

ESCOBAR

When you're clocking up more than 90,000km cruisin' the globe, a well-set-up bike can mean the difference between life and death. Aussie adventurer Steve Crombie gives the lowdown on nine products that saved his arse.



9 PRODUCTS THAT LAST 9000000 YEARS

9 LIVES

WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHY BY STEVE CROMBIE



STEVE CROMBIE, 27, SYDNEY
Growing up on healthy diet of *National Geographic* and the *Guinness World Records*, Crombie eats, dreams and lives adventure. Prior to cruising the Americas on his trusty Honda Dominator, he picked up a Master's of Business, coasted around Australia with a circus and even travelled the Amazon in a homemade canoe.



I've basically spent the past two years travelling 90,000km on a motorbike through 26 countries, starting in Australia and ending up in the Arctic Circle. Why, you might ask? I'm attempting to be the youngest person to circumnavigate the world by land and sea by motorcycle, and the first to visit the seven natural wonders of the world by land and sea.

The bike? A trusty modified Honda Dominator NX650. It didn't take long to learn how to recognise a reliable product from a gimmick. When your life depends on it, you wanna know the real deal.

Leaving Sydney in January 2003, I headed for South America, travelling up through Central America and the United States and then up to the Arctic Circle before heading back to Oz to get a few things sorted for the rest of the trip (and to wait for Siberia to melt).

During my time in South America and Central America, I paddled the full length of the Amazon River, clawed my way across the Andes and carved my way through the Caribbean – with the help of more than 60 boats, and the bike in tow.

I had countless punctures and accidents along the way, saw four of the seven natural wonders of the world, had some very strange diseases and a few brushes with death.

Knowing sweet FA about bikes before departing meant I learnt everything the hard way. Just to give you a bit of an idea of just how harsh it was, I single-handedly completed four engine rebuilds – in Bolivia, Venezuela, Mexico and Canada.

Charging headfirst out of mainstream society and carving a trail around the globe on your beloved four-stroke is always gunna present a few problems. Whether you're a beginner or a pro, you find out soon enough.

When you're riding a dirt bike through some of the most remote and least mechanically savvy countries in the world – and over the course of two years – you want products that will do the distance and not let you down. You need products that'll see you make it into a sweet señorita's arms rather than out the arse of a pissed off, hungry Amazonian carnivore.

After spending three years researching the best products available, I ended up selecting the most indestructible gear on the planet.

Here are nine products that did their time and stood their ground. After beating the absolute shit out of every single one of them, they've proven themselves beyond reasonable doubt.

01

TESCH ALUMINIUM PANNIERS

DISTANCE SERVED: 90,000KM

When it saved my arse: Two 49-litre panniers housed my life for the entire trip. They're narrower than the handlebars (unlike Touratech), set low on the frame, feature perfectly chiselled bottom edges for those knee-bleeding corners, and are made with one solid sheet of aluminium.

These provided the perfect buffer zone for any accident. I slid along the terrain – sideways! – at up to 120km/h so many times. With the combo panniers and modified crash bars, I was able to pull out a cigarette, light it up on the sparks and suck the puppy down before I came to a grinding halt, generally unscathed ... with the exception of a few finger dislocations, cuts, bruises (and the odd haematoma) and a chipped neck, of course.

HOW I'D IMPROVE IT:

- Bigger lid lip to ensure that no water gets in.
- Add second lock in order to safeguard goods.





ACERBIS PHS HANDLEBARS

DISTANCE SERVED: 55,000KM

When it saved my arse: One of the roads that exits from Guyana into Brazil leads you through the most concentrated puma population in the world. Obsessed with the idea of seeing one in the wild, I rocketed my way down the muddy dirt trail and almost rode my bike straight up the pukka of a rather large, dirty-brown puma, thus narrowly escaping my run-in with death that week.

Five minutes later, fist pumping and screaming to into a dirt embankment, handlebars first, with 470kg of bike concentrated on the left side of the 'bars at 70km/h. They bent 35 degrees down, but didn't break. Hayley, a smokin' English "honey pot" who joined me for part of the trip, was wedged behind me for this leg of the journey. She catapulted straight into a nice big diuretic puddle 5m on. With mind-numbing concentration, we battled on with the dodgy 'bars.

Any other handlebars might have snapped in two, leaving me as the main course to the local large carnivores.

HOW I'D IMPROVE IT:

- Make it stronger, maybe with a cross-brace.



03



ACERBIS LONG-RANGE TANK

DISTANCE SERVED: 90,000km

When it saved my arse: Without a long-range tank you are pretty much rooted. Any ride into the Australian Outback will prove this theory.

Riding across Salar De Uyuni in Bolivia, the highest salt plain in the world, I almost ran out of fuel. My GPS had marked the spot for more fuel, and I'd arranged a truck to carry an extra 50 litres. As it turned out, the dodgy little Bolivian driver/pisshead had swapped my fuel for some local beer the night before. I smacked him around a bit and made him suck it out of his truck. I just made it back to town three days later.

HOW I'D IMPROVE IT:

- Make it narrower where the tank joins seat – would give better grip.
- Increase from 23 to 30 litre capacity.
- Leak-proof tank cap – with constant changes in temperature, the cap often locked onto the tank.



ACERBIS RALLY PRO HANDGUARDS

DISTANCE SERVED: 90,000km

When it saved my arse: I used the same levers for 90,000km. From -20°C to 48°C, they managed to block the flow of air to my fingertips and stop my hands from being ripped off the 'bars by intrusive branches – and even locals.

The handguards reduced the amount of dead bugs covering my hands, whilst providing a supplementary food collection device; when really hungry, I could scrape the muck from the front-end, drop some saliva in and make up some fried-up insect patties, which are high in protein, fat and carbohydrates. Sloth, pig's brain tacos, dried rattlesnake and freshly speared caiman also taste mighty fine, not to mention guinea pig – or rat – on a stick and dog-meat soup.

HOW I'D IMPROVE IT:

- Increase coverage over hands to ensure fingertips are fully protected.
- In extremely cold conditions (-10°C to -20°C) I often lost feeling in my fingertips even with "Australian" winter gloves. This sometimes forced me to piss on my hands to stave off frostbite. (I generally prefer to piss in a toilet.)



04

05

CHAIN GANG
STEEL
SPROCKETS**DISTANCE IT SERVED:** ALMOST 90,000km

When it saved my arse: My original sprockets lasted from Australia to Vancouver. I'd adjusted my chain incorrectly so many times though, often due to my suffering from starvation, dehydration and being generally rooted. Luckily, they still made it through every country in South America up until Panama.

Though I couldn't find any replacements in Panama, Chain Gang had sent me some, but they never made it through customs, so I bought a new super-cheap, crap set, which were similar in size, for around \$A30. I cut the teeth off the old 530 Chain Gang Sprocket and welded the new teeth from the cheap-shit sprocket on. Thanks to its perfect alignment, this homemade job took me from the Panama Canal to the home of the BC Bud [Britis]

HOW I'D IMP

- Make them s



06

SCOTTOILER – AUTOMATIC
CHAIN LUBRICATION SYSTEM**DISTANCE IT SERVED:** 90,000km

When it saved my arse: I hate lubing my chain, and I ain't the belt-driven type.

is Scottish invention I thought it was all hype. That was until I wriggled the thing just beneath my numberplate and cable-tied

the drip-feed pipe along the swingarm. It cleaned and lubricated my chain while I kept riding. I wouldn't do another adventure without it.

HOW I'D IMPROVE IT:

- No need to – fine as it is.



07

RK CHAIN

DISTANCE IT SERVED: 55,000km

When it saved my arse: Combining the RK Chain, Chain Gang Sprockets and automatic Scottoiler potentially gets 60,000km out of one set of well-lubricated components. I didn't. But I could have.

Regularly affected by starvation and disease, I often didn't have the brain capacity to adjust my chain correctly, which, in turn, shortened its life span to only 30,000km.

HOW I'D IMPROVE IT:

- Make it stronger and keep it oiled.

08

WHIPP'S
BASHPLATE**DISTANCE IT SERVED: ALMOST 90,000km**

When it saved my arse: I rode over anything in an attempt to puncture a hole in my bashplate. I flipped and twisted it over logs, through thousands of rivers, over dogs and small children, strapped it to a former drug-smuggling yacht from Colombia to Panama, and hauled it up to the Arctic Circle. The bottom of my engine doesn't have a scratch on it, just a few blood stains. The bashplate is indestructible.

HOW I'D IMPROVE IT:

- Increase the airflow through the plate as it can affect the cooling of the engine.

09

GARMIN GPS 5

DISTANCE IT SERVED: 20,000km

When it saved my arse: This little black box saved my arse more than once. That is, until I flipped my bike somewhere north of Salar De Uyuni in Bolivia and smashed the screen. It maps your route, altitude, speed, remaining hours of sunlight, best time for fishing, where

fuel is located, where the best ladies etc, etc. The only disappointment was the lack of a decent map for South America and Central America.

HOW I'D IMPROVE IT:

- Upgrade the world map with more detail.

THE STATS

ACCIDENTS

LOW-SPEED: 7

HIGH-SPEED: 3

NEARLY DIED: 1

STUPID STACKS: 4

INJURIES SUSTAINED:

Dislocated finger (put it back in himself – X-rayed, all good), haematoma (right knee), chipped bone in neck.

DISEASES

STRANGE RASHES: 16

HAEMORRHOIDS: 0

HEAD LICE (DAYS): 60

THE RUNS (DAYS): 200-plus (lost count)

FEVER: 2

STDs: 0

OTHER DISEASES: Dysentery, amoebas (2), giardia (2), parasite in my foot (I can still feel it moving). I'm sure I have more, am just waiting to be rectally penetrated by a doctor to find out what else is up there.

BUSTED BY COPS

PULLED OVER BY POLICE:

50-plus (often to pull me over to perve on the bike, then they let me go).

NIGHT IN A CELL: A secret

SERIOUS TIME: 0





INSPIRATION FOR THE TRIP

I was inspired by the death of a school friend, Jimmy, to use this journey to help raise awareness about youth suicide, and to encourage people to live their dreams. Jimmy died during a camping trip almost five years ago. He was the perfect traveller, and was dedicated to experiencing life to the fullest. Travelling in flip-flops, and with only a few dollars in his pocket, a chessboard and a pool cue, he was able to cross Australia without a hitch.

FOLLOW THE TRIP ONLINE

Steve Crombie's website – www.loston.com – follows the 27-year-old's attempt to be the youngest person to circumnavigate the world by land and sea by motorcycle, and the first to visit the seven natural wonders of the world by land and sea. The site has been designed to lay some inverted lines on your lips.



"THE" PRODUCT

THE INDESTRUCTIBLE DOMINATOR FRAME

My Dominator frame, Icebreaker underpants and I were the "last men standing" – none of which were welded or replaced. I rebuilt my engine, bent my rims, knocked off the front-end, flipped the bike, slid it, dropped it, burnt it and drowned it, and still couldn't damage the frame.

Sometimes I wish it would just snap in two as it rides like a senile donkey at the moment. But after dragging me through so many memories and having the balls to hold it together, I have no choice but to plate the fella in gold – when I win the lottery – and stick it on the mantelpiece, right next to my underpants.

WHERE TO FROM HERE?

I'm temporarily back in Sydney waiting to head to Siberia so I can complete the next stage of the journey. This gives me time to plan, secure a new bike and to try and get more sponsors.

After four rebuilds, my Dominator has basically spat the dummy. Thanks to Honda, I've just laid my hands on a new 2006 Honda XR650L, and am in the process of repeating the same [product] modification process to set up the ultimate lightweight adventure bike for the rest of the trip.

I'm about to return to Vancouver, Canada, with my new bike, where I'm hitching a ride on a Russian tanker to Japan. From there, I'll head through Siberia, China, Mongolia, Russia, Kazakhstan, Northern Europe, then back through Central Europe, around South Africa, up to the Middle East, and, finally, home again through South-East Asia in mid-2008. ■

