

# ADVENTURE SKILLS

## GET THE RIGHT BARS

With John Nick

Road and off road riding require completely different riding stances. To gain the level control required to ride off road, the rider, like a skier or a jockey, must spend most of their time standing. The resulting position must allow the rider to centre their head and shoulders over the vital area of control: the bike's steering head pivot. Off road riding, especially on a big adventure bike, requires that you can stand easily and move your weight around as far as possible. Thus the bar will tend to be higher and placed further forward. It will also be wider, for greater leverage, and control. If you want to do some real off road adventuring, go for an off road set up and compromise on road – it's an easier trade off.

The wide range of handlebars and mounting accessories now available mean that every bike can be tailored to the rider, moved forward or back and raised or lowered. Be aware that bikes themselves vary in dimension and the way the bars are clamped, so a bar you liked on your Transalp may not work on the new Beemer. Bars themselves can vary in many ways: overall width, rise (height), sweepback and even the width of the riser section. If buying new bars make sure your clamps and any accessories will fit. Some bike models provide a degree of bar mount adjustment and every bar can be rotated forward and back in the clamps, so before you go out and spend up on accessories find out if your stock bars can be optimized with risers, or by adjustment. When purchasing look closely at materials, a cheap mild steel bar will be unlikely to survive even a common off road low speed tumble, especially on a bigger bike. Consider perhaps a tougher tapered alloy bar.

## BARRING UP THE XT

The stock bars on the XT 660 R I ride are too low for anyone tall enough to see over a shop counter. The stance was hunched and I could not get my weight back at all. The cheapest solution is to fit accessory bar risers to the stock bars. These are available at all good dirt bike shops. Going a step further, I decided on replacing the bars altogether with some tougher, competition quality, Renthal alloy bars. I have long liked the classic Renthal, high, CR Honda bend. Combined with a set of bar 35 mm risers my bars are now about 45 mm higher and a better shape. All that's required is to set the bar angle so you can be comfortable in both the attack and trail standing positions (see last issue). The ballpark setting is to line the bar risers to the same angle as the fork legs and fiddle from there.

## WHICH BAR FOR ME?

Here's a guide to choosing a bar bend and height to suit your bike and body shape.

**Tall riders:** generally need higher bars and can set their bars further forward, or a combination of both.

**Short riders:** may be most comfortable with bars set at a mid to rear position and bars that are not too wide or straight.

**Sandy, loose terrain:** many riders feel more comfortable with a higher bar.

If the bars are too high or too rear-set: the rider will be too upright and, though great downhill, they will find it difficult to stand, especially when going uphill or accelerating.

**Bars too low or too far forward:** when standing the rider may be cramped and sore in the back, neck and shoulders. The bike will probably turn like a snake, but may feel twitchy in the steering and riding downhill or in sand will be scary.

**Bars too wide:** this applies most to smaller riders and women especially and usually indicates as for bars too low or too far forward.

**Sore wrists and outside forearm tendons:** bars may be too straight with too little sweep back, or too wide for the mechanics of your body and wrists.