

BIRDSVILLE BY BIKE

Attending the iconic Birdsville Races is almost a rite of passage for any fair dinkum Aussie but getting there by bike has got to be the ultimate Outback experience

STORY: TUFFY PHOTOGRAPHY: EDDIE TRAPP



OUTBACK AUSTRALIA

TRAPP TOURS

We have some particularly amazing sporting events in Australia and perhaps one of the most iconic is the famous Birdsville Races. The annual Outback horse racing event in the south-western corner of Queensland is Aussie folklore, legend and a must-see experience. Most famously, race-goers travel by four-wheel-drive or fly into the tiny town of 295 residents for the most famous Outback horse race event every September, but there's a better way to do it.

Trapp Tours runs a 1900km adventure ride from Quilpie to Mt Isa over eight days with the highlight being the weekend at Birdsville for the annual nag drags. The ride takes in classic Queensland Outback experiences covering incredible landscapes that you just can't imagine.

All you need is your riding gear, a small bag with some clothes, a pillow and sleeping bag and some spending money. Trapp Tours take care of the rest, including setting you up with a purpose-built Suzuki DR-2400E or DR650.

OUTBACK SPIRIT

Eddie Trapp has been running Trapp Tours since 2002 and his guided rides through the Outback offer ridgy-didge experiences that most people only ever dream of. Eddie is in the business of making dreams become reality and he's got the Birdsville Races ride dialled.

Australia is massive and covering vast distances on a dirt bike is great if you have the time. To keep to the eight-day schedule for the Trapp Tours' Birdsville Races ride, the adventure kicks off in Brisbane with a flight to Quilpie.

FAST FACTS

- Trapp Tours run guided adventures including rides to Cape York, the Simpson Desert, Birdsville, and Uluru and Darwin in the Northern Territory. They also offer one and two-day rides at Byron Bay, NSW.
- The Birdsville Races ride includes flying from Brisbane to Quilpie where riding begins. The eight-day tour consists of six and a half days of riding covering 1900km.
- The flight from Brisbane to Quilpie, hire bikes, fuel, camping and food is included in the \$4950 price. Flights home are not included.
- Suzuki DR2400E and DR650 hire bikes are the weapons of choice.
- The Birdsville Races ride runs once annually in September.
- Take a look at Trapp Tours on www.amcr.com.au for rides, dates, prices and plenty of useful information.

No trip to Birdsville is complete without a ride to Big Red



The Birdsville hotel is a place of legend



Trapp Tours uses a fleet of Suzuki DR650s and DR2400E bikes for their rides



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The 1900km of riding is completed at Mt Isa where you hand the bikes back to Eddie and you fly home in comfort. The bits in between Quilpie and Mt Isa are where the adventure lies.

JOIN IN THE FUN

A true Outback adventure like this appeals to all walks of life and the good news is that almost anyone can do it. According to tour boss Eddie, "It doesn't really matter how much experience you have on a bike, I can always get them through. It tends to be the guys that think they're gun riders that hurt themselves. The riders with less experience ride with more caution. It doesn't matter who the rider is, the more bike time they have before coming on tour, the better. They need some sort of fitness. It's not a hard ride but it is six days on a bike and it does get tiring. It's not a technical tour but it is long days in the saddle. I've had some bigger gentlemen come on tour and halfway through the ride they're just stuffed. You really do need to get as fit as possible so you can enjoy the experience as a whole."

It'd be a real shame to save the money and set aside the time for an experience like this and not enjoy it due to lack of fitness or conditioning. Similarly, it's easy to mess up a great ride by acting like a spoilt kid. Eddie agrees. "Aggressive and bold attitudes don't work in the desert and the same attitude can quickly see you destroy your bike or yourself. The riding is in extremely remote parts of Australia and you don't want to get hurt out there. It's not like riding on the East Coast

TOP TOURS

Trapp Tours boss, Eddie Trapp trained as a motor mechanic before joining the Navy and training as an electrician. He then went mining underground in Mt Isa, then went travelling before kicking off his motorcycle adventure tours in 2002. Eddie is the tour leader, camp cook and master of all at Trapp Tours. Eddie works hard to keep everyone happy but he loves his job. You'd just about have to say he's the luckiest bloke in Australia. Eddie's favourite ride is across the Simpson Desert.

"I love riding the Birdsville Track, Mungerannie, Oodnadatta Track and I've always

loved Oodnadatta itself. Crossing the desert is just a great ride. There's so much wildlife out there and one of the real highlights for me is the Dalhousie Hot Springs. It's just fantastic. You're in the middle of nowhere and there's these hot springs at 29 degrees Celsius. I've done that ride about 30 times and I still love it. You never get sick of it. The Birdsville to Uluru tour is almost as good. Finishing off at such a beautiful place is a true highlight. Another ride of difference is the Mt Isa to Darwin ride passing through Mataranka and Litchfield National Park. It's a different kind of beauty up there."

where an ambulance can reach you easily. Riders need to constantly remind themselves of where they are. It's the same in the small towns we visit. You don't want to be upsetting the locals out there. The entire experience is about being aware of where you are and respecting your environment."

SETTLING IN

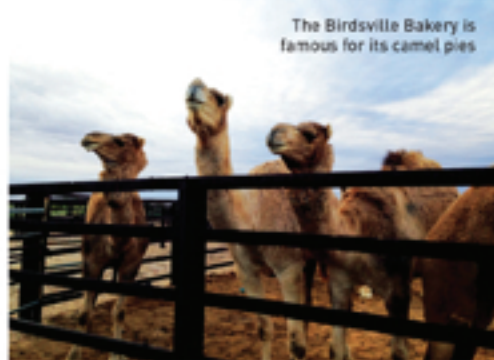
If you do take the opportunity to ride this great adventure with Trapp Tours you can expect to meet Eddie when you touch down in Quilpie from your flight from Brisbane.

Eddie will set you up with your choice of either a Suzuki DR2400E or DR650 and you'll get assigned a tent and other camping equipment which will have a corresponding number to your bike. You'll easily identify your gear each day.

As you might expect, the accommodation is



This dusty track is home to one of the most famous horse races in Australia



The Birdsville Bakery is famous for its camel pies

camping and Eddie wouldn't have it any other way. "The camping is brilliant. What better way to spend the night than around the fire? It's a total switch-off from everyday life with no mobile phone service, no television and no radio, just the stars and the fire."

OUTBACK EXPERIENCE

The famous Birdsville Races is the lure for most riders but the country you will cover getting there is just as brilliant. The first day is easy riding covering 190km, passing by the Toompine Hotel. This place is literally the pub with no town. Cobb and Co used to pass through this place but all that remains is the hotel, which has been serving weary travellers since 1893.

The next day you hit the dirt for 346km to reach Cameron Corner — where South Australia, Queensland and NSW all meet.

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BIRDSVILLE RACES BY BIKE
A QUEENSLAND OUTBACK ADVENTURE



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EDDIE'S TOP 5 TIPS

- Eddie Trapp's top five tips to surviving an adventure ride are:
1. Ride to your ability.
 2. Don't get involved in any racing with the other riders.
 3. Don't speed-test the bikes. One rider ran into some stock a few years ago while trying to see how fast his bike would go.
 4. Enjoy yourself.
 5. Remind yourself of where you are and respect your environment.



It can be a long ride between outposts



Just over this horizon is where your next dream could be made

You see some strange things in the desert



There isn't much out at Cameron Corner other than the shop and the Dog Fence but it's certainly unique.

The Dog Fence is yet another iconic Aussie legend originally erected to keep dingoes from the south-eastern parts of the country. Built in the late 1880s the fence is the world's longest, stretching 5614km.

The following day leads to a place called Innaminka, a place Eddie likes to call "the end of the Earth. It's always windy there but it's a great place to wander around after a day's riding. There's the historic pub which is great for a look, and we camp on the banks of Cooper Creek."

It was on the banks of Cooper Creek where the final deathly chapter of the doomed Burke and Wills expedition through the centre of Australia played out in 1861.

"It's amazing to see the reaction from riders when we get out into this country," Eddie explains. "They suddenly realise just how big Australia is. And in places it's so desolate you can just imagine the intensity of the heat in summertime. The riding we do and the places we pass through to get to Birdsville are amazing. The pioneering history of Australia is just incredible. Like when you get out on the gibber plains of the Stony Desert you just think, 'How the hell did they survive out here on horseback and on foot in the old days?'"

Boxing Tent
The races bring people from all over Australia and it's not just the dusty racetrack and the gambling that draws a crowd. The legendary Fred Brophy's Boxing Troupe is a massive part of the Birdsville Races weekend.

Fred Brophy runs the very last travelling boxing troupe in the world. Fred offers anyone the chance to challenge one of his boxers to three one-minute rounds under the Brophy big top tent. There's always plenty of willing challengers and the bouts can be colourful, to say the least.

"A night in Brophy's Boxing Tent is the best," says Eddie. "As a young fellow I did a bit of boxing and I thought, 'Gee I'd like to have a go at this'. But the people that get up and have a go at Fred's boxers, some don't know what they're getting themselves in for. There's always so much action going on. Fred is a real showman and he gets the crowd going. There's guaranteed action inside and outside of the ring. Sometimes there's a

pissed upon or someone having a punch-up outside the ring and Fred stops everything and sorts it all out before the show goes on. It's the best Aussie entertainment you'll ever see. You just don't get entertainment like that anywhere else."

UNDERGROUND ENDING

With the festivities of Birdsville over, the ride continues toward Mt Isa, riding through Boulia, covering 677km. Mt Isa is a great place to finish the ride. It's in the middle of nowhere but it's the hub for supporting all of that north-west area of Queensland. The mining industry is just huge and Mt Isa lives off it. There's something like 3000km of mining roads underground.

Riders fly home from Mt Isa with a stack of memories and experiences you just can't buy. Riding through this part of Australia is incredible in itself but to take in one of Australia's most unique sporting events while you're at it would surely top any tales that your mates could tell.



Camping in the Outback can make you feel as if you are a world away from your everyday life