

DARWIN TO ADELAIDE



SOUTHERN CROSS RIDE
FOR DEPRESSION & SUICIDE AWARENESS



SECOND LEG

WORDS & PICS DOC

Given the dramas and problems I encountered riding from Adelaide up to Darwin, I almost felt like changing Electra Betty's name to the Anxiety Glide. The first stage of my Southern Cross Ride for Depression & Suicide Awareness had made me more than a bit apprehensive about the ride home.

With all the professional preparation that was done on this bike, who'd have thought that two brand new starter clutches would fail, along with a new starter relay, a faulty ignition module and an intermittently faulty VOES switch? Not me. And the fun was far from over yet.

Now, there are various events that are organised to focus awareness on the terrible and growing problem of suicide in Australia, but my ride was aimed at raising awareness of the early signs that often go overlooked. I'll cover one approach to this in the sidebar accompanying this story.

And please visit www.southern-cross-ride-for-depression.com, which will give you some background on my personal motivation to do this ride, motivation that began to develop after losing my eldest son Scott, a medical doctor, to this scourge.

As well as raising awareness the ride was also to honour both Scott, and the daughter of my American friend Carla, Lisa Marie Korb, another



ABOVE: For a bike built in 1970, the Shovel was surprisingly comfortable, helped along by Progressive Suspension springs up front and their shocks at the rear. With my luggage for a backrest and the superb Air Hawk cushioning my backside, the miles passed smoothly. RIGHT: This bike of Darwin Dick's has held speed records on the salt flats both here and at Bonneville.

young victim. Scott was born in 1970, which was why I was riding a 1970 FLH, partly out of sentiment and partly because the age of the bike was a 'hook' that I hoped would give the story more of a chance to attract media coverage. The bike had been rebuilt thanks to the generosity of Andy



from Hyperformance Cycles/SA Choppers who performed all the labour, along with the kindness of S&S Cycle who supplied the brand new S&S S-H (Shovelhead) series engine and Bert and Lisa Baker who looked after me with a Baker 6-into-4 transmission. Without their help I could not have done this ride.

Day One was to be an easy one, with our first order of the day a stopover at Darwin Dick's place half an hour south of Darwin to shoot a couple of

bikes. Well we enjoyed looking over some of his bikes, some of which will be featured in a future issue. Leaving Dicks' early that arvo we headed for Katherine, some 274kms south, but as I was riding along I thought that the left hand fuel tank seemed to be vibrating more than usual and this got marginally worse as we rode along.

We stopped at Pine Creek where we took some photos by various decommissioned railway locomotives and then fuelled our bikes. I moved my

bike away from the pump, put it on the kickstand and went inside to pay for my fuel. As I walked out again I could see fuel pouring out from under the left hand gas cap, so I hunted around for a rock to put under the kickstand so that I could sit the bike more upright. The left hand cap is a bit of a strange one and despite trying several aftermarket units, none of which fitted, I had decided to make do with this one.

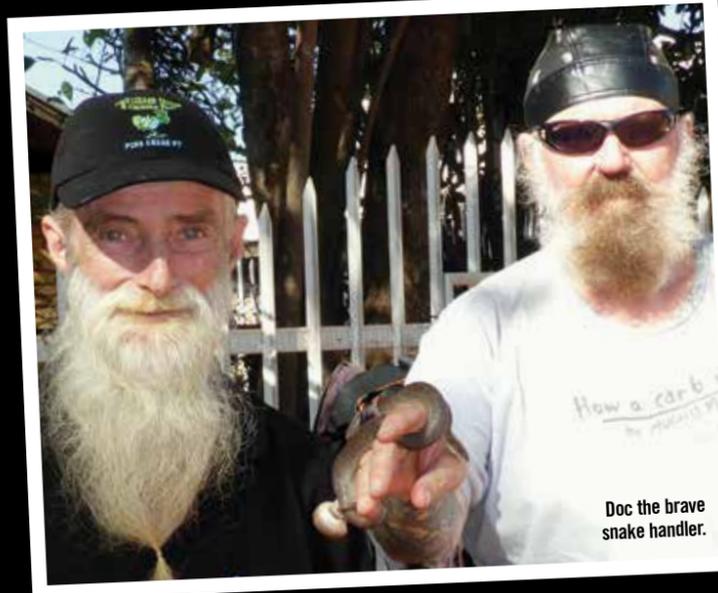
A close inspection of the bike showed that the left hand

mounting tab had fractured through, causing the excessive vibration, and that vibration had also adversely affect the gas cap's seal. No biggie normally, but to get the mileage I needed to achieve between fuel stops required me to fill both tanks close to the brim, and then find a rock to prop the bike upright each time.

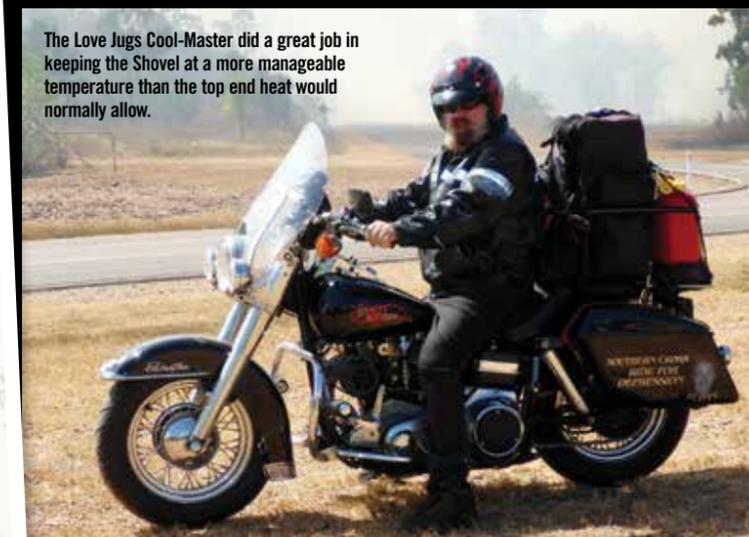
As we were leaving we met Brownie, a colourful local with a little snake, a Childrens Python, and because I have some friends who cannot stand snakes of any size or kind I just had to get a pic of me handling it.

Outside the town we encountered a large bush fire with several fire trucks in attendance. Well, with the radiant heat from the fire added to the Territory heat, I was very glad I had fitted the twin cooling fan setup, the Cool-Master, from Love Jugs as they did a great job.

These twin cooling fan units look deceptively simple but as testing in my driveway, with my Road Glide idling one very hot summer's day showed, the motor stayed much cooler than my wife's Switchback idling beside it. After 20 minutes with both bikes idling, the Roadie was showing 103C and the Switchback 195C. That is impressive.



Doc the brave snake handler.



The Love Jugs Cool-Master did a great job in keeping the Shovel at a more manageable temperature than the top end heat would normally allow.

We cruised on down to Katherine, making it without further incident and enjoying a pleasant dinner and a beer or ten at the Knotts Crossing Resort. However, the manager put a bit of a dampener on our plans for the next day, urging us to wait until the sun was well up and then ride slowly because, as he put it, the road south of Katherine for some 100 or so kays is well known as "death alley" due to the teeming numbers of kangaroos and wallabies supposedly lining it. Mmmm.

So we followed his advice and rode for a nervous couple of hours at around 80 kays, as that is about the speed that I reckon you could hit a roo on a bike and, if not walk away from, at least not die. Well, four or so hours later we had covered the 273kms to Daly Waters and after filling up our bikes at the roadhouse ordered some coffee and toasted sangers.

Now the coffee was exceptional and the ham, cheese and tomato sandwiches had plenty of filling and were delicious. But our happy mood was shattered as I was going for about my third bite when a bloke tore into the dining area shouting, "Either of you blokes own a Harley? A woman has just backed her 4WD over one!" Shit!



The broken kickstand. A small item in size but big in need.

We both raced outside and it was with some relief – I am embarrassed to say – that my old Shovel was still balancing on its rock while Bob's 2012 previously flawless Road King was on its left side in the dirt and gravel, the alarm squealing away like a stuck pig. The woman had snuck away from working on a property nearby to get some smokes and in her haste to get back before the boss discovered her missing, had not looked behind as she tried to make a quick exit.

Well we got Bob's bike up only to discover that the kickstand had been snapped off. Now, what to do? It was a heavily laden bike with top box and, as we discovered, having no kickstand is very limiting indeed. We'd noticed a storage shed behind the roadhouse and so Bob rode the bike around there and we asked the bloke working there if he could help us make up something we could balance the bike on.

A most obliging chap, he cut



up a pallet and we duct taped three bits of wood together at just the right height and angle to slide under the left side of Bob's bike where the kickstand usually is mounted. While it got us out of trouble it was quite an art to set up his bike on it and at all times its balance could only be described as precarious at best and puckering at worst. Bob lived in a state of constant anxiety that the wind would pick up, or change direction, or that a large insect might alight on his right handlebar. By the way, the W at the end of the part number stands for the wooden version.

This event put us a couple of hours behind schedule and still having some 400km to ride in order to reach our accommodation in Tennant Creek, I began to worry about travelling in the dark as the light seemed to be fading rather fast. Now this was in June, and there were thousands of grey nomads pulling caravans on their way up to the winter sun in the Top End, and while they'd been a traffic nuisance on the way up, now for the first time in my life, I felt a twinge of 'caravan envy'.

Riding along, peering past our headlight beam as we traversed long sections of road where signs warned us of unfenced roads and the hazards of cattle, not to mention the ever-present hazard of kangaroos, we'd pass those roadside rest areas where caravanners had pulled over for the night. Music was playing, barbecues were out, picnic tables erected, chairs set up, stubbies cracked and women chatting as their blokes put the steaks and snags on.

What they thought of two crazy blokes pushing on through



the darkness we'll never know but as the desert night grew more and more chilly I figured they would not have had 'Harley envy' on their minds.

To add to the 'fun', the guts of my brand new high/low beam switch had jiggled apart and I only had high beam, resulting in every oncoming car, truck or road train flashing their lights at me, often very mean spiritedly. So in this way we tediously rode on until we finally reached Tennant Creek and pulled into the Bluestone Motor Inn. Here the lovely manager, remembering us from the way up and being warned of our late arrival and bike problems, walked out to greet us with a couple of glasses of Sambuca as we pulled up.

We rode out the next morning, moderately hung over and wondering what further joy the day would bestow upon us, but everything went smoothly until we stopped for fuel at a location I would rather not mention. Our fuelling routine was for us to pull in, for me to dismount and find a rock for my kickstand. Then I would

fuel my bike, move it away from the pump, and set it up so fuel wouldn't pour out from under the cap.

Next I'd unpack Bob's wooden block from my bike and he would ride in next to a pump, dismount and hold the bike while I fuelled it up, and then I would go in and pay for my fuel and then hold his bike while he then went in and paid.

Well this particular day an army of nomads were jostling for bowser priority to fill up their 4WDS so I told Bob to ride his bike out to the edge of the road while I went in and paid, intending to pay for both lots of fuel. But while I was lining up, a nomad engaged me in conversation about the bikes he owned "back in the day" and I lost focus on my task at hand, and didn't notice how much had been put on the card.

Striding out I jumped on my

bike, fired it up, rode over past Bob motioning him to follow me, and headed back on to the Stuart Highway. After changing into top gear I glanced in my mirror and there was no Bob to be seen. So I slowed down for a while. Still no Bob. Then I pulled over for a while but no Bob came along. Damn. Better go back.

Which I did, to find him still sitting on his bike in the hot sun, sweating like the proverbial pig and being berated by one of the roadhouse employees. You see, I had forgotten to pay for his fuel and she'd come out screaming as he'd begun to ride off. Which left him with nothing to do but sit there, as his wallet was in his locked top box and, without a kickstand, he was unable to dismount. So my return was something of a relief although he expressed his gratitude in a funny kind of way.

We reached Alice Springs

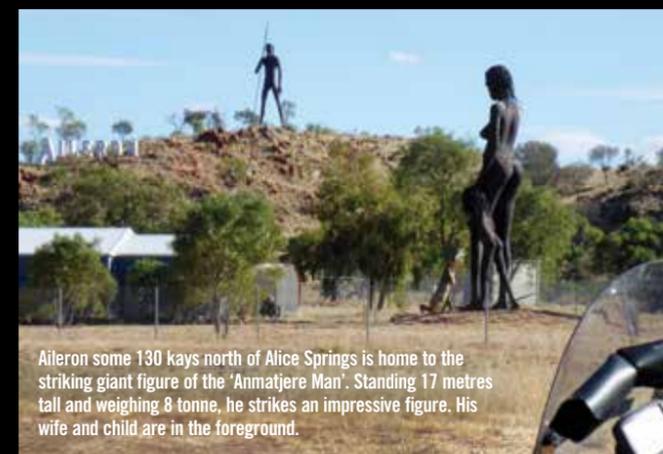


ABOVE: Bob waiting for me to leave the servo and about to follow me. Alas, that was not to be.

late that arvo to find that Richard 'Ducktape' Blom, a local HOG member had not only arranged with Desert Edge Harley-Davidson to remove a kickstand from one of their new machines in the showroom to fit to Bob's bike on the Monday, but organised

some local chapter members for a get together over dinner and a few beers. Most enjoyable.

As was the next day when Hagar, another member, drove us around Alice to see some of the sights such as the view from Anzac Hill and the old



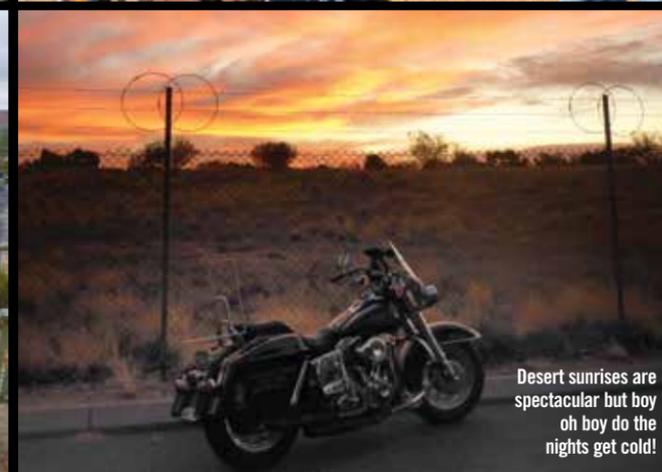
Aileron some 130 kays north of Alice Springs is home to the striking giant figure of the 'Anmatjere Man'. Standing 17 metres tall and weighing 8 tonne, he strikes an impressive figure. His wife and child are in the foreground.



Alice Springs from Anzac Hill.



Feeding the emus at Stuarts Well.



Desert sunrises are spectacular but boy oh boy do the nights get cold!

telegraph station. We rocked up to Desert Edge bright and early the next morning and in no time Dallas and his team had us back on the road. Thanks guys.

We stopped for brekky at Stuart's Well roadhouse and then at the memorial to the blokes who'd lost their lives on the Cannonball Run some years back, but after that kept the throttles open until we reached Kulgera, some 300 kays from Alice. After the good time we'd had staying at the pub there on the way up, we'd made it our destination for the night, only stopping for fuel and food at Erlunda.

The next morning I thought that we might have a day on the road without dramas but

"The next morning I thought that we might have a day on the road without dramas but that delusion ended abruptly..."

that delusion ended abruptly as the extremely low Kulgera overnight temperature must have affected my battery and the bike would hardly turn over. Fortunately, I had on board a very clever device, a Powerbrick, and by connecting it to the battery the motor spun over and started right up. I can highly recommend these units after this experience.

We made Coober Pedy after a lazy 424 kays and booked in once again to Radeka

Down Under for a night in an underground room. Harley-Davidsons always attract attention when you are on the road, and a 1970 model in the outback attracts even more, which gave me many opportunities to talk about Lifeline, the charity I was supporting with this ride.

From Coober Pedy to Bob's place in Port Augusta is just under 550kms and for some reason we thought this last day on the road would be an

easy run. So we got up late and stuffed around getting ready, with me trying unsuccessfully to fix my high/low beam switch and eventually leaving much later than we should have. So once again we're riding in the dark at the end of the day, getting blinded once more by oncoming road trains, 4WDs and sundry other traffic.

But we made it and, pre-warned, Bob's delightful wife Clare greeted us in the driveway with a large bottle of

Sambuca in her hand and a big smile to see us both safely back. Prior to that night I don't think Clare had partaken of Sambuca but she sure got into the spirit. Or is it that she got the spirit into her?

My final leg was to ride the 300km from Port Augusta to Adelaide and while the sky was clear a gale was blowing making for an interesting ride at times when a road train went past going the other way. Ten minutes from home I was feeling relieved that I had made it without drama but then, while stopped at a traffic light, I smelt plastic burning and thought that some wiring must have caught on fire. But then looking down I saw that a large white shopping bag had blown against my exhaust pipes and was in the process of both burning and melting. Damn. One more final drama to bring

this ride to a fitting end.

The next part of the ride is to be Adelaide/Sydney/Perth/Adelaide, some 8000km and I'll be doing it either later this year or early in 2016.

READING THE SIGNS

Depressed persons frequently find it difficult to talk about their problems or to seek help. My mission was to try and get out there a greater awareness of some of the signs of clinical depression so that family and friends might be able to help the person concerned. Looking back, my son Scott demonstrated some signs but I did not recognise them. Carla my good friend at S&S Cycle who lost her daughter Lisa to suicide recently, made me aware of a new US organisation, The Campaign to Change Direction.

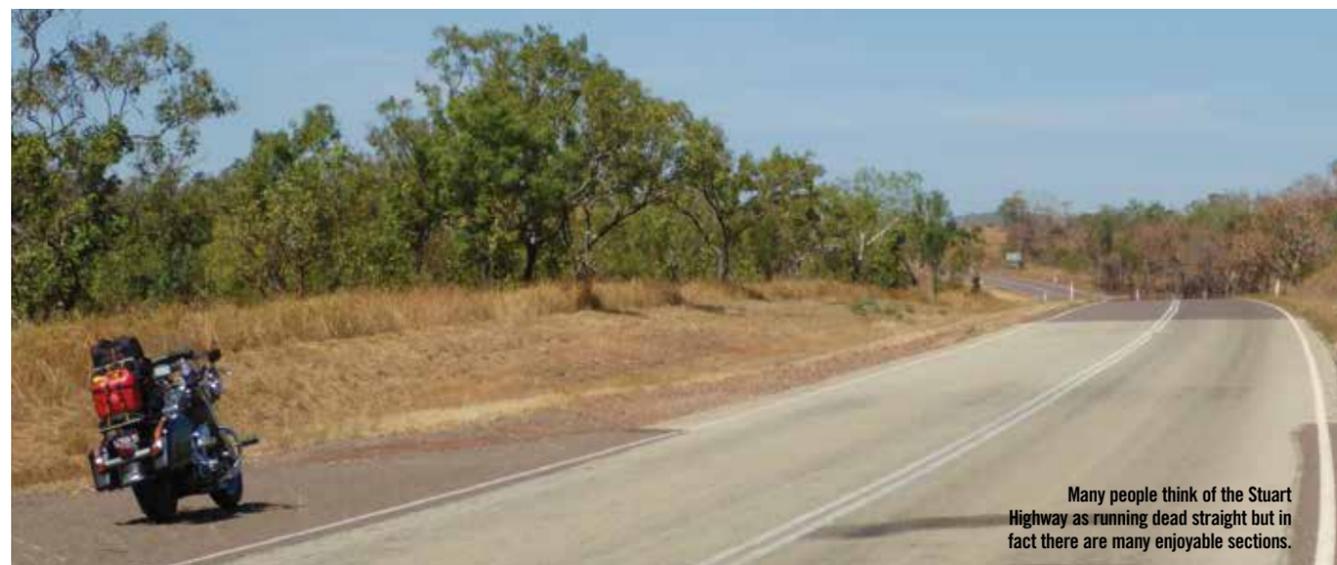
What I especially like about



ABOVE: The last drama on the trip was this white plastic bag that settled on my exhaust. Sheesh!

their approach is that it is based on "Five Signs that may mean someone is in emotional pain and might need help". It seems that all too often our friends, neighbours, co-workers, and even family members are suffering emotionally and don't recognise the symptoms or won't ask for help. **HD**

A big thanks goes out to my sponsors. Hyperformance Cycles/SA Choppers, S&S Cycle, Baker Drivetrain, Rocky Harley-Davidson, Progressive Suspension, Love Jugs, Wimmer Machine, James Gaskets, ND Refinishers and of course HEAVY DUTY magazine.



Many people think of the Stuart Highway as running dead straight but in fact there are many enjoyable sections.

FIVE SIGNS OF SUFFERING

				
PERSONALITY CHANGES They behave in ways that don't seem to fit their values, or they may just seem different.	EXTREME MOOD SWINGS They show problems controlling their temper and seem irritable or unable to calm down.	SOCIAL WITHDRAWAL They pull away from family and friends and stop taking part in activities they used to enjoy.	RISKY & CARELESS BEHAVIOUR They start engaging in substance abuse and self-destructive behaviour that alienate loved ones.	SUFFERING HOPELESSNESS They suffer from extreme or prolonged grief, or feelings of worthlessness or guilt.

Nearly one in every five people have a diagnosable mental health condition. Half of all lifetime cases of mental disorders begin by age 14. Often our friends, co-workers and even family members are suffering emotionally and don't recognise the symptoms or won't ask for help. Honesty and openness about mental health can help prevent pain and suffering, and those in need will get the help they deserve. **You can learn more at www.changedirection.org**



This sunset outside Pimba made stopping to snap a photo well worthwhile.