wouldn't know what to do with it even if I did take it. Unlike a lot of people I ride with (male/female, newbie/experienced), I have next to no mechanical clue. I do try, but my aptitude lies in different areas. It's a bit ironic if Dave's doing a group ride because I'm usually sweep with all the gear. I have no clue how to use it.

Rod found that out as he and I were left behind after the group got going and his bike wouldn't start. My diagnostic skills ended after I made sure the kill switch wasn't on. The second step, while Rod crawled over and under the bike, was to call



Main: Nick and Craig fixing the Husky's sidestand switch.
Below: Nick, an autoelectrician, came prepared. He had wire, too, and was able to deal with two electrical problems on the one trip.
Right: Must-haves.



son Darcy. His suggestions – such as test the wiring/battery or something or other using an 'altimeter' or something – were met with some rude scoffing.

Fortunately another rider came back and he happened to be a bit of an autoelectrical guru, and he had a multimeter and wire. He fairly quickly diagnosed the problem as some questionable wiring during Rod's hasty, heated-grips installation and had him going in no time.

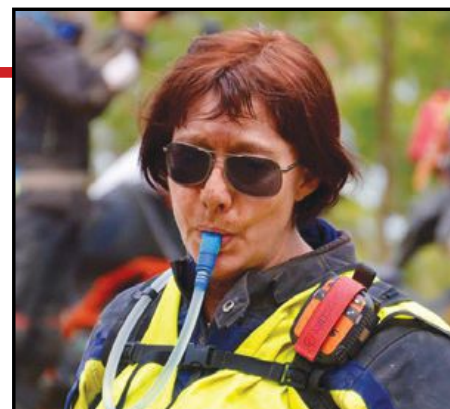
Later in the day my bike conked out when I hit a bump and a rather large stick. As is usual, I was out of view of everyone (I like to say it's to avoid the dust and potential carnage). I found it wouldn't restart. I was still moving, so I decided my best plan was to keep rolling as far as I could. That way it'd be less walking for me, and maybe I'd find a better place on the track to stop.

Rounding a bend I could make out some bikes ahead so I started blasting the horn (as loud as a Husky's horn will blast, anyway). I'm still not sure how, but the rear two bikes heard me and came back. And one of them was Nick, the man with the auto-electrical skills. For the second time in the day, the problem was electrical. I'd wiped out the sidestand cut-out switch which, thanks to Nick and his electrical wire, was soon sorted.

Load-bearing

I have the utmost admiration for anyone who packs well; those who keep it compact but still manage to have everything they need. Invariably when we travel, no matter how strategic we try to be, we still end up not using most of what we carry. Or we leave something vital behind – for me it's usually my raincoat or hand-guard covers when we strike wet weather.

I've been speaking with David Hicks, a bloke who's just back from a trip through Scandinavia, Russia, the 'Stans and into Mongolia. He said once he got into his trip, most weeks he was sending gear home or



Karen Ramsay

giving it away, even items he thought would've been essential. I think we've all had that moment when we've unloaded all the gear off the bike into a pub room and wondered how we ever managed to carry it all in the first place.

Over time we've tried to be more lightweight with our loads, mainly by using hiking-specific gear for camping. Gone is the swag consisting of a large canvas tarp, a piece of foam, a sheet and a blanket. These days we have a tent (keeps the mozzies out) and are still trying to minimise our bedding. We have lightweight camping chairs that were a combined birthday/anniversary/Christmas present from my folks (for some reason lightweight is a pseudonym for expensive). By the time you add a bit of cooking gear, food and clothing, it's hard to keep the bulk down. It seems that many people take a single luxury item. Some I've seen include a coffee percolator, a wooden chopping board and speaker systems.

It all works out

Unless you're travelling with a support vehicle and spare bike, you're likely to have times when you won't have something you need. And most times, something serendipitous will come of it. You'll improvise (like using a hair tie to hold something in place). Or a fellow adventure rider will come along with what you need. Or a local will come past and arrange to get your bike to the nearest town. Whatever happens, you'll have a good story to tell. And it'll restore your faith in humanity for a while too.

ADV

What I've learned

- ✓ For someone who doesn't pack much, I sure carry a lot of useless stuff
- ✓ Necessity brings out the innovation in people
- ✓ Pack well or sleep with someone who can
- ✓ If you can't fix it, you might as well smile about it
- ✓ The 'how' of packing is a whole other story





The good gear

Riding apparel can make a big difference.
Miles Davis explains.

A We all love riding bikes. Fun, excitement and even danger are part of the appeal to many. But when things don't go to plan and you end up on the ground, it really pays to have high-quality riding gear that provides excellent abrasion resistance and impact absorption. Not only that, when you're riding in extreme cold, wet or heat, good gear can be the difference between having fun and

having a miserable time, or even whether you go riding or not.

Compromise

We say it a lot: 'adventure riding is a compromise'. One day you're in the desert and the next you're on the bitumen, so apparel needs to be versatile.

In 2015 on one Safari recce ride we were in 15cm of snow in the high country, and a few months later we were in Arkaroola and it

was 48 degrees. I was wearing the same gear, with a couple of extra layers in the cold. Even in these extremes comfort levels were pretty good and protection levels were second to none.

Many years ago working as a bike journo I did get the chance to wear high-quality gear from time to time, and when I started work with BMW I was exposed to some of the best riding gear available. It's not until you ride in bad



conditions with great gear you really understand the benefits and the value of spending more for the good stuff. I've had a BMW Streetguard Goretex two-piece textile suit for over 10 years and it's still doing the business. I use it in winter, in cold, wet conditions, and it's amazing how comfortable you can be when others are miserable. I even use it on the ski slopes, and I'm pretty sure it's better than any ski gear you can buy. So a \$2000 investment can really pay off in the long run. And that's



MILES DAVIS



Main: It pays to have high-quality riding gear that provides excellent abrasion resistance and impact absorption.

Left and above: Motocross and enduro gear is light-weight and makes for great comfort, but it's not designed with the abrasion resistance to cope with a slide down a road or hard-packed track.

just from a comfort and longevity point of view. When you consider how the same suit can protect you if you end up going for a slide it's extremely good value over the course of 10 years.

I still have my original blue-and-grey Rallye suit from the 2006 Cape York GS Safari, and even though it's been replaced it still gets loaned to people here and there at various events. If you look at the budget gear that's available, it might look similar from a distance, but when you compare fabrics (for abrasion resistance), armour inserts, zips and general quality, there really isn't any comparison. It's common sense. You do get what you pay for, there's no way around that. ►



Boots

This is a good one.

There are some 'comfy' boot options on the market and they're popular due to their light weight and general comfort. Then there are the more 'off-road' boots, very similar to moto-cross or enduro boots. They're heavier, stiffer and tricky to get used to at first due to the fact you don't feel your gear- and rear-brake lever as easily.

I say 'at first' because once you get used to this style of boot there's no issue, and everyone goes through that initial challenging phase. But when you think about the protection levels, the off-road boots win hands down. Riding off-road can really put your feet and lower legs at risk from riding into stumps or rocks. The bike can fall on you during a spill, or even when you're stationary. You can cause an injury simply by putting your foot on the ground for stability at the wrong time.

On GS Safari events we see the odd lower-limb injury and it's been noted that a large percentage of these are with riders wearing the softer, lighter,

Above: It's not until you ride in bad conditions with great gear you really understand the value of spending more for good apparel.

Below: When things don't go to plan, good riding apparel – including boots and gloves – shows its worth.



'comfy' style of boots. It's a choice everyone needs to make for themselves, but it's good to understand the real pros and cons when you make that call. Personally, I ride enough that I have both options covered. I use the softer BMW Gravel boot on lighter adventure rides or when I'll be on the road a little more, especially in the rain and cold (as they're Goretex). But when it comes to a proper off-road adventure ride I always wear my GS Pro boots. Even though they're heavier, they're still comfortable and the extra protection is good piece of mind.

With many of my sporting footwear choices I swap the standard insole for an orthotic type with more arch support for extra comfort.

Gloves

Unless it's the middle of summer I'll always take two sets of gloves with me: lighter GS gloves offer good feel with the handlebar and levers when I'm riding off-road; and a Goretex set for the colder mornings or rain.

My wet-weather gloves have a rubber

wiper on the left-hand index finger to squeegee the visor in the rain, and this is priceless when it's bucketing down! Even the lighter gloves have some leather to provide protection in case of a spill. Nylon motocross and enduro gloves are comfy off-road or in the heat, but offer almost no protection when sliding down the road.

Give it a go

If you love your adventure riding and haven't yet lashed out on top-end riding gear you should probably consider it. It can be the difference between an injury or not, or enjoying your ride or not. It should provide you with many years of service and give you good peace of mind.

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Right: The versatility and durability of quality riding gear makes the investment well worthwhile.



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Meeting the challenge

chapter three

Images: Touratech. Words: Andrea Box

This issue completes Andrea Box' United People of Adventure Touratech ride in Madagascar. When we left Andrea last issue she was concerned about the riders' deteriorating physical condition and some possible bad weather heading their way...

A boat had been organised to take us across the next section of our route as there was no road, and unfortunately it was unable to leave its port. The stormy seas and frequent downpours we'd seen from our beach camp with its endless views of the Indian Ocean were in fact the edge of tropical cyclone Fantala, and she looked to be headed in our direction.





ANDREA BOK

We could've listed pros and cons all night, but time was pressing. Plans had to be made for whichever way we elected, and ultimately the group chose caution and decided to return north.

As darkness fell the group atmosphere was deflated. We knew we needed to stay safe, but we still felt the bitter loss of not being able to finish the route we'd set out to do. Even the sweetly spiced vanilla rum didn't really warm our hearts that night.

Turning back

We headed north the next morning, and to say my heart wasn't in it was an under-

Decision time

We weighed up our options. We could continue south towards the boat, but we could end up weathering the storm in a remote village while waiting until the boat could safely sail. That would mean a high probability of missing our flights home.

The other option was to return north and either fly out, or cross the mountain pass and continue to the capital down the west side of the island which was sheltered from the storm.

As options were considered my vote was firmly to continue south. We'd already proved we could handle the difficult riding conditions and we'd never again have such an experienced team to attempt this difficult route. If I missed my flight it'd just make this amazing adventure last longer, so that didn't worry me at all.

But the riding conditions had taken their toll on people's resilience and many wanted to err on the side of caution with the threat of Fantala looming.

A rum go

We were all torn. None wanted to risk safety, but all wanted to finish this beast of a track...or at least make the attempt.



Main: Madagascan weather only has two settings: monsoonal rain and wind or 37 degrees and 91 per cent humidity. Guess which one this is.

Left: New friends from all over the world.

Above right: The mud bogs we'd dug our way through were now almost impassable mud pits and we hauled, towed and pushed the bikes through. The log crossings had to be rebuilt.

Right: All wanted to finish the beast of a track.

statement. This wasn't the trip I'd mentally prepared for and it would take a little while to get my head into the game again.

The rain had stopped and the sun was bright in a cloudless sky. That seemed like a blessing, but the Madagascan weather only has two settings: monsoonal rain and wind or 37 degrees and 91 per cent humidity. As we wrestled our way through the streams and bogs we had to decide between protection and keeping ourselves cool. Going so slowly meant ▶



Slowly but surely the mood of the group improved.

we had no wind to cool us down, so many shed jackets to avoid overheating. The mood within the group was flat and everyone seemed to be caught up in their own thoughts. Our happy banter and motivating teamwork of the days prior had gone. The mood was only compounded by the relentless terrain.

We retraced our steps out of camp. The snotty 10km that had caused us so much trouble on the way in had us in a world of pain again. The mud bogs we'd dug our way through were now almost impassable mud pits and we hauled, towed and pushed the bikes through. The log crossings had to be rebuilt.

Tough times

When we finally made it out of the mud we had to deal with a kilometre of deep sand through a little village, and it looked like the whole village had arrived to watch us navigate the sand. In truth it was an entertaining spectator sport.

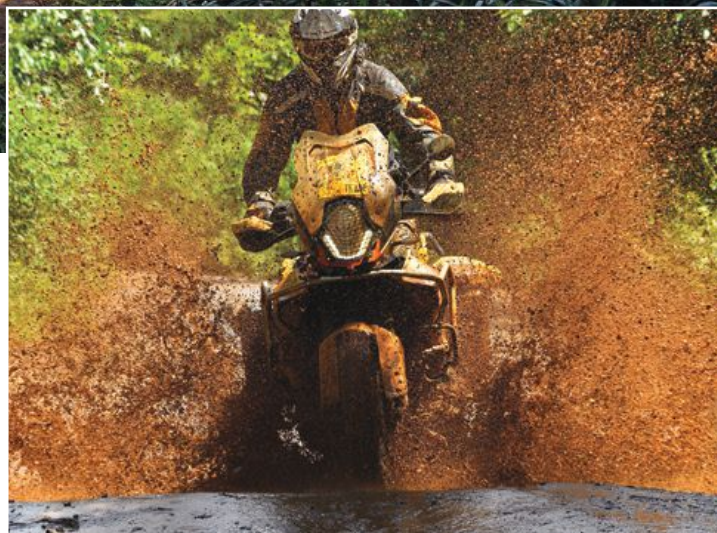
Distracted by my disappointment, and exhausted after the mud of the morning, the first rut I hit had me thrown unceremoniously off my Tiger, sitting in the sand in a bubble of disappointment. I knew I'd have to get myself into a better head space if I was going to make the most of the trip and avoid having a careless crash.

Slowly but surely the mood of the group improved, and by the time we all sat down together over pasta that night we'd reconciled ourselves to the ever-changing nature of adventure.

Final days

Our final day on the bikes was both insanely fun and bittersweet.

We rode north to find we couldn't cross the mountain pass as it was blocked by landslide damage. The police turned us back. But knowing it was our last day on the bikes together we all let loose a little, enjoying the sweeping dirt track scattered with puddles



Above: Our final day on the bikes was both insanely fun and bittersweet.

Below: The last rider through always had a tough time.



that created a natural course of berms and little jumps, chatting away together on our Sena headsets as we rode through the warm Madagascan rain we'd become so used to.

Sitting here now, I can still picture it all so clearly. The whole adventure was an absolute dream come true. Who could ask for a better introduction to Africa? To Herbert, Ramona, everyone at Touratech Germany, and the fearless crew on bikes who captured it all for the documentary – Wolfgang, JP, Mattias and Marcelle – I can never offer thanks enough.

My new friends from all over the world – July, Ben, Gunter, Gudmunder, Omar, Robert, John and Kurt – made the trip so memorable and I can't wait to ride with them all again one day.

It's hard to tell just now, but I have a feeling one day I'll look back and realise this amazing adventure changed me, as adventures so often do. It made us look at ourselves and the world with a fresh set of eyes. After the vivid Technicolor of an adventure like Madagascar, everyday life can look a little black-and-white by comparison. I guess I'll just have to start planning the next adventure.

I'd like to dedicate this to the memory of Tony Kirby. He nurtured my adventurous spirit and helped teach me to ride.

ADV



Above: Who could ask for a better introduction to Africa?

Below: A beach camp with its endless views of the Indian Ocean.

Below: After the vivid Technicolor of an adventure like Madagascar, everyday life can look a little black-and-white by comparison.



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Toolkit essentials

It's a real pain to have a ride interrupted by a problem when you know what needs to be done, but you don't have the tools to do it. Here's a few essentials for every adventure rider. These are only the core of a toolkit. Every bike has different special bits and pieces it needs. Some need specific drivers to remove axles. The Euro bikes often need Torx drivers to remove panels and fittings. Even a plug spanner can be a highly specialised item.

Try doing your regular bike maintenance in the shed using only the tools carried on your bike and you'll soon learn what's important. The trick is to refine the list of tools you carry to cover the essentials, and to try and have each tool suited to more than one task. This group is by no means comprehensive. It's a starting point, hopefully to get you thinking about what you personally need to carry.



Puncture kit

We're throwing a pump or compressor and spare tubes in with this lot. You should be running heavy-duty tubes, but your spare tubes should be regular-weight. They weigh half as much as heavy-duty tubes, they pack half the size and they're 50 times easier to fit. This goes for the tubeless guys as well. They'll need plugs or worms and an applicator, but if they tear a sidewall or ding a rim, they'll still need a tube to get to out of trouble. We like to carry a small compressor these days, but a pump of some kind – electric or manual – is a necessity. Gas bottles are fine for enduro guys, but by the time you carry four or five so you can get the pressures needed in the tyres on the big bikes, you may as well chuck in a compressor you can use over and over. A couple of patches and some glue take up no room and weigh nothing, but can be a lifesaver on a bad day...or if you pinch a tube. If you can't break the bead you need to address that situation. You can carry a beadbreaker, but if you travel in company, you can usually use the sidestand of another bike to do the job.



Spanners and screwdrivers

Make sure you carry the spanners you need for basic tasks and maintenance on the bike you ride. Tightening mirrors and lever perches, removing the air filter, removing plastics...whatever. Usually this will come down to half a dozen sizes at most, so double-ended spanners are the go. If you're feeling particularly affluent you can go for Titanium units. They save a lot of weight and impress the hell out of everyone, but when the chips are down and it's time to get medieval on an ugly situation, they don't have the strength of good-quality, tool-grade steel. Also be careful about the depth of access to some bolts. You may need a T-bar or socket and extension. On most bikes a single screwdriver with a Phillips-head one end and a flat blade the other will be enough.



Plug spanner

You hardly ever hear of anyone fouling a plug these days, but that plug still needs to come out for de-watering, and if a bike won't run, checking for spark should be among the first things you do. Make sure you have the spanner to remove and replace the plug/s. Also make sure you can remove the plastics and other bits and pieces modern bikes have so you can actually get access to the plug itself.



Multitool

These things are gold. There's a squillion of them around, and price will often reflect quality. Leatherman is a favourite, and with good reason, but if you hunt around you can find multitools designed and built for bike maintenance rather than human survival. Even so, by the time you pack a pair of pliers, you could just as easily chuck in a multitool that'll cover you for pliers, allen keys, screwdrivers, and even small spanners, corkscrews, toothpicks and lord knows what else.

Tyre levers/axle spanners

This is an old enduro-riders' trick. Have an axle spanner welded to each tyre lever – one front and one rear, obviously. It saves space and weight, and chances are if you need axle spanners, you'll be needing tyre levers a minute or two later. Even if you're running tubeless you should still be able to remove wheels and tyres. Be careful with the shape of tyre levers. The spoon-shaped levers look good, but they aren't as easy to use as those with a finer-shaped, hook-type end. And don't get weak-as-water budget levers. The big adventure bikes need some serious leverage to get that rubber on and off.



Nuts and bolts

A few matching nuts and bolts of varying sizes in some kind of small container can be amazingly handy.



Tape and cable ties

The ultimate emergency fixers. Don't leave home without 'em.

Checkout

This lot will boost your roost!

TOYS2GO KTM 690 CRASH BAR

Solid protection for the KTM.

- ✓ Made with stainless steel
- ✓ Available in stainless steel or powder-coated black finish
- ✓ Fits standard KTM 690
- ✓ Alternative crash bar fits Rally Raid tanks
- ✓ All mounting hardware and instructions supplied

RRP: \$270 - \$300 Depending on colour/model

Available from: Adventure Motorcycle Equipment

Email: www.adventuremotorcycle.com.au



INUTEQ ATANEQ COOLING VEST

Fill with between 500ml and 600ml of water via the filler cap at back of vest, distribute the water evenly and squeeze out any excess water.

Be cool, man!

- ✓ Lightweight and fully washable
- ✓ No wet or soggy vest, making it suitable to wear underneath clothing
- ✓ No refrigeration needed
- ✓ Reduces heat stress and fatigue, allowing you to perform better
- ✓ CE marked
- ✓ Available in grey/silver, khaki, or yellow



RRP: \$219

Available from: Motorrad Garage

Web: www.motorradgarage.com.au

MOTUL HELMET INTERIOR CLEAN

A bactericidal sanitiser for the foam inside helmets.

- ✓ Sanitises and thoroughly cleans the inside of the helmet
- ✓ Eliminates bacteria due in particular to perspiration
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- ✓ Dermatologically tested as non-irritating to the skin
- ✓ Simply spray uniformly on the foam inside the helmet. Leave to work and wait until completely dry before wearing again.



RRP: \$13.90

Available from: Bike shops everywhere

Web:

www.linkint.com.au/motorcycle-products/cat/motul.html

FORMA ADVENTURE LOW BOOTS

Perfect for summer rides and gentlemen with larger calves. Now available in black.

- ✓ Mid-height design
- ✓ Full-grain, oiled-leather upper
- ✓ Drytex waterproof and breathable lining
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- ✓ Anti-slip sole
- ✓ Rigid nylon mid-sole with steel shank
- ✓ Made in Europe

RRP: \$339

Available from: All serious dealers in Australia

Phone: (03) 5792 3888

Web: www.formaboots.com.au



MOTOZ TRACTIONATOR ADVENTURE AND GPS TYRES

The latest addition to the Motoz Adventure tyre range.

- ✓ Both available in 110/80-19
- ✓ New size complements the existing range of 21-inch fronts and four optional rears
- ✓ Renowned for their high-performance and long-lasting capabilities



RRP: \$139.95

Available from: Your local dealer

Web: www.jtr.com.au

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Lock and load!

- ✓ Fitted with side handles for easy installation and removal
- ✓ 30-litre, water-resistant storage capacity
- ✓ Can fit a full-face helmet
- ✓ Available in silver or black
- ✓ Older model Ténéré's may require Rear Carrier Kit (sold separately)
- ✓ Uses lock and key sets supplied with your Ténéré
- ✓ Removable inner bag available separately

RRP: \$529.52

Available from: Your local authorised

Yamaha Dealer or Y-Shop

Web: yshop.yamaha-motor.com.au



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For use with X.D1 and SX.100 helmets.

- ✓ New second-generation X-Com, with additional antenna that slots neatly between the helmet shell and EPS layer
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Available from: Carlisle Accessories

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A unique new tank bag for long-range plastic tanks.

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RRP: \$99

Available from: Moto National Accessories

Web: www.motonational.com.au

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Available from: AdventureMoto

Web: www.adventuremoto.com.au



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- ✓ Helps protect the expensive BMW headlamp against stones, branches and road debris.

RRP: \$123

Available from: All good motorcycle stores

Web: www.rockycreekdesigns.com.au



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A new seat kit for the AT.

- ✓ Standard, lower or new Rally seat kit as pictured
- ✓ Only available as a kit initially – foam and cover
- ✓ Complete seats being available mid 2017

RRP: From \$295 (plus \$195 for pillion foam-and-cover kit)

Available from: AdventureMoto

Web: www.adventuremoto.com.au



BARKBUSTERS EXTERNAL 'BAR WEIGHTS

Keep that 'bar vibrate to a minimum and still have the protection of Barkbusters.

- ✓ External 'bar-end weight (set of two), including bolts for mounting
- ✓ Helps reduce handlebar vibration
- ✓ Adds approximately 180g per side
- ✓ Fit in conjunction with most Barkbusters backbones (except EGO)
- ✓ Adds a stylish finish to the handguard
- ✓ Powder-coated black

RRP: From \$49.95

Available from: Your local bike shop

Web: www.barkbusters.net



JNS AUXILIARY LED LIGHT MOUNTS

Heavy-duty aluminum brackets designed for mounting auxiliary LED lights to Suzuki's DR650 and DRZ400, and Gen 2 KLR650s.

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- ✓ Powder-coated black
- ✓ Includes stainless mounting hardware

RRP: From \$49.95 to 84.95

Available from: Adventure Bike Australia

Web: www.adventurebikeaustralia.com.au



BIKESERVICE MULTIFUNCTION RATCHET WRENCH SET

High-quality hardware.

- ✓ All-in-one wrench handle designed with offset ergonomic grip and interchangeable ratchet head mechanism
- ✓ Features six ratchet mechanisms for 1/4-inch, 3/8-inch, 1/2-inch square drive and 1/4-inch, 8mm and 10mm hex bits
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- ✓ Supplied in a sturdy metal case lined with oil-resistant foam lining
- ✓ **Special Bonus!** Free 3/8-inch socket set (RRP \$45.99) with every Bikeservice multifunction ratchet wrench set order. Enter code ADVR at checkout! (Code valid until March 31, 2017).

RRP: \$203.99

Available from: www.motoplace.com.au

Web: www.motoplace.com.au



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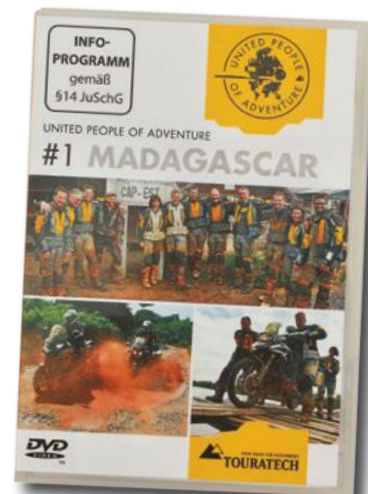
www.heldaustralia.com.au



UNITED PEOPLE OF ADVENTURE DVD

If you've followed Andrea Box' story in the past three issues, you'll love this.

- ✓ A film by Wolfgang Danner
- ✓ How the shared passion for motorcycle travel creates a bond between people
- ✓ How different cultures meet in extreme conditions
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- ✓ Showing the true spirit of adventure and of friendships for life forged on rugged slopes
- ✓ Running time: 61 minutes



RRP: \$25

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Web: www.touratech.com.au

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Web: www.overlanderae.com.au

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Available from: www.airhawk.com.au

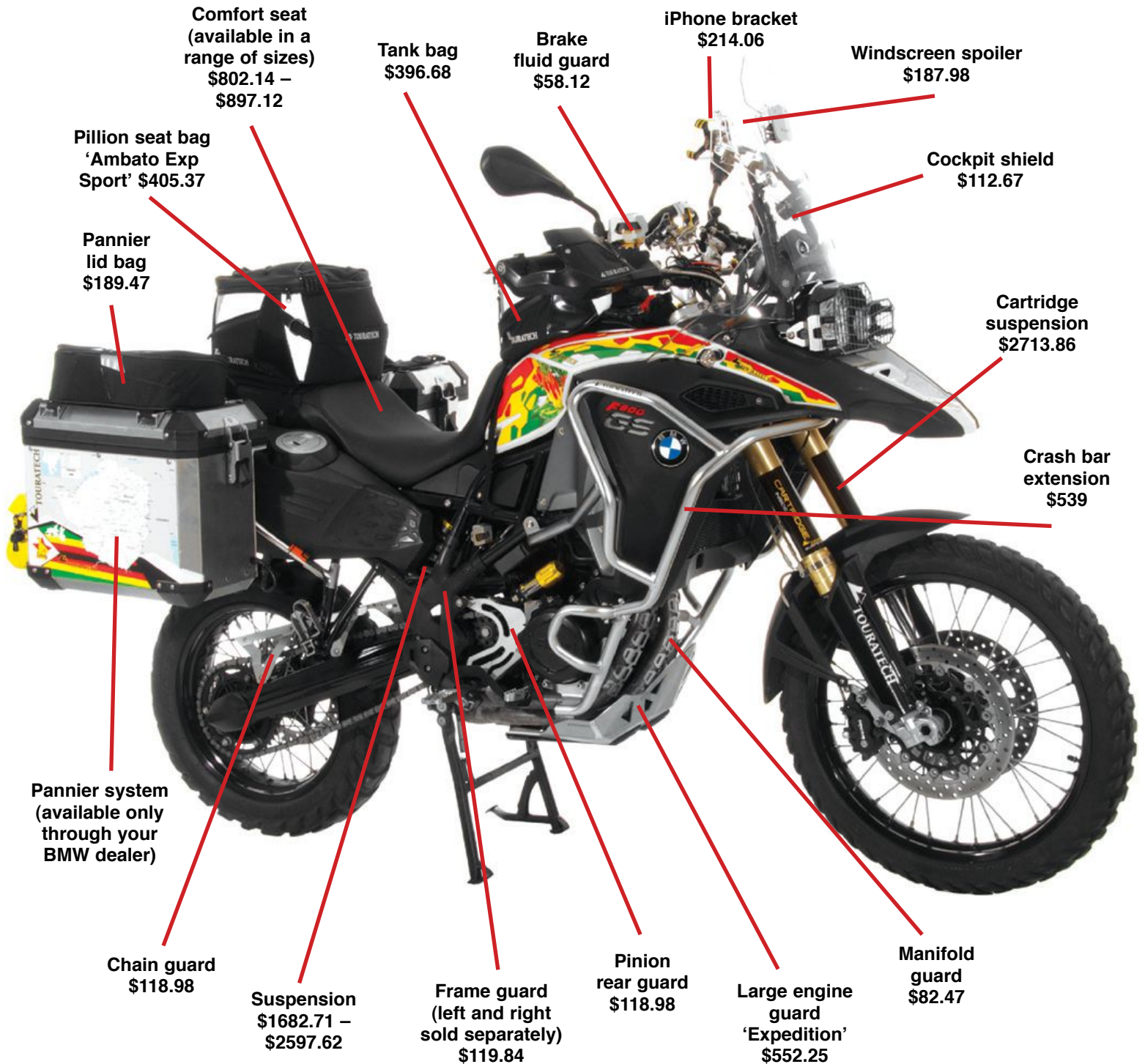
Phone: 1300 783 128.



Touratech

BMW F 800 GS

We fell in love with BMW's new F800GS and if you're lucky enough to own one Touratech has some primo kit that'll knock your eye out. Have a look at this lot! **ADV**



ADVENTURE RIDER MAGAZINE

On sale April, 2017

*At the limit
(and pushing hard!)*

The boss is heading across Australia again. This time he'll be on a DRZ, and we'll cover the Vince Strang build in issue #22.



We're also hoping to:



- ❖ Talk to Rod Faggotter about his 2017 Dakar
- ❖ Take the Ducati Multistrada 1200 Enduro to see if we can catch up with Troy Bayliss
- ❖ Put an Ataneq cool vest through its not-so-sweaty paces

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Can't wait for the next issue?
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