

"Sorry mate," said the voice from Sydney, "haven't used the phone in years..." Steve Crombie was trying to remember his own home number, and the task was proving difficult. No wonder: the 26-year-old hasn't lived in one place for longer than a month since 2003, and Sydney hasn't even been one of those.

Steve was 'home' for a short stopover before resuming the epic journey he hopes will carry him to a world record as the youngest person ever to circumnavigate the globe by land and sea on a motor-cycle.

The bike in question - so far at least - has been a 1999 Honda NX650 Dominator. It's carried Steve and a mountain of equipment from Tierra del Fuego to the Arctic Circle, had engine rebuilds in Bolivia, Venezuela, Mexico and Canada and, when we spoke, it was about to give way to a brand-new 2006 Honda XR650L for the next four legs of the challenge.

# LOST ON EARTH

Two years, 26 countries and 90,000 km on a Honda NX650 - and that's just the first leg of the journey Steve Crombie has mapped out for himself in a worthy cause

**ONE  
NOT-SO-EASY  
AUSSIE  
HONDA  
RIDER**

This one-man project (it was originally three, but we'll get to that) is all being undertaken in a bid to raise awareness of youth suicide and to help generate funds for the Youth Insearch organization. It's also become the central fact of Steve Crombie's life, and something of a personal mission since he lost a close friend of his own some years ago. Hence the concern for Youth Insearch, the Sydney-based organization which encourages the young and disadvantaged to set goals and directions for their own lives. And hence this epic journey. "To travel hopefully," as the great Stevenson said, "is a better thing than to arrive," but this is ridiculous!

"To say it's been a roller-coaster would be putting it mildly," Steve agrees. One of the goals he has set himself is to visit the seven natural wonders of the world (see separate box), and for good measure he thought he'd better take in the greatest man-made wonders as well. That raised problems of its own (see separate box).

His website ([www.loston.com](http://www.loston.com)) carries rich detail of his itinerary, but for reasons of time and space we asked Steve to pick out some of the key moments of the first leg. "Number one, I suppose, was the dislocated finger," he chuckled. "I had to try three times, but eventually I put it back in myself, taped it up, then travelled for another two days before I could get it seen to properly."

Then there was Argentina. "Being stuck on the Pampas for four days was also a bit of a test," Steve says. "Mark had eight punctures in 40 kilometres. There was a problem with the inside lining and he didn't realize it but a spoke had gone through. We tried everything: we found an old car tyre in the desert and put that on, we stuffed clothes inside the lining, but nothing would work.

"The nearest town was about 200 km away, so I rode in there and stopped at a gas station (a hole in the ground with fuel in it) where the kids all crowded round to see who this bloke was. Soon we had scouts out all around town looking for a tyre and I got really excited when one of them came back and said he'd found one - until I realized it was still on someone else's bike!

"I had to find the guy at his place of work, explain what had happened and persuade him to sell me the tyre. Then when I turned around to get ready for the 200 km ride back out to Mark, I discovered the front tyre on my own bike was flat and I had to hitch a ride myself!"

Now, we hear you ask, who's this Mark bloke? Well, when it all started there was not one easy rider but three. "I had spent three years preparing for the trip," Steve says, "and I had some money - I had sold everything I had to raise the initial funds. The other two, Mark and Geoff, decided they'd like to go with me, but they didn't have any money, which was the first problem.

"We made a pact before we went that if any one of us fell in love, that would have to wait until the journey was over. Both of them not only fell in love, but also ran out of money! Geoff went off with a Brazilian, a high-heeled vixen, and went to Miami, while Mark already had a girl at home in Australia."

As Kipling once put it, "He travels fastest who travels alone," but 'fast' would be putting things a

bit strongly for our man and his Dominator, not least because the catalogue of problems just grew and grew.

"Like the Amazon, and getting across the Andes," Steve muses. "Basically I just jumped on the first boat that would take me in Ecuador. I wasn't as fluent then as I am now in Spanish or Portuguese: I could get by, because I had been there in '99, but it was pretty hard to make people understand exactly what I was trying to do, especially with 260 kilos of motor-bike in tow."

As well as bewildered locals, there was also the local wildlife. Like the puma... "I almost hit one in Guiana," Steve recalls. "I had gone there for that reason: to see the virgin rainforest and the pumas, and one of them - a very big one at that - just loped across into the middle of the road. I was so pumped up about it that a few metres further on I lost control of the bike, hit an embankment and bent the handlebars pretty badly, then had to ride another 600 km with them in that condition."

It's easy to laugh about in hindsight, but travelling alone in often uncivilized surroundings has its major downsides. "One of the worst things was getting sick so much of the time," Steve acknowledges. "I was sleeping rough in hammocks and tents, mixing with the people, eating unfamiliar things, and stomach disorders became a way of life. I had a medical kit, but I kept getting re-infected again and again."

One good reason for being back in Sydney was that the emaciated biker could stack on some weight. But, we wondered, would it not be hard to pick up where he had left off after a taste of the Aussie good life?

The laughter at the end of the line told you everything.

"Mate, I still use my sleeping bag!" said Steve. "I use a rolled-up jumper as a pillow because I just don't want to spend the money on one. Sure, I like the ease with which you can do things and get things here, but it's nothing compared to the satisfaction of being on the road."

And that's the crux of the matter: the open road. "I want to see places that won't be there for much longer," says Steve, who will be helped in the rest of his travels by the new Honda presented by the company's Tony Hinton.

"Steve's journey embodies the true adventure of motorcycling," said Mr Hinton at the presentation. "We are really thrilled to be able to provide him with a bike that is up to the task. He is setting an excellent example for young people through his determination, spirit and altruism."

Next on the route is an unorthodox trip from Canada to Russia. Steve left off the first leg of the journey in Vancouver and plans to take passage on

a tanker to take him east. "If I can pre-negotiate it I will," he says, "and I have a few people working on that for me, including Honda Canada. I reckon I went to a Honda mechanic in virtually every state in South America, and it was Honda Canada who did my fourth engine rebuild and crated the bike up for me to come home. In Vancouver I'd like to get on a Russian tanker and go to Japan, then into China, across Mongolia, Russia and into northern Europe."

Though stopping off in Scotland to trace the ancestors is a must, Steve will shorten the time in 'civilised' Europe in order to make his rendezvous with the Sahara in January, a propitious time to cross the desert.

"It's the frontier places - Russia, China, Mongolia - that excite me more than anything," he insists. "The further off-road you go, the more intense the experiences become. And being alone isn't such a bad thing: people always have enough

## SNWOOW

No. it's not a dyslexic attempt at spelling something cold and wet, it stands for 'Seven Natural Wonders of Our World'. Steve has drawn up a list: the harbour at Rio de Janeiro, the Parícutin Volcano in Mexico, the Grand Canyon, the Northern Lights (Aurora Borealis), Victoria Falls, the Great Barrier Reef and Mount Everest. So far he's chalked off the first four and the other three all figure on the itinerary for the next couple of years. "In two years," says Steve, "I have learned more than 20 years at university. The roads less travelled hide landmines of experience and pleasure."

## MMWOOW

This one's the 'Man-Made Wonders of the World', and the fact that it has no fewer than 26 items on it shows that it's a lot more controversial. "That's my list," says Steve. "I found about 48 different places that claimed to be modern wonders of the world, including 10 or so in America, but I nipped out the ones I thought would be more interesting to me." Its eclectic spread takes in sites as different as the Hoover Dam and the glorious Cathedral of Chartres, and ends with the Opera House in his hometown. Steve has a bit to go here, though: so far he's chalked off just seven of those 26...

room, or enough food, for one more."

The plan is to get this enormous journey over and done with by February 2008. The Sydney stop-over was a chance to generate some funding, partly through an exhibition of his own photographs, partly through a new interactive link on his website and the one for Youth Insearch. With a GPS mounted on the new bike, Steve hopes people will monitor his progress, chip in a cent, ten cents or whatever sum per kilometre covered and so help him raise funds for the cause he has espoused.

"The new bike is going to help me a hell of a lot!" our easy rider says. "I'm looking forward to setting it up. I've lived by the skin of my teeth on the journey so far, so I'm planning to enjoy more of the adventure rather than merely surviving as I go. I've got things really mapped out. It's important to finish it, and then move on to other similar projects. The journey has become my life." ■



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