

BikeBytes

The Magazine of The Scottish Motorcycle Club

WELCOME...

To the latest issue of BikeBytes. The season is well under way and as well as a number of Club runs, there have also been a few overseas trips, the most notable being the trip to the Himalayas undertaken by the intrepid trio John Hill, John Nicol and Kenny Anderson, more details below. This issue we've also got some intercom reviews for those looking to set up some inter-helmet communication and instructions in inserting a USB port onto the bike, so sit back, relax and enjoy!

Our Himalaya Adventure

Well we did it, John Hill, John Nicol and Kenny Anderson had a biking **adventure** of a lifetime.

From the time we flew in at dawn over the huge area of beautiful snow-capped peaks of the Himalayas, to the dramatic landing at Leh military airport in the remote north west corner of India bordering Kashmir, Pakistan and Tibet, we realised that we were in for something very special. In fact the areas we went to have only fairly recently been open to tourists and for some we had to get special permits locally.

After processing the formalities at the airport, we were soon transported through the cool thin air to our hotel where we were warmly greeted by Adam and Dave, our guides/leaders from Blazing Trails plus our mechanics, truck driver and the medic. We soon found that electricity supplies would be erratic, internet connections more so, texting impossible, and all this while we were still in the main town of Leh. We (there were 9 of us who had paid to come on the adventure) also saw our "trusty" steeds that we would be riding, all lined up and clean - original 500cc Royal Enfield Bullets.

A welcome breakfast, as it was still only about 7.00am, was soon prepared, consisting of what became the norm, chai to drink, porridge and an omelette. This hotel was to be our base and after some introductions and guidance we were left for the rest of the day and the next day to get over our long journey and, more importantly, get acclimatised. This soon became very evident to most of us in different ways, as we were already at an altitude of 11,500 ft (3,550m), and would be going much higher. During this period we were also introduced to our bikes, told about some of their idiosyncrasies, like they had more neutrals than gears! and practised the art of trying to start an Enfield - which some of us never mastered!!

Then Tuesday morning came and we rode out through the hotel gates at 8.30am on to the road for the first time. It's not easy to alter what one normally does automatically, so

changing gear with the right foot with 1st up, and 2nd, 3rd and 4th down, using the left foot for the rear brake and trying not to use the front brake was fraught with problems at the start (and remained so until the end to an extent!!)

The first day took us 120km to Lamayuru where we arrived by 2.00pm. It had been very hot and sunny all day, mostly on good tarmac but with a few tight spots which were on dirt and heavily congested with army trucks and other vehicles. We also passed through some dramatic gorges with the road then climbing up the side with many hairpins to get to the next valley. At the end of the ride it was great to get the biking gear off and sit on the terrace of our hotel looking at the view. Then when the beers arrived we thought wonderful, but surprisingly we could hardly manage to drink them down. The altitude factor again. So this was to be, for most of us, our last beer until the end of our adventure.



1st day on road between Leh and Lamayuru

We were on the road the next morning, Wednesday, heading up in to the mountains on beautiful sweeping bends. Then at the last major town, Kargil, we left the main road and started our 2 day journey on the only road into the remote Zaskar region and our destination at Padum. At our lunch stop in a small village, Adam gave us his latest gem. He told us that on the next section we would probably come to what he termed “stoppers”. Here we should only proceed when the previous bike had cleared the obstacle, such as water crossing the road. If he considered it was particularly difficult, he would wait there to see and if needed, help each bike across. Wow! What were we letting ourselves in for!!

Well the tarmac soon finished and we were on what we would describe as a very rough track. Then came our first stopper. Water running across the track but no problem as we each splashed our way through. Then another and another, and then at the next

Adam was waiting for us. This time the water was much deeper and raging across with only a narrow bit near the edge where it was passable, but with some help we all got our bikes across. Then the next stopper. The torrent from the snow melt was so bad that after only just managing to get Adam's bike across with a lot of help, he decided that we would have to leave the bikes there for the night with Dave sleeping there with them. We then rigged up a rope across the water and with this as an aid to stop us getting swept away, we each waded through, with the water up to our thighs. Thankfully the skill of our truck driver got the vehicle across. Having spent 2-3 hours trying to get across we then had to endure another 2-3 hours feeling cold and wet in the dark bumping along in the back of truck until we got to our camp site in Rangdum at 9.00pm.



2nd day and 2nd "stopper" on way to Rangdum

The next day, Thursday, we had to go back in a truck to try and pick up the bikes. Luckily as hoped, the snow melt had died down overnight and the water level had dropped right down. Dave with the help of a passing biker had got all our bikes across. By lunch time we were back at the camp and getting ready to set off to our destination of Padum.

Unfortunately after a couple of hours of riding, having just gone over the summit of the pass and during the descent, this all being on a very rough rocky track, my foot came off the peg and was very painfully yanked between a rock and the bike. I managed to stay on the bike and come to a stop, but there was no way I could ride. I was in the support truck for the rest of the day until we arrived in Padum at 5.30pm but the village hospital was already closed. Luckily next day, Friday, was a planned rest day, so while the others went to visit some temples by taxi, I was at the local hospital to locate a doctor and then make a trip to the X-ray dept where we had to wait for them to find some electricity, I eventually paid my 60 rupees (£0.60p) to take away the X-ray. Thankfully nothing broken, but damaged tendons.



2nd day and “real stopper” as John Nicol crosses the water on way to Rangdum

Saturday was going to be a long day, 250km back to Kargil almost all unsurfaced. We set off at 6.30am with me in the truck. Unfortunately mid morning John had an off and damaged his shoulder. So he had to take my seat in the truck while I lay on the luggage in the back. The rough road was also taking its toll on the bikes and we had 8 mechanical breakdowns including punctures. Fortunately the water was well down at the crossings but everybody was very tired. We eventually made it to our hotel at 6.30pm.

We were now getting short of riders for all the bikes so I was riding again on Sunday for the easier 230km back to Leh, although we did have the only rain while on the bikes for the first couple of hours and when it was mainly unsurfaced. John was finally able to get to a hospital that afternoon along with another of our riders who was needing attention. They got excellent attention and John’s X-ray only cost 50 rupees, and luckily it showed that nothing was broken, just a bit out of place!

That night in Leh we had a big thunderstorm with torrential rain. We wondered what the morning would bring when we were due to go over the Khardung La, the highest motorable pass in the world at 18,380 ft (5602m). It was slightly damp but the problem was that the overnight storm had meant that higher up, the pass was blocked with snow. By mid-day there was still no confirmation from the army that the road had been reopened. So we were forced to spend the Monday in Leh and our planned visit to the amazing Nubra Valley was cancelled.

With our schedule rearranged, fortunately on Tuesday we were still able to tackle the Khardung La which was one of the main objectives of doing the tour. It was very hot and sunny as we left Leh, but with more experience now of riding the Indian “roads” we managed to get to the top without too many problems. After the obligatory photos at the summit sign and a welcome cup of chai, we heeded the warning sign which said “Staying for more than 20-25 min can be harmful to your health” and headed back down the way we came to Leh and on to our next overnight stop at nearby Thiksey. Even then some were suffering headaches etc from the altitude. The hotel here was very tranquil as it was run by

the Buddhist monks from the monastery on the cliff top overlooking the hotel. The few left amongst us took a late afternoon walk up to see it.



The 3 of at the top of the Khardung La

The next part of our tour was to head into another remote area where we would camp by Pangong Tso, a huge salty lake 150km long, three quarters of which is in Tibet. To get there we first had to go over another very high pass, the almost as high Chang La Pass at 18,365 ft (5599m). The road to the top was awesome, and much rougher as was the descent the other side. We were in an area of high mountain desert. Finally we arrived down at the lake which was at 14,000 ft (4300m) above sea level. There were no villages here, just a few scattered stone huts. After riding along the shore of the huge lake for an hour we arrived at our en-suite tents. It was an idyllic spot by the lake, so peaceful with the most wonderful light at dusk and again at dawn by which to view the lake and the high mountains surrounding us. At night with the complete darkness there were so many stars to be seen. One of the most beautiful and awe inspiring places any of us had ever stayed.



Last night on road camping beside Pangong Tso lake

The next day, Thursday, we sadly left the quiet beauty of the lake behind us on our last day of riding. We headed back over the challenge of the Chang La Pass and to our hotel in Leh. Dismounting our bikes for the last time we all spontaneously gave each other a big hug. We had all come a long way together and been through a lot and had developed a real bond and team spirit.

There had been 8 days of riding, 1 rest day and 1 enforced rest day. All of us except our expert leaders had at least 1 or 2 “offs” during the trip. The 3 of us agreed that had we known that it was going to be such hard and difficult riding, we wouldn’t have gone on the holiday, but then we would have missed the adventure of a lifetime.

That night we went out for a final meal together in our favoured rooftop restaurant in Leh, although tonight there would be no meat or alcohol available (except for special tea!). In this remote region we came to know that this was nothing out of the ordinary.

John Hill

Intercoms

We had a request for thoughts on different types of intercoms and some thoughts and opinions came through from members. First up is Janet and John Moss:

Janet and I have had a few different types of intercoms, starting with a very cheap one which was absolutely useless, sorry can't remember the make. We then went for an Autocom system using their budget radio sets. This was operated with a push-to-talk button on the handlebar. The Autocom build quality is very good, but we did have some issues with certain cables that tended to fail. The fact that the system used cables is a negative point along with the cost which can be eye-watering, especially if you want to have VOX capability. We upgraded the radios to the more expensive Kenwood type a few years later and after shelling out even more for the different cables needed for these we saw a great improvement in performance, both with range and the speed at which they switched on. I

would say that Autocom are leaders in the field of intercoms, but getting all the kit together for any particular set up is very expensive and cabling can be awkward. For the last few years we've used a Scala Rider G4 PowerSet. These are much less cumbersome than the Autocom system as they are wireless (Bluetooth). We can still talk to each other at a range of up to 1km depending on the terrain and the battery seems to last long enough for a full day's riding. We have replaced the helmet fittings once as the original set went kaput, but overall we think the current G4 PowerSet we have is our favourite. I now see that Autocom have their own bluetooth system which looks to be fairly competitively priced..... watch this space!

Mandy and Peter Johnson also had a few thoughts to share:

Our first venture into the communications market was low budget, easy to use hard wired rider-pillion units. These worked on an "open channel" system so you are permanently connected to each other which is good, but can also have its drawbacks (or so Peter would say!). As these are the most basic of devices, they can't be used for Bluetooth or connecting to SatNav, purely rider-pillion communication only and, other than that, the other major drawback is the wired connection between you both.

Once you are riding it's fine, and we worked by getting on the bike then Peter would pass the cable back to me and I would plug in. However, remembering to disconnect when you go to dismount can be challenging, and in times of emergencies if the rider drops the bike and he goes one way and you, as pillion, go another, well, the cables will be ripped out of the units and that's the end of the intercoms (we know this from a not so nice experience!).

We then upgraded to walkie-talkie type intercoms. These work by using by pressing a button to talk to each other which isn't great for the rider but with a bit of faffing around with some Velcro to attach the button to the handlebars, it isn't too bad. For the pillion, a little strap round your gloved finger means the button is easy to press as well. However, as these have a better range you are not limited to rider to pillion and they can be used as rider to rider.

The actual walkie-talkie is hard wired to your ear piece and you run the cable down the inside of your jacket / down the zip channel and put the unit into a pocket. These worked really well and we didn't have any problems with them (other than the volume button on the walkie-talkie being pressed when it was inside my pocket but Peter managed to disable the button) and for a low cost non-bluetooth simple device between 2 riders they work great. We didn't really test the range much but should be approx. ½ a mile which was fine for us.

Now we are doing more riding and participating in group rides we decided to go Bluetooth and got the Scala G9x Powerset with 2 units and have used them throughout the summer and love them. A little faffing about getting them mounted to the helmets and all the set-

things correct (can be done on the computer or on the app for an I-phone) but once they are working they have been really good.

The G9x are an “upgrade” from the G9 units and instead of having wheeled rollers to scroll through the functions they have buttons which are easier to locate and press – can’t compare the scroll option to the buttons as we’ve only ever had the buttons but I can see how it’s easier. However, they also have a voice activation setting which is good and you can adjust the settings for that as well – occasionally it will put “music on” when you are trying to “call intercom” or things like that which is a little frustrating but it’s only to be expected with a voice activation system I think.

We also bought a TomTom Rider 5 Sat Nav this year and use this hooked in to the Scalas and the instructions come over clear and concise to the lead rider, it’s a little annoying when the TomTom takes over and blocks the rider-rider communication and the 2nd rider doesn’t know that’s what’s happened but that’s how they work and it’s not a case of the lead rider ignoring the 2nd rider!

I’ve also used the Scalas with the Curvy girls this year as quite a few of us got them about the same time. We use them on group runs for a bit of banter, warnings about road conditions / bad bends etc and we’ve loved having them (at times being thankful other people cannot hear us!). On group runs they’ve been really good in getting feedback to the lead rider about speed etc when we had some novice / L-platers with us (they don’t do a drop off system) and also on the way home from a run we tend to just peel off and go our own way en-route so it’s easy to let the group know what’s happening.

We’ve had a few problems getting the units to connect sometimes but that’s probably more operator error and nothing a quick re-boot of the devices didn’t fix. On the long run down to Lincs the other weekend the girls said they were fantastic as they got split up as one group went the wrong way so they were very useful in getting them back together as they have a range of approx. 1 mile.

Having the option to listen to music is great although we don’t use it much (mainly on long boring stretches of Motorway!) but it’s nice to have the option. Having the phones hooked in takes a little getting used to – answering a call when going round a left hand bend is interesting – as is the response you get from someone when you tell them you are actually riding while talking to them!

The Scalas are not cheap (thankfully we had some vouchers to use up), and we looked at the differences between them and the Senas but the Senas are another level above again from what we had and we decided we didn’t need to jump that far up the ladder in one go. Scalas are back-compatible so the G9x can be paired with G4s and G3s which is great and we definitely miss having them if we are out together and don’t have them on for

one reason or another (I just need to remember when my phone is hooked in and I take my helmet off if I phone someone it comes through in the helmet not on my phone! And we would definitely recommend them if you are thinking about bike to bike or even bike to rider communication.

Cheap bike mounted Sat Nav set up

I had been thinking of a sat nav unit for the bike for a while and after getting lost a couple of times this year decided to have a closer look.

First up were dedicated bike units from Garmin & TomTom. These are a bit expensive compared to car units but they are supposed to be waterproof and you can use the screen with bike gloves. They also have a bike friendly route setting. These can also be mounted in cars with the kit included or optional depending which one you get.

Next option was to get a car unit and mount it on the bike. Not waterproof so a waterproof cover would seem like a good idea.

Option three was to use a GPS enabled smartphone and being the cheapest this is the one I went for - I could always upgrade to something better in the future if it worked out.

The next decision involved mapping. Google maps is all well and good but on one of my wayward excursions earlier in the year I found it was useless without a good 3G/4G signal. After doing some research I found the TomTom Go mobile app in the Android store (also available for other phones!). This uses maps downloaded to the phone so no need for a mobile/wifi signal and seems to have all the functionality of the car units. You can use it free for 50 miles per month or get a subscription - this costs £14.95 for 1 year or £34.99 for 3 years. And you get free map upgrades.

I then had a look at various options for mounting the phone to the bike and settled on a Hermann Richter Splashbox which looks fairly bad but is waterproof. This was going to need some modification as the phone didn't quite sit right. Also the clear cover you look through is not that clear and it is badly affected by sunlight. Since buying this I discovered that GIVI do some phone holders which look a bit better and have a hood to keep bright sunlight away.



Power unit mounted to steering yoke



Handlebar mounting for phone



Both above

Power is courtesy of a Jinto motorcycle 12V 1.2A USB cigarette lighter outlet socket with on off control which I got on from China via Amazon. There are numerous alternatives available which look much the same. This has 2 USB sockets and the cigarette lighter socket would also be handy for running a compressor if you need to inflate your tyres. It also features an inline fuse which should protect the phone from any electrical mishaps and can be switched off to avoid draining the battery when not in use. Fitting is easy - just connect to the battery terminals, run the wiring under the tank or attach to the frame rails. You can cut holes in your fairing to get a nice install but I just cable tied it to the top yoke.



Wires connected to battery, inline fuse just behind it



Red/black wires tied to frame rail

So far there have been no problems using this set up. The phone tends to get hot but that's too be expected when running the screen on full brightness (you need to switch

off Adaptive Brightness on the phone and set Brightness to maximum) and GPS on for extended periods.

I also like some of the features I never thought about before, e.g. traffic jams on the route and suggested ways around them. This was good in the car, probably not so much on the bike.



Sat nav in use (could have turned the brightness up)



Another one

Alex Muir

Club Shop

The club shop is now up and running, click on the shop tab on the website to be taken to what stock are available. As this year is the fifteenth anniversary of the Club, there are logos available to reflect this. Happy Shopping!

Club Nights

People may remember Wilson Hutchison who gave a talk last year about the epic Long Way Up trip he was doing with friends. The trip is now complete and Wilson has been asked to return to a future Club Night to give a talk about his travels. Keep an eye on the emails for more details!

And finally...

If anyone has any ideas for future BikeBytes articles please don't hesitate to get in contact. I am quite happy to accept articles, ideas or anything you may think will interest people. In the meantime, enjoy this video of a singing zebra:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qJCasUZz_xY

Contact the Scottish Motorcycle Club via the Membership Secretary: Gordon Robertson E-mail: secretary@scottishmotorcycleclub.org.uk
