

ON THE ROAD

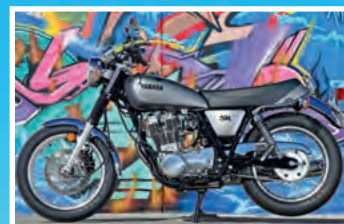
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DARYL BEATTIE ADVENTURES

CROSSING THE SIMPSON WITH DAZ



YAMAHA SR400
THE RETRO
SINGLE
RETURNS



08



ESCAPE TO...

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HUNTER VALLEY, CALAIS

DOUG VOSS

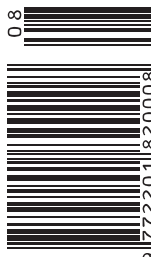
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Main The desert night sky is something else, especially when you have nature's fireworks on display. The tent next to the bike is a Jet Tent Bunker, perfect for a night under the stars. **Above left** We did this a lot! Stopping somewhere along the French Line for a happy snap, Birdsville is 330km away, and it's only day three! **Above right** Ron crests one of the 1100 sand dunes between Alice Springs and Birdsville.

Now, this is an adventure!

Alice Springs to Birdsville

Daryl Beattie has launched his own adventure tour company, travelling to some of the most remote and beautiful places in Australia. *FW* was lucky enough to be invited for the return leg of the very first tour.

It doesn't rain out here. And when it does, you're never here to see it. Everything is scorched and roasted red, like the sky is a gigantic grill turned up to max and left on for a millennia. The sand is deep, treacherous, energy sapping and never-ending. It's easy to see how men far braver than I have come to meet their maker in this desolate, lonely expanse. Burke and Wills, plus their traveling partners Grey and King, walked this place over 150 years ago. They made it from Melbourne to the Gulf of Carpentaria, but only one man, Grey, would come back to Melbourne alive. They must have been brave like warriors, and slightly mad.

You really get an idea of how insignificant you are in a place like the Simpson Desert. It's a mystical, magical place, enormous beyond explanation. Water is so scarce. Incredibly, life is sustained here, from spiders to snakes and, as I was later to find out, dingoes (see top five moments)...

But tonight, water is not scarce. Tonight is the final night for the return leg of the first ever Daryl Beattie Adventures Simpson Desert tour, and we've scored front row seats to a lightshow to rival New Years Eve on Sydney Harbour. Lightning and thunder crack in the distance and blaze the desert sky purple and silver like an Aussie version of the Northern Lights, and 10 grown men sit and stare like schoolboys, mesmerised by nature. It's a perfect curtail to what has been one of the best weeks' motorcycling any of us, including Daryl himself, could have imagined. ►

But it's about to get better. The benefit of having such a monumental drenching – aside from seeing nature at her most dramatic – means the final 250km to our last stop at Birdsville is like having the world's best motocross track, groomed and graded, all to yourself and your new best mates. The rain that chases us to Birdsville has made the sand almost hard-packed, meaning you can ride it like a racetrack – pushing the front, whipping the back into natural berms and pinning the throttle of the Honda CRF450X like Jacob Smith in the Australasian Safari. This is a bucket list moment. Even Daryl admits, "You probably get one of these days once every five years."

About 40km into the ride we reach Poppell's Corner – named after Augustus Poppell, the South Australian Government surveyor – which signals the meeting point for South Australia, Queensland and the Northern Territory.

Four hours into the day's ride, we're knackered, spent from having the bikes pinned for so long and laughing and grinning so hard our faces hurt. "It's days like these I remember why I really love dirt-bikes!" Adrian belts out. We all nod, smile and agree. And go back to lying half comatosed after lunch and get ready for the QAA line into Birdsville.

The previous four and a half days gave real meaning to the term "Adventure". This is not a ride to get coffee. This is *real* adventure, on light bikes built for speed – Honda CRF450Xs – something I guess you'd expect from one of Australia's most successful grand prix exponents. It's like a week's worth of rider training and fitness has been given to us as an added extra. Our ride snakes from Alice Springs, through Mount Dare and into South Australia, before looping back into Queensland and eventually Birdsville (the first group went Birdsville-Alice Springs). We get



Below Lunch in the middle of nowhere.
Right If you can't handle the flies...



Centre left Camels cruise by the Birdsville pub. We ran into a few wild bull camels on the ride, but we seemed more interested in them than they were in us.
Left John and the Finke Riverbed Warrior cop the only puncture on the trip, barely 40km into the ride.

what the boys in the race do. Picture this: Last year, GHR Honda rider Todd Smith won the race on his Honda CRF450R, averaging 113km/h going to Finke and 110km/h coming back to Alice. So in many sections, over square edged ruts, whoops, and super fast blind corners, he was hitting near on 170km/h! To say that takes balls of steel is an understatement... While we are only hitting about 50 percent of his speed, it is still epic fun. The sand is super-fine, and you can use the course to help you and the bike soak up speed while looking for the next obstacle, which you're probably already in. What a rush! The track runs 227km each way, and all the time you can see the refueling stops painted on old car bonnets littering the side of the track.

Further on we ride through the Aboriginal town of Finke, past the South Australian border and into Mount Dare, having covered about 350km. This is the transport day and is the straightest piece of road we'll see all week – from here on it will only get tougher. We unload the Unimog and get the first taste of Grant's exceptional cooking – tonight it's Filipino style pork and rice with bread and butter pudding for desert. Top that off with some beers and bullshit and it's about as good as life gets.

After a shower (a shower after a ride makes a hell of a difference to your comfort levels), we get our first night's kip in our new abodes – we all have a Jet Tent Bunker each and proper thick Oz Tent sleeping bags – and sleep like babies. All except Grant, who's up until stupid AM making wraps for tomorrow's ride. ➤



Right Ron hard on the gas during official practice for the 2014 Finke – he wishes!
Left A birds eye view of one of the many salt pan crossings the group faced.



The boys go for a dip in Dalhousie Springs – that water is about 36 degrees!



Stopping for a quick photo on the New Crown Cattle Station. Further down the track is the famous Pink Roadhouse at Oodnadatta.



This is about as close as any of the guys will get to the finish of the real Finke race, but it still felt great!

10 MINUTES WITH DAZ

Former 500cc Grand Prix winner Daryl Beattie has always been a country boy at heart, and we sat down with him to get his views on this new business venture.



How did you get the idea for bike adventures?
It all came from a few different things. I've been going away with mates for years to the NT and Cape York, and a mate of mine, Bradley Thomas, has always had awesome camps. So as time went on, the Unimog came up for sale at the Army auctions. I bought it for fishing trips a year ago and realised it would be perfect for bikes tours. So I started setting the business up. Honda and Michelin were keen to be involved, so that's been a huge help. The camps are great, but they need a little fine-tuning.

It was extremely important for me to have the capacity for riders to have a good shower every night. It makes such a difference to your state of mind at the end of a ride. Also, the beds were equally important. I'd used these beds before so I knew they were good. And having great food was imperative. A good feed makes you feel good and ready to get out there and ride.
The riding takes care of itself in areas like this, so having a shower, a comfy bed and great food was top of my list with setting up the company.

How did you decide on the routes?
I read a lot of 4x4 magazines and the Canning Stock Route, Cape York, Simpson Desert and the Kimberleys were the places everyone talks about. The Cape comes from my love of fishing – I know that area really well because I've been going there for 18 years.
The 450s are the bikes I want to focus on right now. I might do some big bike adventure stuff later on, but for now the focus is deserts and dirtbikes.

Explain to us the Cape York connection
I'd go there every year after racing, then more after I stopped racing. I started going to a property on the mail plane, which went Wednesday and came back the following Wednesday. Then I started driving and did some dirtbike tours with Roy at Cape York Motorcycle Tours. For me the Cape is not a massive focus. It's hard to go past the Simpson for a dirtbike because it's so challenging. The Cape is different – there's deep sand in some places, but this to me is a real ride – it's full-on in the Simpson.

You're a country boy, aye?
Yep. I was born in Charleville, but I didn't spend much time there as a kid. Dad was in Charleville for 20 years as a plumber and on properties. I grew up with stories of the Channel Country and the Diamantina out to Birdsville. Driving out to the Simpson from Birdsville, I feel comfortable, like I'm at home. I love the area and the desert. On the Canning trip, we'll cross the Gibson Desert, and see some stuff further south I haven't seen before.

How has the reaction to the company launch been?
The website and social media have been great, as well as newspapers. The two Townsville guys are here because they saw it in the local paper. We need to do more to get the name out there, but things like the Unimog tracker on the website has been great. Wives and friends can go to the website and see exactly where we are on the trip, which also helps for safety.
Honda and Michelin have been unreal with bikes and tyres; Waeco want to come on board more; and Hela have lit the camp up for us. Honda has a competition going on the Formula One coverage for a spot on the tour, and Michelin are doing a competition in bike stores. It's all coming together but there's still work to do.

How long do you see yourself doing the tours?
I hope to be doing it for at least 10 years. When I look back at my life, whether it's racing, commentating, they seem to be in 10-year blocks. If the company is really successful and it's past that stage, I might drive the Unimog and still be at the camps to be involved and talking with everyone. ■

Day two is our first encounter with the notorious French Line, but it will have to wait as we hit up an oasis in the middle of nowhere – Dalhousie Springs. Dalhousie Springs is like a natural, upside down shower of around 80 holes called mound springs. The water itself comes from Queensland and the Northern Territory and is heated by the earth's core, traveling under layers of hard rock until it springs to the surface through rock faults. The result is a massive pool of mineral-laced water with fish and frog species found nowhere else, the water reaching 36-38°C in the swimming area. West of the main pool the water can reach 43°C, with a flow rate of 160L per second. Have you ever heard that expression of swimming in the world's biggest bath? This is the world's biggest bath. I don't want to get out.
Back in gear, after we pass old colonial housing wrecks and windmills and the ground gets progressively sandier, we see the first dune. It's time to turn Frenchy! The French Line is the shortest and most direct route across the Simpson, but it's also the toughest and can be one of two things: Paradise on a dirtbike or hell if you don't know how to ride one. Luckily the CRF450Xs are built for this kind of riding, and the harder it gets the more the bikes love it. It's conversely the opposite for my arms, which are now pumped to the point where I can hardly hang onto the bike. A bit of stretching and yet more piss-taking from the guys gets me right though, and I decide to take it a bit easier on day three just to make sure I'm good for the run to the flag.
Our campsite for the night is Georges Corner, a massive crater in the middle of nowhere, like someone dropped a bomb on the place a thousand years ago. It seems to be a happy place to die, as at the end of the crater I see a few dingo skeletons turning to dust.
By now we've seen some of what the Unimog can do. This thing is a beast! Daz picked it up at the army auctions and has done a few mods to it (see breakout). Scooter has the thing dialed up – he nails dunes and almost has the big girl drifting in some sections. It's 10-ton fully loaded and ploughs on through practically anything. Seeing it blast up and down big dunes is something else.
Day three sees us taking in the Rig Road to Lone Gum. The Rig Road is the longest and most direct route across the Simpson and was once used for heavy machinery but its old clay surface is now eroding, and you'd hate to take a big rig down it now – Scooter doesn't seem to mind. Today we get the kind of heat we'd been expecting all trip. Up until this point we'd absolutely jagged the weather – the hottest it has been was mid 20s, now it's well into the 30s. Scooter measures the ground temp at 46°C and calls us all pussies – the crew before us, running from Birdsville to Alice Springs, had temps like this or more every day with a ground temp well into the 60s. Water is getting downed like it's never going to run out. ➤



THE MIGHTY UNIMOG

One of the stars of the tour is undoubtedly the Mercedes Benz Unimog. Daryl picked it up at the army auctions a year ago to go fishing, before transforming it into the support vehicle to end all support vehicles. He takes up the story.

“It’s a six-cylinder diesel 1989 model with 180hp. It’s got eight forward gears and eight in reverse,” Daryl starts. “One of the things I wanted to do was to build it for the Canning Stock Route and work backwards, because the Canning is the most remote destination we go to and biggest distance we cover without services.

“It’s got six wheels and two spares. The tyres are Michelin XZLs on Hutchinson rims with a bead lock. The tyres and wheels alone are over \$20K. They’re a must for this trip. The truck is eight ton empty and over 10 ton fully loaded for a trip. The suspension is standard but I’ve fitted a larger radiator.

“We carry 500L of unleaded petrol, which is the legal amount. We carry another 850L of diesel, about 1000L in total, which gives us a range of about 3800km. We’ll change the water around later on so we carry 1000L of drinking water and 500L of shower/kitchen water. That means that extra 500L can be pumped from rivers or other clean water sources. The showers can be heated if the engine is on and we run six batteries – two to start the truck and four auxiliary ones, so there’s no need to run a generator – but we have one as a back up.

“As far as communication goes we have the website tracker so people can see where we are at all times; we run iPads with Hema maps; sat-phones; EPIRBs and two substantial medical kits – both built by QLD Ambulance when we did our medical training there. We also have a \$3000 defibrillator for real emergencies. Ron and I both carry basic medical kit while riding for snakebites and general injuries which we’ll fine-tune over the next year.” ■

Above The Unimog made the camps exceptional.

Top right The ‘Mog crests yet another dune.

Centre right Filling up at camp.

Right Those four Waecos held enough food for 10 blokes for a week!



THE HONDA CRF450X

The trip was made all the more memorable thanks to the Honda CRF450X machines that we had the use of.

The Hondas never missed a beat the entire time, handling the deep sand and hard-packed trails with ease. The Michelin Desert tyres also played their part well – not one rider suffered a puncture (who rode on these tyres) and you probably would have been able to get another 1000km or so more riding out of the tyres before you needed to replace them.

The Hondas were modified using 25L Safari tanks, which gave us enough fuel to get through most days on a single tank. They handled brilliantly on a full tank, a little top heavy but once you’re used to them you’d never notice – especially if you’re used to riding big adventure bikes.

Other mods included: radiator guards, new chains from RK Chains, steel sprockets (gearing was changed to go one tooth up on the front and three down on the rear), DBR sprocket and chain covers/protectors, a bash plate and standard handlebar guards were fitted. Daryl and Ron’s bike also run a cig lighter point for keeping iPads charged on the go.

The 450 engine was perfect for this type of terrain, with an excellent spread of power despite the taller gearing.

The modifications carried out, along with the performance of the 450 engine, make this the perfect bike for this type of terrain. ■



Today is also the day I make my freestyle motocross debut. Following Daryl up a steep dune, I totally forget how to ride and bury the nose of the CRF into the dune.

“Hey mate, have you ever ridden before?” smartarse Daryl says. The bike’s buried past the axles as I yank it out of the sand. “Right, bugger this,” I mutter, and head back about 200 metres more than I need to. First, second, third gear. At the base of the dune I screw up and seat bounce the bike. Now, not being Chad Reed means I have no skill in this area of motorcycling, and the bike immediately flings itself 10ft in the air, kicks my feet out and pitches the nose down. The result is fairly predicabile (check Top 5 breakout). And it happens right in front of the entire group. Pissed off for about five seconds, I can’t help but burst out laughing. May as well, everyone else is. Big John also comes a cropper, getting flung over the ‘bars of the Riverbed Warrior later in the ride and landing on his shoulder for the second time.

We arrive at the Lone Gum late in the afternoon, set up camp and get stuck into some beers. Lone Gum is interesting in that this mammoth Box Eucalypt tree really shouldn’t be here. These trees are normally found in clay-laced soils near waterways, so how this thing has survived ►

WHAT THE RIDERS THOUGHT



Name: Adrian

Age: 45

From: Gold Coast, QLD

“I found out about the tour through Twitter, and my mate Tony and I thought it would be the perfect trip for us. The fact you can ride new CRF450Xs was a big consideration in us coming along. The dunes have been my favourite part of the trip. It’s a real adventure, not a tour. You’re on the gas and riding hard and the camps have been excellent.”



Name: Gary

Age: 47

From: North QLD

“John told me about the tour, which sounded pretty great. I rode my own bike but if I did it again I’d definitely take one of Daryl’s bikes, because they’re the right bikes for trip. I’ve had a great time – the people have been terrific. The tent was excellent – it’s the only way to camp in the desert. And the food was brilliant. It’s been a great trip.



Name: Dave

Age: 56

From: Adelaide, SA

“This was just a straight blast in the desert. It’s been so much fun. Riding the Finkel racetrack behind Daryl was pretty amazing, but more than that, every day had something to offer – some tracks were harder than others, but all were challenging, especially the French Line. It’s a must do if you love dirtbike riding.”



Name: Tony

Age: 53

From: Gold Coast, QLD

“Adrian told me about the trip, and we’d been talking about something like this for a number of years. It was absolutely fantastic. Well-organised, challenging, great camaraderie, and the food was a highlight of the trip. I’d certainly recommend it to anyone thinking about it. My riding improved dramatically by the end of the trip – I would have loved to have kept riding!”



Name: Mike

Age: 45

From: Sydney, NSW

“It was an awesome trip. It’s hard to know what to expect with the Simpson – I massively over-packed the gearbag! It was little cooler at night than expected. I had my KTM, but I’d take one of Daz’s bikes next time because that way there’s spares if something goes wrong. And they’re not slugs, either. The run from Dalhousie Springs, the first section of sand, was a real buzz. That’s when we got stuck into it.”



Name: John

Age: 52

From: North QLD

“I’d always wanted to do this sort of ride and Daryl’s trip covered exactly what I wanted to do and I’m so glad I did it. The Riverbed Warrior has fared pretty well and despite a few spills I’ve had a good time. There’s not one part that’s my favourite. The ride’s been great as have the camps, I just need to be a little bit more bike fit! Then I’ll be back.” ■

FREE WHEELING
BEATTIE ADVENTURE

GET ON ONE!

Keen to try this for yourself? Here's a list of the upcoming tours Daryl is doing. For more information, go to www.darylbeattieadventures.com.au.

Cairns to Bamaga – Cape York
Tour 1: 3-8 September
Tour 2: 1-6 October

Desert to WA Coast – Uluru to Broome
15 July-1 August

here in the seared landscape of the Simpson Desert remains a bit of a mystery. It was fenced off in 1966 to stop cars and trucks eroding its root system, and makes for a great area to set up camp and take some photos.

Day four and after the best night's sleep under the stars I can remember, we hit up the WAA line and Erabena Track. The WAA line is like the French Line's little brother, not quite as powerful but still packing a decent punch. After the ease of yesterday we're back into it – deep sand, hundreds of dunes and saltpan crossings. If you've only ever seen a saltpan in pictures, they don't do them justice. They're massive expanses of nothing, flat like a pancake (in comparison to the dunes), with heat hazes coming off them that make it look like they're underwater. It's just your mind playing tricks on you, and the Simpson saltpans are not pearly white like the ones at Bonneville. They're a grey, browny mixture that's slippery as all hell if it's got even the slightest amount of water in its surface. Keep it pinned and avoid quick direction changes, as you'll likely slip out if you're not careful.

The WAA line eventually turns at the Erabena Track and provides more of the same as far as dune riding goes – they're not quite as full-on as the French Line dunes but you still have to treat them with the utmost respect or you'll be going A over T before you know it. Today's a big day, covering over 200km and eventually hooking back up with the French Line for the night's camp and

TOP FIVE MOMENTS

1. That final day across the Simpson to Birdsville: A little bit of rain goes a long way and made the final 250km the world's biggest motocross track. Seeing 10 grown men laughing like kids after a wild ride is a pretty cool feeling.

2. My attempts at retaining my dignity: The impromptu seat bounce (left) off the CRF over one stubborn dune and the resulting prang was the highlight for many, and super embarrassing for me. Oh well, you gotta be able to laugh at yourself!

3. The food: Daryl's brother-in-law Grant (left) is an absolute weapon in the bush kitchen. Butter chicken, ravioli, BBQs, Madagascan lamb, beef bourguignon – you'd find it hard to eat better at a top restaurant. Top that off with healthy fresh wraps for lunch and you've got a bunch of very happy riders.

4. The beds and showers: The bedding was top notch. We used Jet Bunkers and properly insulated sleeping bags that kept us warm all night. Sleeping in comfort with just the flynet separating you and the stars is pretty special.

5. The night of the dingo: This only happened to me. I had a dingo sniffing around my tent in the howling wind of the final night and he decided to give me a bit of a nudge with his nose on my head, which scared the sh!t out of me. A quick "BA!!" from me, which woke up the camp at 2am, seemed to scare him off. Mongrel.

Mother Nature's fireworks display. 200km might not sound like a big deal but when you're doing to 20km/h in some sections and knackered from the dunes it will take you all day.

As we settle into the night show and get ready for the final day's epic riding into Birdsville, we're all a little nostalgic. By all accounts this past week has been the most fun any of us have had on two wheels for a bloody long time. And it was so because there wasn't really anything you could fault. I'm sure Daryl will find things to fine-tune as he's still new to this adventure tour game, but for a first up effort he's done exceptionally well. The camps were as comfortable as you could have hoped for, the beds and showers a godsend, and the food Grant prepared has been outstanding. The crew has also been top grade. Rocket and Scooter both did their jobs flawlessly, and we all enjoyed listening to Daryl's stories about racing 500cc Grand Prix in the age of the titans.

Seven days away is the perfect time to get out there and enjoy a dirtbike, especially when all you have to is rock up with your gearbag. Everything else is taken care of, so all you have to do is ride at your own pace, keep it upright (ahem) and have a blast.

Check out the tour guide for upcoming dates and get your backside on one of these tours. It's something you'll remember forever.

