



HU ARE YOU

WORDS AND PICS: WWW.LOSTON.COM

STEVE CROMBIE CONFRONTS HIS AGEING IN A MATURE FASHION. HE TRIES TO FIND A WHOLE BATCH OF PEOPLE OLDER AND CRAZIER THAN HE IS.

Towards the end of February I was turning 28. After many years of physical abuse I decided to experiment with life as a teetotalist. Puritan influences have shafted my hedonistic tendencies. So instead of getting plastered for my birthday I decided to tear off to where the horizons are unlimited ... which I heard was somewhere in Victoria.

Susan and Grant Johnson, a couple of Canadian Adventurers, had organized an annual Australian rally from their mobile home in the UK via the Internet.

Susan and Grant are known as "modern Bedouins" since they have no kids, no pets, and all their possessions fit easily in a storage locker. In 13 years they've travelled two-up to over 50 countries and are the proud virtual foster parents of one of the biggest online motorcycle adventuring communities in the world - Horizons Unlimited (www.horizonsunlimited.com).

After many years trawling through their website and catching up with members from around the globe I decided to head down and check out what goes on at these meetings.

BEING FRANK

For the fifth time in two months I rumbled out of my rusty garage in Bondi and cut a path straight across the backbone of Mt Kosciusko National Park. Chasing brumbies, wedge-tailed eagles, dingoes and a few tasty wild pigs that I often dreamed of skewering with my handlebars and roasting over a fire on the side of the Broken Cart Trail.

Upon arrival a motley crew of mostly ancient individuals were perched out front of the Tintaldra Hotel near the NSW/Victoria border. I thought I'd come across a Ulysses Club meeting until I got a closer look at their bikes, number plates, and unusual characters that were cannibalizing the local beer supply to quench their hard-earned thirst. All here for the fourth annual Horizons Unlimited (HU) Motorcycle Rally.

People had ridden from the UK, Switzerland, Germany and most states of Australia, all riding classic Adventure machines like R80GSPDs, R100s, Super Tenérés, Africa Twins, Transalps, XRs, Dominators, KLRs and DRs. Most bikes were modified by the owners and all bikes were built to last a lifetime, leaving no doubt that some serious stories would fall out of some well-lubricated lips later in the evening.

There were a variety of speakers and tech clinics run by an assortment of unsuspecting characters. Most riders here seemed well-travelled and humbled by their achievements. They covered travel on various continents, flat fixing tips, a GPS workshop, how to pack for your overland bike adventure, and how to avoid fatal

mistakes on your virgin voyage.

I knew I'd fall into some crazy conversations and I immediately struck up a dialogue with a giant white-haired American guy named Frank Wheeler. Frank was riding a Honda CTX200 fitted out with a self-built sidecar outfit and a custom Safari 34 litre fuel tank. He had a suspicious twinkle in his eye that made me think he knew more about me than I did and he was planning a small dream ride, (which recently became reality) travelling 13,000km from the east coast to the west coast and back. His last exploit involved walking 300km unassisted across the Simpson Desert in 14 days behind his Honda Power Carrier (essentially a walk-behind a motorised wheelbarrow with caterpillar-style tracks).

GOING THE DISTANCE

After an explosive conversation with newfound friend Frank, I meandered through the crowd to a presentation out the back of the pub, where a crazy Australian was reliving his journey across Russia. He'd never ridden a bike before, and had absolutely no mechanical knowledge or even a bike license before his departure. His only skill was the ability to speak Russian.

He explained how he learnt to put new clutch plates in his bike over the phone to his Kawasaki dealer in Melbourne, and how he made it home alive. Inspirational proof that if you really want to do it you'll find a way to ride across any continent with a little time and determination.

I decided to test the Law Of Threes. Could the third person I speak to be as fanatical as the first two about adventuring?

I hunted the surrounding environs and spotted an unassuming character loafing around in a darkened corner chatting away with another distinguished gentleman. His name was Mark Deeley and he was a 38-year-old who worked as a medical equipment manager for the Ambulance Service. I asked Ambo Man why he was hanging out at the HU Rally. He said he was here to get some crazy ideas, meet like-minded people, tee up some extreme adventures for the future, and re-acquaint himself with a few old riding buddies.

Fair enough. So I asked him how far he'd travelled by motorcycle. He started counting on his fingers (he looked a bit wet behind the ears). I was thinking maybe 10,000 clicks. Mark looked up and locked eyes with me. "About 300,000km through 49 countries."

SPLIFF IN THE KIFF

"Holy Shit!" I blustered. "Why? What drives you to keep on riding?"

"Not having to abide by Australia's petty rules and regulations that restrict my wilder tendencies," he explained. "Different adventure every day, new people, I'm always off the beaten track, I don't have to follow same route as every other tourist...and I can. I'm a public servant."

That made sense. I asked him to elaborate on one of his favourite memories from the road. I watched as his eyes glazed over and an inverted line swayed across his lips.

"Kiff Valley," he murmured.

Mark revealed a journey he had experienced in Morocco a few years back on a Yamaha Tenéré 600. He was warned by the Australian Embassy not to go to Kiff Valley as it was considered dangerous. He went anyway.

He rolled up to the valley edge and as far as the eye could see there were fields of marijuana. Slowly he puttered down into the valley and onto the centre of a local village where packs of half-naked little kids started to crowd the roadside with black bricks in their chocolate little hands. He was petrified of these kids throwing these giant bricks at him (like they had when he passed through the middle east) so he cranked the gas and dodged his way through the kindergarten collective and onto the next village – where the locals proceeded to laugh at him when he told them of his misfortune. The kids were trying to sell him hashish!

BEERS IN A YEAR

I ask him where he wanted to go next. He began to open his mouth and I knew I wouldn't get a word in for a few hours so I packed the pen away and ordered a drink. Where wouldn't you want to go on a bike?

If you want to hear awesome stories from some genuine adventurers and prepare yourself for a serious inter-continental adventure make sure you head to the next year's HU meeting, and check out www.horizonsunlimited.com.

