



Crombie interviews Craig Hartley – founder of the Dalby Moto Trail Rides.



#### BIO

**Who:** Steve Crombie

**Age:** 29

**Home town:** Sydney

**Marital status:** Single (if he was married, he wouldn't be after he got home)

**Countries visited:** It would be simpler to list what countries he hasn't ridden across – Europe, Africa and Northern Asia

**First bike:** Sparta

**Months spent travelling:** on the road since 2001.

**Hobbies:** Frisbee fiend and general thrillseeking

**Website:** [www.loston.com](http://www.loston.com)





# GLOBAL ROAMER

Showdown at Quinalow: Queensland's Dalby Moto Trailride Series meets Steve Crombie – Natural Born Traveller.

WORDS // JOHN BRYANT PHOTOGRAPHY // iKAPTURE



Ben, the sound guy, fixes Steve's chest-mounted mic.

It's a lonely planet. It is out Quinalow-way, anyhow. If you don't know where that it is, you're not alone. Aim for Oakey, then head northeast and pray. If you manage to drive through Quinalow, keep going and, if you don't blink, you'll find half a town called Kulpi.

You'll never meet a nicer bunch of people than those who call Kulpi home. And thanks to their hard work, the annual Quinalow Dalby Moto Trailride was another kick-arse event where the locals unloaded the country hospitality by the truckload.

If you'd hit Quinalow or Kulpi on March 8 or 9, 2008, you'd not only have found the place inundated with a (welcomed) plague of dirt bikers who swarmed in from the southeast for this annual pilgrimage, but also a bloke in his late-twenties named Steve Crombie, and his film crew.

Allow me to introduce Steve Crombie – self-proclaimed “Natural Born Traveller” (NBT).

NBTs are different from adventure riders. Adventure riders ride bikes three times heavier than they need to (which arguably float better than they ride, though no manufacturer to date has been forward-thinking enough to fit them out with a sail or outboard). Not only that, but they have to stop every 40km for café lattes and cake, turn back at the first sign of a gate (locked or not), have an allergic reaction to dust, refuse to get their socks wet, and have “inverse” personal hygiene issues (obsessively showering at least twice a day). None of them can drink more than half a six-pack without falling over and they're all in bed by 8pm, lights out. “Adventure Princesses” is another, less endearing, term for this type of rider, but that's unfair and silly anyway – tiaras don't fit under helmets. Everybody knows that.

On the other side of the coin, we have “Recon Riders”. This hardy bunch of stalwarts favour small-bore machinery, aren't opposed to going around the odd locked gate and generally stick to singletrack. They avoid

tar like the plague and only concede to riding firetrails if they're down to a thimble-full of fuel, it's three hours after dark and they just blew their last headlight bulb. Oh, and these blokes are usually all piss-wrecks with a history of substance abuse.

NBTs are neither of these. They're in a category of their own and I can prove it. They bring their own film crew. It's like *Getaway* but with Ernie Dingo replaced by someone who can actually ride and doesn't mind taking the piss out of himself.

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Having said that, the concept of humour in riding needs exploring. It's a double-edged sword. Let's take Steve's itinerary for example. Sure, he started at Mt Kosciuszko but where is he finishing up? Dingo's Knob! I kid you not.

Who ends their ride at a place called Dingo's Knob? Is he trying to be funny? Are we all supposed to have a good chuckle amongst ourselves and salute how clever this chap is ... or is someone out there, like *ADB*, going to be brave enough to ask the important journalistic questions such as: “Dingo's Knob, eh Steve? You got a canine appendage fixation or what?”

*ADB* is a respectable magazine. They wouldn't ask these sorts of questions. But they know someone who would.

So *ADB* sent their mercenary mouthpiece, pen for hire journo, yours truly, along to Quinalow/Kulpi to confront Mr Crombie on this and other important issues. Enjoy the read. I'm sure some of it is true.

Yep, that's a Frisbee in his backpack.



Crombie goes from a 15- to a 13-tooth front sprocket for the trails.



To be fair, I like this bloke. He might not be Jason Bourne, but at least he knows his true identity – a Natural Born Traveller – and he's proud of it. Which strikes me as a strange thing to frame one's persona around. And why, after running halfway around the world, is he suddenly returning to Oz? Did the warrants for his arrest suddenly expire?

NBT? It's not for me. I could never really bring myself to chance ending up somewhere too far away ... from a dozen cold ones. Speaking personally, I'm more of a self-proclaimed arsehole. It's not pretty, but it's something I'm good at. So of course, I apologised to Steve straight away, then hit him with my standard interview routine:

- Are you gay? (Not that there's anything wrong with that.)
- How long have you been off the gear?
- How often do you visit Thailand and/or Amsterdam?

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Disappointingly, that triggered nothing, so I resorted to the questions ADB told me to ask.

Somehow, this bloke has managed to go on a kick-arse adventure *and* get paid for it. Fair enough really. They'd have to pay me to ride a bloody XR, too. 8000km up the spine of Australia: our revered and respected Great Dividing Range. I thought it was called the Great Divide because it keeps those who like country and western music separate from those who don't. At least Australia has a spine. Seems there's a lot more invertebrate countries lining up than ever before.

So what's he like, this Steve Crombie? And what has it been like traversing 8000km across the Snowy Mountains, the Blue Mountains, the New England Tablelands (where I caught up with him) and eventually the jewel in the crown (though its World Heritage status limits real ride opportunities), the Daintree.

It pains me to say this, but I suspect Steve is the real deal. Steve Irwin is dead, rest his soul, his daughter isn't really cutting the mustard and, for my money, Australia's next "Crocodile Dundee" export should be a dirt biker! Good positive marketing for dirt biking, which is why we should all support Steve.

I have to admit, he and his film crew were exceptionally well received by the 400 or so riders at Quinalow. He was just one of the





Steve emerges from his polyester palace for another day in the great outdoors.



lads really. Except that before this, he rode 90,000km unsupported (i.e. alone) from Australia to the Arctic Circle over two years, including 7500km through the Amazon, during which he experienced a whole range local cultural delights, including Giardia and dysentery.

Over the next 12 months, more than 100 million people will watch the *Great Divide* series. It's positive exposure for dirt biking all right, but for Steve it's a way to sustain his lifestyle of perpetual adventure. He's devoted his life to "Having a go, and trying his hardest". Being an Australian, I like the sound of these words – aren't they part of our citizenship test?

"The bike is the vehicle to worlds I would otherwise be unable to touch," Crombie explains of his globetrotting obsession. "My bike facilitates access to races, faces and experiences of life. You can whack a bike on a train, a canoe, strap it on the back of a bus. If you've got basic maintenance skills, can cook half a meal, pitch a tent and are handy with a GPS, then you can traverse the planet on barely a cent. You don't have to be a Ewan McGregor superstar to pull this stuff off."

'Now we've hit paydirt,' I thought to myself as Steve continued. "When the *Long Way Round* came out, I was already doing it. It ripped my heart out – it was a brilliant

After travelling the world, Steve finally explores his own backyard.



## STEVE CROMBIE'S GREAT DIVIDE

"It's a five-week ride across just under 8000km and is exclusively along the Great Dividing Range, from Melbourne to Cooktown, sampling all the characters, landscape, history and indigenous culture that the country has to offer. The adventure has layers, but essentially I'm getting into places only a motorcycle can access and getting on the inside of people's lives. It's a real adventure and nothing is staged. It'll screen on Discovery in September and be live-to-air on Channel 10 in November.

"I came up with the idea for the series after coming back to Oz in 2006, while waiting for Siberia to melt so I could go back and traverse it. Six weeks before leaving, I dislocated my shoulder, which caused me to delay continuing my way around the world. So with time on my hands I decided to go to film school. I suppose I was starting to realise that I needed to learn a skill to sustain my lifestyle. I came up with the concept to run the Divide North/South, though it ended up the other way around. Not everyone realises it, but without the Divide this would be a pretty dry inhospitable country. Eighty per cent of the nation lives on or near the Divide. The mountains bring the rain and it's why Captain Cook stopped here, whereas the Dutch didn't [*when they hit the dry, flat west coast*]. I pitched it to all manner of punters, but only Lonely Planet liked the look of it. They picked it up and here we are."

## 2008 DALBY MOTO TRAILRIDES

This year's Dalby Moto Trail Ride Series is already in full swing and promises to be better than ever. Rides generally cost around \$50 and rego is required at some rounds. Visit [www.dalbymoto.com.au](http://www.dalbymoto.com.au) for more info.

### UPCOMING RIDES

May 31–June 1: Karrara  
June 14–15: Warwick  
June 28–29: Jandowae  
July 26–27: North Star  
Aug 16–17: Bunya  
Aug 30–31: Gin Gin  
Sept 13–14: Jimbour  
Oct 11–12: Woodenbong  
Oct 18–19: Cooyar  
Nov 8–9: Crows Nest  
Nov 22–23: Rivertree Stanthorpe







With Craig Hartley, hanging out in the hills.



Location, location: Crombie and crew relished the ride while in search of film venues.

production but didn't represent the real mainline adventurer."

I was really warming to this bloke now. I mean we all know someone who received the *Long Way Round* DVD box-set for Xmas and promptly went out and bought a 1200 Adventure, then left it parked in the garage for lack of someone to lead them around, don't we?

It got better. "A lot of people feel you have to do an adventure on a big bike, but if you can't get the thing off you when it falls on you and pins you in the middle of the desert, then you're going to die. Simple is good and size isn't everything [*where have I heard that before?*]. I met a guy from Yamaha who could've picked any bike from the factory to ride around the world with his wife, and he was on a 70cc machine."

Steve's adventure-weapon of choice is a 2007 Honda XR400SM retrofitted back to a dirt bike then modified into an adventure bike, keeping the cush-drive and fitting panniers, etc. In Steve's own words, "It's an indestructible battle-bike, low-maintenance, and can deal with any temperature and any terrain. And you can source parts for it almost anywhere in the world."

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Now that I know the Honda factory is involved, my conspiracy theory rates a mention. The return of XR world domination by stealth? Wasn't it only a few years ago you could trade in your old XR400 (which was later pulped as scrap metal) on a CRF-X and get a cash-back prize and a signed letter of apology from Honda for not making a high-revving four-stroke with a button sooner?

I have to say, the XR-SM did the Quinalow ride on its ear. The riding is hard. The country is hard (except of course for the bulldust pits that I saw swallow a YZ85 whole). It's tight and technical, and if you see third gear at all, then you're either an expert rider or have crashed your brains out. I love this type of terrain. It hurts and it isn't for everybody, but it's definitely worthwhile. The riding forces you to reach into yourself to find those deeper reserves or to give up and ute it out. If you have trouble with clutch and throttle control, come to Quinalow next year. Saturday's 30km loop is a relatively nice, soft intro (if you like rocks) to the lessons you'll be learning, courtesy of Sunday's 60km heartbreaker.



## LONELY PLANET

Lonely Planet (LP)

Publications is the largest independently owned travel guidebook publisher in the world, growing from its first title *Across Asia on the Cheap* written by LP founders, Tony Wheeler and his wife Maureen, in 1973. Now owned by the BBC, the Aussie-founded company has grown from one title in 1972 to over 500 titles with combined sales of over six million guidebooks annually. Steve Crombie's *Natural Born Traveller* series is a production of Lonely Planet Television. Visit [www.lonelyplanet.tv](http://www.lonelyplanet.tv) for more.

## ON TOUR, STEVE...

- Almost got shot by snipers guarding the President of Panama after he ran up the beach in his boardies to give the Pres a hug (this was after he got there from Columbia in a smuggling boat).
- Ate guinea pig on a stick (unconfirmed as to whether they were alive or even cooked for that matter).
- Stopped short of running over what looked like a log in the middle of a road in Bolivia only to realise that it was a giant anaconda.
- Cased out while avoiding hitting a puma in Guyane, catapulting the hitchhiker he had on the back over his head and into the bushes.

The NBT rides off into the sunset, with the next adventure just around the corner.

I suppose I should have expected Steve and his XR-SM to do it easy. I mean, look at where he's been. This bloke is no stranger to frostbite, flesh-eating parasites, attacks by wild animals, hyperthermia, dehydration, snipers and generally all things feverish and potentially life-threatening.

But if he's that brave, how come he's not at home suffering the joy of a long-term relationship like us true warriors. I don't know about you blokes, but the constant demands for sex and more sex, not to mention my loved one's passion for nurse's uniforms and schoolgirl tartan matched with fish nets, starts to take its toll after a while.

Flouncing around the countryside white-water rafting, rock-climbing, hang-gliding, canyoning, and finishing every evening by washing down your adrenaline-packed day with a few (already paid for) brews. How hard can it be?

Sounds quite romantic, doesn't it: "thrillseeker". But what is that? Someone who is crap at suicide, who just can't get it right and finish the job properly? Get in, get scared, get home and change your trousers – is that the thrillseeker code? Yes, Steve, I think you've got a couple of serious questions to ask yourself, mate.

"I started out, running from life and now my life is the road. When I'm on the bike, I'm happy again. I'm not good at sitting around – I get restless. Life is to be appreciated," claims Crombie. Sure, buddy. The clue is in the interview responses. Probably only just been allowed out of rehab to complete the series. It fits and aligns well with my conspiracy theory.

So there we have it. I've got to the bottom of it. I've established that unbeknownst to the rest of the industry: Honda is unleashing a new world order that will have us all back on piss-box XR400s before 2008 is out. And my new mate, Stevo is the fall-guy. The culpable kid that rode into Quinalow is being set up to take the blame. No wonder he needs counselling.

When I left him, he was off to the ghost town of Cracow, and its quintessential Aussie Outback pub, which itself is on the far outside edge of the civilised world, 200km from Bundaberg. The pub is hosting the last of the Outback boxing troupes, "Fred Brophy's Outback Boxing Tent". Steve's plan was pretty basic: "I'm going to ride up there and get my head punched in". That about sums Steve, and his approach to adventure riding – live the life you love and love the life you live, even if it means having to take a few hits. **ADB**



[www.adbmag.com](http://www.adbmag.com)

Want to see more? Log on to [adbmag.com](http://adbmag.com) to escape the daily grind and live vicariously through Steve as he continues his life of Natural Born Travel.