

JAMES is writhing in pain after being spat off his Suzuki DR650, which is now resting upside-down minus a couple of indicators. Brother Aaron's new Alpinestars boot is melting nicely under the exhaust of his DR, with his foot in it, and their father Dave has fallen flat on his face running back to help. Carnage! Too bad the Go Pro is lying half buried in the dirt, minus helmet mount.

The pink tutu that Aaron is wearing has not been damaged but Team Queensland has been decimated. With the State of Origin clash just away, things are suddenly looking up for the outnumbered New South Wales squad, although Victoria is already out of contention.

LIKE SANDS THROUGH THE HOUR GLASS

We were on an eight-day, 1,550km Simpson Desert adventure ride with Trapp Tours and the 'adventure' part had really kicked in. Funny how much mayhem one gibber rock corner can create.

It had all seemed so easy when we were sitting in the Birdsville pub four days earlier after our five-minute walk from the airport. So the flight had been delayed by four hours because of 'engineering issues'. So there had been threats to remove overweight riding gear bags from the Dash 8 aircraft. So they'd changed the gate without telling anyone, but we'd made it and had managed to see a good chunk of the outback before finally landing in Australia's most remote town.

We had a fairly likely looking bunch of lads, Queensland represented by Dave and his three sons, who all had extensive bush riding

experience, NSW by two graduates of a Trapp tour to Cape York and Victoria by a gnarly veteran of off-road riding and a talkative lolly salesman called Robbie, who revealed his last ride was on a scooter three years before. The southern state had no chance in the interstate competition but Peter 'Robbo' Robertson had tried to even things up a little for NSW by bringing his new Husqvarna TE250.

After a few beers we headed off to set up camp in the Birdsville Caravan Park, another exhausting five-minute walk away in a top spot next to the Diamantina River. Even the dome tents were a doodle to set up and the self-inflating mattresses were sheer luxury. How hard could the ride be?

Next morning it was straight into a slap-up breakfast from Eddy Trapp's trick Toyota 4WD 'Troopie' support vehicle and the first reading of the riot act by our host.

"Don't go faster than 90kmh, hang back out of the dust, watch for stray cattle, pull off for road trains ..."

THE BLUE GROOVE OUT OF BIRDSVILLE

The Birdsville Track south to our overnight stop at Mungaharrie did not encourage this type of restraint. The thing had been graded, watered and rolled to billiard table smoothness and there were blue grooves where the 4WD tyres had been humming south. The DR650s hummed accordingly but Pete's TE250 quickly stopped humming with a dead battery, while the Troopie sheared the flange off a rear half-shaft. Eddy had the shaft replaced before the boys got back to him but was still grumbling about Toyota using spacers to widen the rear track.

The Mungaharrie Roadhouse camp ground might not have been that flash but there was a small bore-fed hot pool and the pub was a classic. More importantly, there was a workshop out the back where Robbo could grapple with the TE's electrical system and ET could reinforce the new trailer, which had developed a distinct bow in the middle.

Eddy welding instead of cooking meant a top pub feed for us and that flat battery meant Pete would be the first wearer of the Trapp Tours memorial pink tutu, no argument. Dave was one of the few to try the hot pool, with most choosing to wait for the bigger offerings, but he sure looked the part of a boiled lobster, with a face blasted red by the wind.

From Mungaharrie we headed south to Marree and then north-west on the Oodnadatta Track to William Creek for lunch, before going on to Coward Springs for our next overnight stop. At 336km, this was the longest leg of the trip, but there were bits of the old Ghan railway to look at and the two Lake Eyre tourist flight pilots at William Creek weren't bad either. Eddy reckoned the girls were pretty keen to join a Simpson trip next year – he can sign me up for that one.

After giving up on a six-volt lantern battery, Pete kept us entertained with his efforts to turn an air mattress inflator into a wind-driven electric generator for the Husky but had to settle for whatever juice he could suck out of the truck batteries each night. You'd think you'd be able to buy a decent battery charger out in the bush, but apparently not.

Coward Springs was a stop on the old Ghan line. The old station master's house is now home to the camp ground manager and the fella's cottage has been turned into a museum. It was a top camping spot, with lots of trees courtesy of the bore water and a water heater for the showers made out of an old gas bottle stolen by a cat let railway sleepers. There were plenty of them lying around, and even a camel trekking business out the back.

IN THE PINK

By the time we reached Oodnadatta the next day the boys were getting restless. The locals were forced to retreat from the pool table in the face of the city slickers' raw talent. Eddy's tent somehow ended up with a pile of gravel underneath and our prize snorer, Pete, found a fence around his canvas palace the next morning.

Tutu wearer Aaron looked a treat outside the Pink Roadhouse and it certainly gave the locals a laugh, not to mention generating a fair bit of CB radio chatter.

We were heading to our first 'dry' camp of the trip along some more-challenging tracks, a fitting warm-up to the upcoming sand dunes of the Simpson. Not far from town we left the Oodnadatta Track and headed north on the Hamilton Track and then north-east towards Dalhousie Springs. The springs are one of the two highlights of a Simpson Desert crossing, along with the 40m high sand dune Big

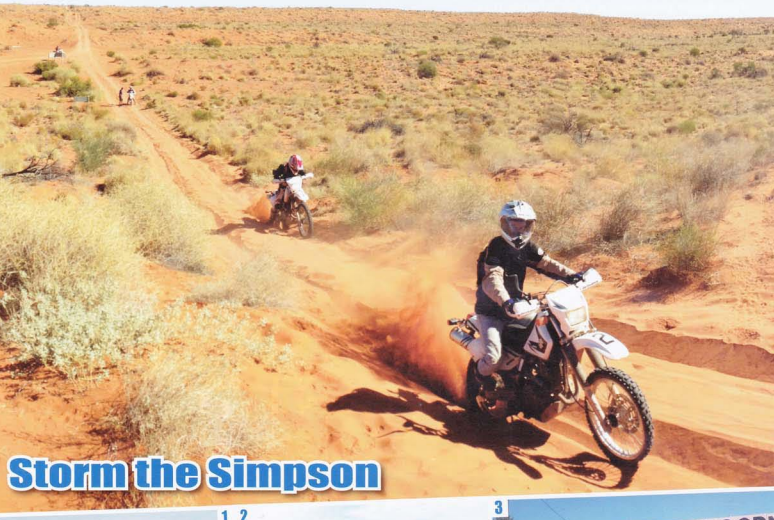
Storm the Simpson

A Simpson Desert crossing is a ride on just about everyone's Bucket List. But it's a big ride and a big trip to organise, so why not take the hassle out of it and simply turn up and ride with a professional tour operation like Trapp Tours? Sounds like a great idea to us!

Story: Wolter Kuiper // Photography: Walter, Rob & Eddy



MAIN: James and Aaron take a breather from the relentless deep red sand of the dunes of the Simpson Desert. 1. With a trailer chock full of Suzuki DR650s, there was no option but for Robbo's Husqvarna TE250 to ride up atop the cab. 2. Group photo at the start of the ride at the Birdsville race track. 3. Trapp Tours uses the bullet-proof Suzuki DR650s as hire bikes. 4. Meet Eddy Trapp from Trapp Tours, who will be your guide for your tour. In between everything else, he's also a demon on the hotplate. 5. Hmmm, looks like the tour group is enjoying a Toyota moment right here!



Storm the Simpson



Red, which is conveniently located on the opposite side near Birdsville.

We crossed the old Ghan route for the last time at Pedirka, where the ruins of fella's cottages and a cook house still stand. It was after our lunch break there that Team Queensland came unstuck at our first decent corner in a long while and James earned the tutu from his brother for his unusual method of parking a DR.

There were some sad and sorry bodies soaking in the Dalhousie Springs that afternoon, beers in hand to dull the memories of vicious gibber stones. The mound springs date back thousands of years and even contain four unique breeds of fish, which have adapted to the 39 degree pool since the surrounding waters receded. Tom, from Logan in Queensland, gave a running commentary as our personal favourites, the Dalhousie guppies, swarmed over our bodies eating dead skin. For something only about 2cm long, they sure knew how to tickle, and Tom seemed to know just where to guide them.

The camp site might have been in the middle of nowhere but there were showers, tank water for our Camelbaks and even a call box for ET to phone home – he used his sat phone set-up, though.

Dinner was a mighty pot of spag bol – the mark of every great motorcycle tour operator – which Eddy cooked while Robbo taught the boys how to play the 'spoons game'. Eddy insisted they use forks, because he needed the spoons for dessert, but neither would have been effective against the swarm of killer mozzies that descended on the card table – they were more vicious than a thousand

guppies. The Queensland crew covered up with hoodies and dark glasses against the onslaught, so it all looked a bit sinister, what with the forks flying across the table and all, until the ice cream came out.

Robbie, the lolly salesman, former accountant, personal trainer and author, kept the troops entertained with stories of his days selling jewellery to hookers. Meanwhile, Eddy adjusted the stereo and kept at it. The guy never seemed to stop. Unloading the truck, preparing meals, checking the oil, lubing and adjusting chains, firing up Geoff's DR each morning (seized choke cable). He had his tent and sleeping bag packed before anyone got away every morning.

MAKING EVERY DUNE A WINNER

Now it was time for things to get serious. Eddy warned the next morning as we hit the Simpson proper. We had to keep left and slow down on the crest of the dunes, even if we didn't see a vehicle for miles. The daily distances would be less but the degree of difficulty would be much higher.

"It only takes one and if you hit a bull bar here you're in big trouble," Eddy advised. "We're a long way from help."

Peter had been spending a fair amount of time in the truck without complaint but was itching to tackle the dunes of the French Line, even if it was just giving someone else a break from their DR.

The north-south dunes are at their lowest in the west, at three metres, and gradually increase in height to peak at 40m Big Red. They're also less steep

MAIN: With 1,100 sand dunes to conquer in a Simpson Desert crossing, the only way to deal with them is with plenty of throttle and momentum, so don't back off! 1. Roadside smoko stop on the Birdsville Track. 2. Man is not a camel, sure, but had these camels ever seen a pink tutu before? 3. In the pink at the famed Pink Roadhouse on the Oodnadatta Track in outback South Australia.

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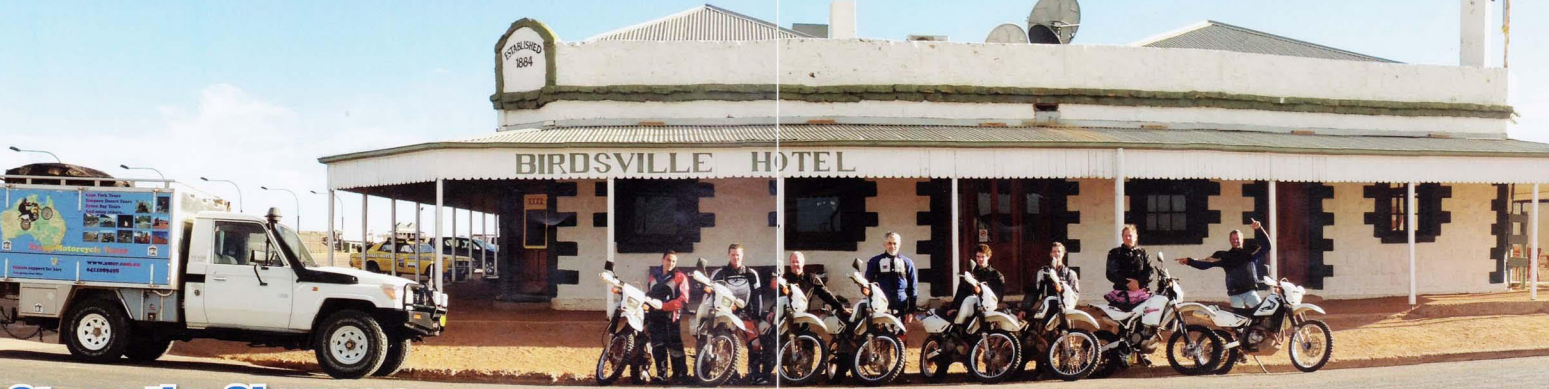
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Storm the Simpson



travelling west to east, the way we were going, because of the prevailing wind. Gradually the group got into the rhythm of desert riding, resting on the clay pans and gassing it up for the dunes before backing off at the crests and 'surfing' down the steeper eastern sides.

Now, was that dune number 61? Did that last sand ridge count as one or two? At our first stop on the French Line we'd already lost count of the dunes, but that was no real surprise. Even the books can't agree on whether this vast arid plain in the middle of Australia has 1,000 or 1,100 dunes, so what chance did we have of getting the count right?

Tom distinguished himself by accidentally sinking his boot into the 85 degree water of Pumie Bore, thereby earning the tutu for the next day. Robbie wanted to know the correct method for passing camels, but was coping surprisingly well with the sand despite being on the short side for a DR.

We rode on to the Big Road turn-off, where Eddy was keen to refuel the bikes and get some more of the 300 litres of unleaded out of the truck. Eddy was aiming for the Colson Track turn-off for lunch, with Robbie taking a break in the truck while Pete rode his DR. Everyone was struggling, gloves full of sand and blisters.

"We've just done eight kays and it feels like 80," Tom said.

The technique soon became: Select cruise mode! Stand up, lean back and gas it up the dunes. Momentum is your friend. Wheelspin is your enemy. Tractor it in

second; Try third down the dunes.

As the sun started going down, we could see the rooster tails of sand in the shadows behind us. Everyone was buggered, diplomatically choosing a campsite eight kays early and going to collect firewood. It was a beautiful little clay pan in the middle of nowhere, and no mozzies! Pete was assigned to cook the sausages and mashed potato as punishment for annoying all the 4WDers on the CB while he was in the truck.

THE KING & HIS CROWN

Eddy was aiming to make it to Birdsville the next day but Dave was agitating for another night in the desert. It would be the winter solstice, shortest day, with a top sunrise and moonset.

Over a scrambled egg breakfast, our man of the moment, Robbie, was crowned King Albert, complete with a cardboard crown duct taped on his helmet made out of a Camflakes box. If only we could find a copy of his book, 'Chick Magnet'.

There wasn't a jelly snake between us as we headed off towards Poeppel Corner, the tracks still deep in shadow. Camel and dingo tracks were everywhere. News of King Albert wearing a crown and tutu quickly spread on the CBs.

Aaron was body-slammed by his DR, leaving a life-size impression of himself in the sand. Momentum is your friend. Wheelspin is your enemy. Tractor it in

MAIN: When in Birdsville, make a bee-line for a beer at the Birdsville Hotel. 1. Trail boss Eddy cools off with a beer in Dalhousie Springs, which is like an oasis at the western edge of the Simpson. 2. When you are deemed to wear the Trapp Tours pink tutu, wear it with pride! 3. Eight ball in the corner pocket ... 4. What's at the junction of Queensland, SA and the NT? Poeppel Corner! 5. Sand dunes and tired riders equals carnage in the desert!

THE FINAL CHAPTER

Everyone was up early for our last day in the desert, packing up their tents and sleeping bags for the last time and fighting off the aches and pains with Panadol. For a few moments the sun and moon sat on opposite horizons, until the solar rays

blasted the moon into oblivion.

The tutu was mine at last but I'd lost my mojo. Perhaps the tutu was upsetting the aerodynamics? Stall. Hit the kill button instead of the starter. Angry kill button spits sand, won't release. Assume Valentino Rossi position. Pray to Mother Earth. Mother Earth finds mojo, key releases kill button. Blitz mode. Third gear, go!

The traffic was getting worse courtesy of the start of the Queensland school holidays and so were the corrugations, because of our proximity to Birdsville. Like a thirsty camel, the DR seemed to smell the roadhouse and finally there was Big Red. We could tell because of the cars and people parked on top. The official sign pointed to the bypass route. The boys found their own ways to the top – some easy, some tough. Pete fired up his Husky and launched repeatedly off the top of the mighty dune, making it look easy. Team Queensland went nuts. What a buzz standing up on top of Big Red in a tutu with a cuppal!

From there it was just a 37km cruise on the tourists' gravel super-highway into Birdsville. Dave didn't get much time to relax. A few clicks from town a slow front flat popped off the bead and he nearly took out son Tom. What was that Eddy said about the last day being the most dangerous?