

EXTREME ADVENTURE

going the distance

STEVE CROMBIE'S LOSTON ADVENTURES TAKE HIM AND HIS BIKE AROUND THE WORLD AND INTO SOME PRIMITIVE AND SCARY PLACES. For most of us, reliability is important. For Steve, it's a matter of survival. He's recently built his next adventure bike, a Honda XR650L, with Nick Dole of Teknik Motorsport. Here's Nick's top 10 tips for a bike's survival off the beaten track.

1.OIL

Basic engine care 101. How many times have you heard the saying "oil is cheap, engines aren't"? Even with today's high quality oils, the high level of contaminants and heat generated from single cylinder engines gives the oil a workout. Oil change intervals of 3000km should be considered your maximum if you ride a single, and don't forget to check the oil before every ride. If you're desperate use any oil, even cooking oil, to get you home.

2.AIR FILTERS

With a lot of dualsport bikes coming out with paper filters, it's wise to fit a washable foam element or oiled cotton element if you are doing long dirt miles. The stock paper filters will load up with dust, making the engine run rich. Bang them on a rock if you need to unblock them, but not too hard! The oiled foam filters are easy, if not a bit messy to wash. They are, however, great protection from a wrecked engine full of dust. Some resealable plastic bags for a fresh filter and some disposable gloves will make the chore a whole lot easier. If worried about a clogging your filter midride, Unifilter www.uniflow.com.au make air filters with sleeves which can be removed or changed on the fly so you can clean them at the end of the day.

3.WHEELS & SPOKES

Wheels can go unnoticed, as most people ignore them until it all goes wrong. Spoke tightening can be a little tricky, and is out of the scope of a two sentence "how to". However, running a spanner over the spokes will do no harm, just remember spokes need to be firm, not tight, and tighten in a maximum of quarter-turn increments for each spoke. Cable tie the cross of the spokes together so if you break one it won't puncture the tube. Same goes for broken spokes.



4.TANKS

For adventure riding most bikes will need a bigger tank. Some things to keep in mind when shopping for a tank: Keep the weight as low on the bike as possible, and as close to the steering head as possible. It makes for much better bike control if it all gets out of hand. Fuel pumps are just another thing to break, so avoid them if you can. The Aussie made RV Aqualine tanks (www.rvaqualine.com.au) are our personal favorite. If you puncture a tank you can either make a fire and get handy with some makeshift plastic welding or grab a cake of soap out of your bag to plug a hole.



WORDS AND PICS BY STEVE CROMBIE
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5.TOOLS

Essential tools (to carry) will allow you to remove the seat and tank, front and rear wheels, plus tyre levers and a means to repair punctures. Tyre changing is easy with good levers and some practice. Most guys who are good at tyre changes are only too pleased to show off. Get them to show you how it's done, or buy them a beer at the pub if they change yours! Stuff grass in the tyre carcass if you don't have a spare tube, it will get you back to civilization if you ride carefully. Using heavy duty tubes like the Bridgestone Ultra HDs will probably lessen your chances of getting a flat in the first place. If you lose a bolt and don't have a spare, look for things on the bike that could pinch a bolt off, like a horn or a stand. Besides your basic kit you could also include a chain breaker; bicycle pump; clutch cables; accelerator cable; spare jets (if varying altitude more than 3000m); brake pads; air filter skins; fuel filters; spare spokes. »



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6.DRIVE

A long-lasting drive chain and sprockets is worth the investment.

A high quality X ring chain will be around the \$150 mark, but worth it when you team it up with some super long lasting steel sprockets, like the ones from The Chain Gang (www.chaingang.com.au). Keep the chain lubed with a mini aerosol or a Scottoiler (www.scottoiler.com)



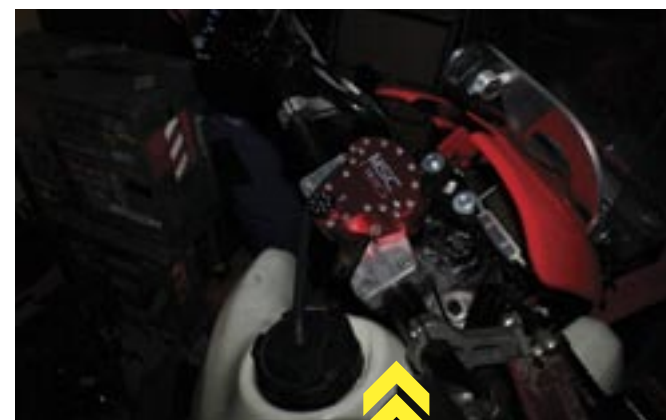
7.BRAKES

With a lot of extra weight on board, don't neglect the brakes. Most dual sport bikes are marginal on brakes, so some quality Goodridge hoses (www.johnstamnas.com) and oversize front disc will keep braking distances safe. Change the fluid every 12 months, or more often if it overheats. There are no substitutes for brake fluid, don't put oil in there, it wrecks the seals



9.SUSPENSION

Setting the suspension up for you and the weight you carry on the bike will make the journey a joy. Have a reputable suspension tuner service the forks and shock annually and talk to them about upgrading the springs, as all bikes are under-sprung if you load them up with panniers and big tanks. Teknik's a reputable tuner, go see them (www.teknikracing.com).



NICK THE TECH

Nick runs one of the leading motorcycle suspension and engine tuning workshops in Australia. Teknik builds the engines and suspension for the GHR Honda and Yamaha Safari Teams, so there's no doubt he knows what he's talking about. Check 'em out at www.teknikracing.com.

8.GEAR RACKS

The same rules for tanks apply to panniers. Keep them close as practicable to the centre line of the bike and keep the weight low. The higher and further out fit is, the more of a pendulum effect fit will have when you get sideways. Inspect the pannier mounts every few days, looking for broken bolts and fatigue cracks. Have some pliers on board for the fencing wire that's scattered around this great nation. Resist the temptation to cut a cocky's fence. Always ensure when mounted your boxes or soft bags are narrower than your handlebars for optimum handling. Protour boxes are narrow, indestructible and well designed (www.loston.com/protour.htm)

10.DAMPERS

Steering dampers have become very popular in the last 10 years with good reason. They require minimum maintenance and make long rides more comfortable. Check the mounting bolts regularly. Buy a good brand with a solid reputation, like MSC (www.msproducts.com.au). ■

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