

## LOOKING FOR ADVENTURE

By John Nick.

Much as we all love New Zealand it's an inescapable fact that we live in a small country and it won't take a lifetime of motorcycling to explore most of the places you might ride, especially if you confine yourself to tar sealed roads.

Only half of New Zealand's 100,000 km of public roads are sealed and with the larger percentage of these 50,000 km of seal comprising city or suburban streets (and hardly prime touring) by my rough calculations somewhere upwards of 70% of our rural roads are still unsealed!

If you feel like you have ridden pretty well everywhere there is to go on tar seal, perhaps it time you came to grips with the rest, our 50,00 km glorious kilometers of unsealed roads?

Many riders quake at the first mention of gravel, or freeze on sighting a road works sign, so please bear with me, I'm not suggesting that you necessarily take to the gravel on your road bike. For all but a few, the days of plowing out into the wilderness on your road bike went died along with the 3.25 X 19 inch front wheel.

The modern alternative is the Adventure bike, the back to the future hybrid on/off roader that today makes up part of almost every manufacturer's model range. Adventure bikes give away little on the road to genuine road bikes and also make practical day to day commuters or weekend blasters, in fact on some of our rougher sealed roads they are often more comfortable and composed. Yet, when you hit the gravel a good Adventure bike will come into its own. Larger diameter and narrower section tyres, longer travel and more plush suspension, and higher and wider bars, make Adventure bikes easier to control on loose surfaces.

Adventure Riding is hardly a new idea, Che' Guevara discovered revolution in South America astride a Norton. My own father's tales of riding through Africa on a BSA M20 in 1946 inevitably set me on the path. Dad tells the wonderful story of how once in desperate heat he was the only vehicle to make it through a particularly bad stretch of sand and dirt road. He reached a remote town just on dusk, the only vehicle to get through in several days and was carried shoulder high from the saddle by a crowd, still covered in red dust and into the pub where he was not allowed to pay for drinks, food or accommodation. More recently Ewan and Charlie's

epiphanies and escapades have done much highlight the beauty and simplicity of taking the long way home, on two wheels.

What makes a good Adventure bike is of course a subject of long and vigorous debate, which I will leave to another issue. In the same way Adventure riding can be all things to all people; a world or continent girding expedition, an afternoon ride around some of your local back roads, or a holiday with friends to another corner of the country. There also organized Adventures catering for relative beginners to seasoned experts, and even more challenging do it yourself rides following rough unsurfaced public tracks, and are of course a myriad of overseas adventures. This diversity is beyond the scope of this article, but watch for more on these in future Looking for Adventure features.

### **ADVENTURE FOR FREE**

The beauty of New Zealand's amazing free resource of gravel roads is not just that they access so much stunning country, but they are also among the most interesting you will find on the planet. No butt numbing dusty straights to the horizon, these are sinuous tracks, twisting, climbing and descending as they snake through spectacular terrain. I've guided Adventure riders from all over the world around New Zealand and they will all tell you from the first day to the last – 'this country is the adventure rider's paradise'.

At it's most simple gravel road Adventure Riding requires only a modest bike, sensible preparation, a decent road map and a reasonable sense of adventure. There are literally hundreds of public gravel road routes to take throughout NZ. In the North Island most back roads are bridged and are open year round, given reasonable weather. On the South Island the situation changes somewhat as some remote roads are subject to closure by winter snow. The higher roads are usually feasible from December to April, while those with unbridged fords are often subject to closure at any time of year.

Bit by bit our gravel roads are being covered over in bitumen, only very recently has the last of Highway One sealing been completed. However from now on the process may be even slower as gravel roads are recognized as a lower cost and 'greener' solution for low traffic volume roads. Just like the pioneer traveler the Adventure rider experiences the elements, rain cold, heat and dust, even smells, in touch with the journey in every sense. Our gravel roads hark back to a time when travel was slower, more difficult, but so much more personal. Give it a go.

