

ADELAIDE TO DARWIN



FIRST LEG

WORDS & PICS DOC

It's 6065 kilometres from my home in Adelaide up to Darwin and back. And with my completely rebuilt Shovel, I thought it would be a doddle. Well sort of. This was to be the first leg of my Southern Cross Ride that I set up to raise awareness and research funding regarding the scourge of depression and suicide. Please check out www.southerncrossridefordepression.com for more information.

Now Andy and Adam of Hyperformance Cycles/SA Choppers rebuilt the bike and did a great job of it, fitting the new S&S 93 cubic inch motor along with the new Baker Drivetrain 6-speed transmission and Baker clutch as well as replacing all the bearings, the fork internals and much more besides. And Andy very kindly donated all the labour making him a much-appreciated major sponsor.

So all up it became virtually a new motorcycle. But it didn't quite work out like that, though, not because of any fault on their part. I left home on a Sunday afternoon and stopped at Pt Wakefield for a coffee and petrol, having ridden a mere 112 kays from home. After refuelling I went to start the bike and there was no response at all from the starter button. I checked all the fuses and they were fine and I was just starting to scratch my head when I had a text come through from Adam, asking how the ride was going. Ha! I explained

that it wasn't – and Adam very kindly jumped on his turbo-charged Fat Boy and rode up to see if he could help out.

It turned out that a starter relay had failed and after Adam replaced it with the spare I was carrying the bike started like a charm. But it was too late by then to carry on, so I rode home again arriving just before midnight. I arose at 4am to get an early start and once again got to Pt Wakefield. Stopped at the same servo, topped up the fuel and hit the starter.



Leaving Port Augusta

Nothing. Nada. Zip. It was déjà vu all over again, as Yogi Berra famously said.

This time around it was the main fuse that had blown but figuring that there must have been a reason for it, and not game to carry on as I only had a few spare fuses with me, I headed back to Adelaide once again.

I thought that I would pick up some fuses from Adelaide Bike Works which is close to home, but in attempting to start it there, heard a spinning noise and the motor wouldn't turn over. Damn. Double damn! Turned out to be a starter clutch, the second one to fail in this brand new starter motor in just a few months.

So I had head tech Craig replace both the starter clutch, and also the starter button, in case that was intermittently faulty. I also had him install a Wimmer's Custom Cycle (www.wimmermachine.com) compression release on each cylinder. These units require no engine modifications or disassembly.

To fit them, just remove the spark plug, install the compression release device over the spark plug hole, install the new spark plug Wimmer's provides to you, which has a groove in the threads to work with the compression release. Do the same with the other cylinder and the job is done.



Wimmer compression releases

Right, fingers crossed. Toes crossed. Everything crossed! Not being one who walks under ladders I didn't stop at Pt Wakefield this time, but instead refu-



ABOVE: I'm not known to travel lightly. RIGHT: 43 years separates these two Harley-Davidsons, but you wouldn't know it at a casual glance. RIGHT BELOW: Geoff, keen Harley enthusiast who lives in Perth and works offshore New Zealand. That is a hell of a commute!



elled at Snowtown and a couple of hours later pulled into my mate Bob's place in Pt Augusta.

Bob currently owns a 2012 Road King and when I had told him of my ride, he volunteered to come along with me, an offer I greatly appreciated. We go way back, though we had not had much contact in recent years. So next morning we rolled the bikes out and pointed them north.

An icy cold morning made the first leg of the day less than pleasant and the wood fire at the Pimba roadhouse was very welcome. There we met Geoff, a fellow Harley rider, who, with a mate had ridden to SA from Perth only to have his mate's bike develop a major engine problem at Pt Augusta.

The day had warmed a bit and Pimba to Coober Pedy was a good ride and 'though I missed cruise control (being



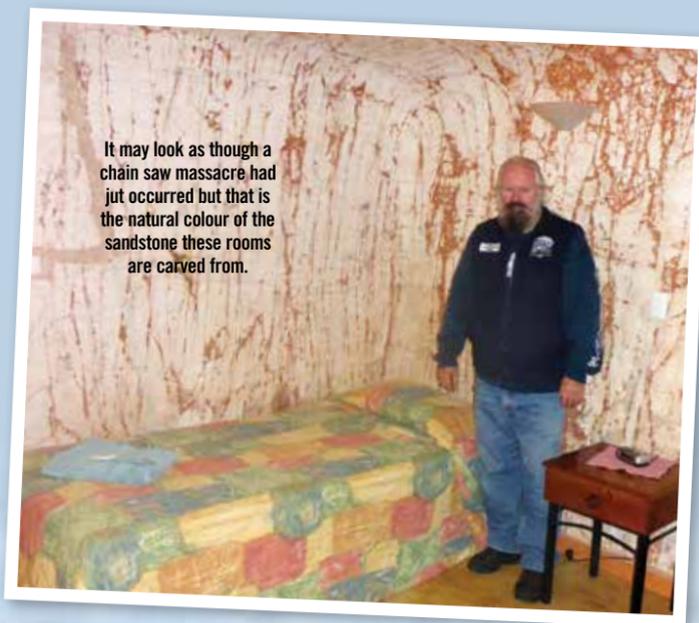
a bit of a wuss these days) the engine ran strong and the Airhawk cushion kept my bum happy despite the tired old seat on the Shovel.

Ah, Coober Pedy. What an interesting town this is! Among its attractions are several underground motels, one of which, Radeka Down Under, was our overnight stop. This is a biker friendly facility and was originally an opal mine with the accommodation tunnelled out of the sandstone. The rooms are three and a half metres underground but you enter them at ground level. Secure undercover bike parking quite close to our room was a bonus.

These rooms maintain a comfortable temperature all year round in the low to mid-twenties and are totally soundproof and absolutely pitch black when

you turn the lights out, making it a unique experience indeed. Geoff was staying at the same place so we enjoyed a meal and a few beers with him at the local pub.

Next morning we rose bright and early, eager to get on the road but just as I was loading up my bike a fellow biker parked near me pointed out that my rear tyre looked flat. And it was. Dead, motherless bloody flat. We tried re-inflating it but when we removed the compressor hose the interior section of the valve fell out and



It may look as though a chain saw massacre had just occurred but that is the natural colour of the sandstone these rooms are carved from.

Day One was trouble-free. Made it to Coober Pedy.



it went down again.

By dint of careful removal of the hose a second time, we managed to put the valve cap on again and it held air this time. At least temporarily. I had a brand new spare tube with me and after calling the RAA road service their local representative turned up.

Now being a city slicker I expected a bright yellow van with flashing lights and a smartly attired and eager to serve young man to jump out of it. So when a battered old ute that had seen better days pulled up, and the world's oldest mechanic creakingly eased himself from the cab, I was more than a bit surprised.

"Bloody hell, I'll have to fix this meself," were his opening words, followed by, "I'm Bob, I'm a biker meself." He suggested I follow him to a workshop a kilometre or so from the motel and there he began his struggle to remove the rear wheel. Because of the pannier bracketry the hinge on the rear guard couldn't be accessed and, without a bike lift, the operation had to be performed on the floor of the shed.

After some struggles Bob's son Peter was called in to assist, and bit-by-bit the wheel was removed, the old tube tossed in the bin, and the new one fitted. But here was another problem, in that it was not the right tube for the rim of the Shovel. Instead of a rubber cone shaped valve stem it had a metal one, one that was way too small for the hole in the rim. However, with a washer or two added, an o-ring and some Clag glue I was back on the road.

But not without more worries.

You see, on removing the wheel, the rear tyre was found to be practically worn out with the tread wear indicators suggesting imminent replacement. Damn. This tyre had



Damn!



The wheel is out but not without a struggle.



Kulgera cabin

been fitted when the bike was rebuilt and had only lasted a bit over 3000 kays. Now sections of the Stuart Highway have been laid down with very coarse gravel, whose sharp points make for good grip but at the expense of rapid tyre wear. With nearly 700 kays to reach Alice Springs – my first opportunity to get a new tyre – the next few hours saw a lot of puckering going on.

Erlunda was our planned

destination for the night but when we stopped at Kulgera for fuel and saw the neat bar at the roadhouse and the roaring fire, we booked a cabin immediately after downing a stress relieving Sambuca or three.

We'd make up the distance the next day and given it was happy hour we got stuck right in. There's a camaraderie that builds up with fellow travellers in isolated locations and we soon had some enjoyable

conversations going on and tucked into some good food. And more than a couple of drinks, if I remember rightly.

The next day we made it to Alice Springs where Desert Edge Motorcycles, the local Harley-Davidson dealership, replaced the shitbox rubber with a Dunlop D402, along with a more appropriate tube. And yes, I bought another spare tube to carry with me.

That night, we enjoyed a fun



An inspiring sunrise. And a time to reflect on why I'm doing this ride...

evening thanks to the hospitality of the local HOG chapter who were running a music quiz night. I must thank Richard Blom (Ductape) for arranging this as well as helping us in many other ways. We made the next day, a Sunday, a rest day and awoke refreshed on the Monday to head further north.

At Wycliffe Well we had a close encounter with an alien but managed to get on top of the situation. Bob wanted to put the alien child in his top box but I said no. The mind cringes...

In Tennant Creek we met up with Russell, a mate who did our Sturgis tour a couple of years back. Russell lives and

works in Mt Isa but had four days off, so feeling like a bit of a ride he jumped on his Fat Boy and cruised the 660 kays from Isa to Tennant Creek, where the three of us enjoyed the superb hospitality offered at the Blue Stone Motor Inn, a facility I highly recommend.



In company with Russell (pictured above) we headed north the next morning



The locals at Wycliffe Well are a bit odd...

and after a brief stop at the Larrimah Pub for a picture with the big pink pussy, and some icy cold refreshments, we rode on up to Mataranka.



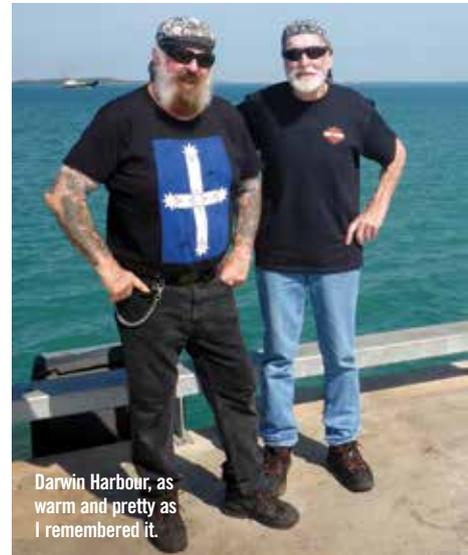
My day's reading on my odometer displayed 567 kays as we rode in to our overnight stop at the Mataranka Cabins and Camping facility. Here hosts and fellow Harley riders Glenys and Michael Somers kindly shared their evening meal with us which saved us from riding the wallaby infested road back into town to the pub.

The next morning Russell headed back south and Bob and I rolled further up the Stuart Highway toward Darwin, a distance of only 422 kays and reached our accommodation at the Darwin Free Spirit Resort some 15 minutes from the city.

Boy, Darwin has changed a great deal since I last rode up there some seven years ago. We enjoyed a great dinner that night at the home of Connie and Mark Hoy whom I met

through FOB (Friends On Bikes) thanks to Shunter and the Hoys were very generous to us in other ways including running us around Darwin for some sight seeing. Thanks guys, much appreciated.

I also had the techs at the local Harley dealership, N.T. Motorcycle Centre, check my primary oil levels as the bike left some patches of oil wherever I pulled up. Oil did need to be added there and I thank them for fitting me in. The next day we left Darwin, but I'll cover the ride back next issue. Including the moment when a bloke rushed into the roadhouse where we were breakfasting, yelling that "a woman has just backed over a Harley with her 4WD". **HD**



Darwin Harbour, as warm and pretty as I remembered it.



With Glenys and Michael and their Harleys.