

"What do you think it is?" Miller was concerned. "Sounds like the clutch—try it." Halford responded. John Miller straddled the sick Husky and rode out of sight around the bend of the road. He was back shortly. "The noise has quit, but it's in the clutch," John said to Jim Halford, "We'd better look at it before it's too late."

John ran the bike off the road, and laid it on its right side in the shade of a large juniper. The rest of us followed, shedding our helmets and jackets, gathering around the wounded 450. Tools flew. Apprehension filled the air.

We were just 50 miles out, on the first day of a three day 350-mile trip. Five of us left John's house in a Phoenix suburb earlier that morning, planning to ride our dirt bikes over back roads and trails for the entire excursion. We planned to travel unsupported, carrying tools, spare parts, and a change of clothes on our bikes and on our backs. Our only concession to civiliza-

Dick Remender nodded to indicate he heard me and, dropping his 400 Mono into gear, smoked off to break trail. The rest of us caught up with him at a gate on the access road. He was talking with an oldtimer who was camped there.

"What's up?" At my question the oldtimer walked over. "You can't go through here, this is private, you'll have to take the main road." No use telling him we didn't want to take the main road, he wouldn't understand. Territorial cuss. Wonder what happened to western hospitality?

The mountains make a perfect backdrop for the rolling grassland, I thought as I stopped a few miles ahead. I expected Jim and John soon, so I broke out my 35mm. This will be an epic photograph; a study of man alone against the hostile environment. Here they come. Around the curve—just a little farther. Seeing the camera, up came their front wheels. Clowns! What

"Cross or eat?" I asked as Dick rode up. "Cross, so we can dry out while we're resting." Figuring the rest would find us, I dove in. Up on the pegs in the shallows, I scanned the bottom for hazards. About half way across it was knee deep and getting rocky. Forgetting style, I dropped to the seat and started to foot to insure my balance. Not very graceful, but sure. In the deepest and rockiest part I dabbed along the bottom, revs high, regulating torque by slipping the clutch. I crossed with little trouble. Parking the bike, I left it idling to dry off while I went back to take pictures of the rest. Five out of five made it. It was indeed a beautiful day.

The 20-mile ride into Strawberry was over a good dirt road and easy going. Spectacular, but uneventful. The road climbed from the desert to the pines in 10 miles, and then wound through the forest, past an occasional meadow with an old ranch headquarters. Fall



350 MILES BY DIRT BIKE

PHOENIX, THE HARD WAY

By Philip C. Briggs

"But how come you have to get up so early?"

tion was to spend the two nights at backwoods lodges and to gas at country stores. Already the expedition was threatened. Crap.

The primary cover was off and the clutch assembly seemed okay. Odd. Looking closer, our fears were confirmed; the driving plates were in sad shape, severely battered with most of the teeth missing from one. We pulled the clutch apart. It's not really too bad—maybe it will make it. John called Mel Foor over. "It's not good, but it might make it, want to try?"

"Hell yes!"

With that resolved, we all smiled and relaxed; it looked like it was going to be a nice day after all.

"All right," I yelled over the noise of the idling engines, "when we get to Bloody Basin, turn right to the powerline, then north along the access road."

kind of an epic is that?

Lunch at the Verde River was the decision, but I was beginning to regret it. I was getting the early afternoon wobbles. Hunger was compounded by a 100 miles of vibration. I've got to admit that my Husky, Lord love it, vibrates. Not too noticeably mind you, but the shaking seems to accumulate in your system. Around another curve and the River was below me. I can see why the Spaniards chose the name Verde. It looked like an emerald green serpent winding through the desert mountains. The biker part of me assessed the easy flowing current, crossing should be a snap. The cottonwoods were turning and the bright yellow ribbon of trees were a striking contrast to the browns and tans of the surrounding desert. Rejuvenated, I picked up the pace. I slid to a stop at the first crossing of the river. The ford, little used, looked shallow, and the current appeared especially slow.

was in the air. The summer cabins started showing up at the pavement a couple of miles from town. Creeping civilization.

Strawberry Lodge was homey, friendly. There was a fire going in the fireplace and the grandmotherly bartender found a dusty bottle of Irish behind the bar. Old Bushmills, ice, a splash of water and the fire. Indeed!

Supper started with a bowl of homemade bean soup and got better. The waitress was duly impressed with our daring do. "All the way from Phoenix on dirt bikes. My!"

The oldtimers folded but I followed the youngsters, Jim and John, on a tour of Strawberry's hot spots. There are two. We walked. The first was filled with drunken hunters. It was deer season and they were all suitably attired—except for the pistols which were checked at the bar. The place was a typical middle-class American bar; the





waitress stiffed us for an extra buck and faded.

Down the main street (highway) to the second, The Foxfire. We found the bar area fast filling with cowboys out for a Saturday night and freaks in from their hillside hideouts. A three piece C&W group was holding forth. They were surprisingly good. Booze flowed and everyone was mellow. The kids faded after three or four. These youngsters just can't handle that liquid fun.

The night air was sharp, the sky ablaze with unfamiliar stars. The big city sky never looked like this. We walked down the middle of the highway, heads tipped back, discussing the certainty of life out there somewhere. Sleep came quickly.

DAY TWO

"I think we should turn back," I

Highline Pack Trail from Strawberry to Kohl's, but time had run out.

Jim rolled back down and started back the way we had come. I was tired, and the gathering darkness wasn't cheering me up. If we can get out of this canyon we should be able to make it out before dark. If . . .

Chet Carman

Editor

Dirt Rider

Challenge Publications, Inc.

7950 Deering Avenue

Canoga Park, CA 91304

Dear Chet:

Some subversive trail riding for you. A tale of a three day, 350 mile dirt bike ride. We started and ended in Phoenix, and rode street legal dirt bikes. All very up and up, but an adventure nonetheless.

gling got him through. Both of these guys are far better riders than I and they've had trouble—foreboding. My turn. Making the switch without too much trouble and turning the bars, I nailed it and charged the cliff. The front wheel stuck on the face, started around and then the fire went out. Damn! Paddling backwards I struggled to stay upright. The bike stopped and, wonder of wonders it was aimed up the trail. Jim came back to help the old-timer (at 36 I'm ancient to a 25-year-old). A little dragging, and I was fixed for another try. The bike lit on the first kick (good bike) and I was off. 400WR tractor power dragged us up and over. Hot damn!

Now, it was a race against the sun. Jumping logs and riding narrow cliff-side trails in the dark is not my idea of fun. Jim and John had split, and I did my best to hurry. At least, when I'm riding with these guys I don't have to eat their dust. It has settled by the time I got there.

There wasn't much light left when we got back to the jeep road. John's sealed beam took a rock someplace and Jim's was gone as well. My token headlight worked and, being from a tractor, made a perfect light to lead those thumpers into Kohl's.

The gal at Kohl's has been waiting for us. "Ah, yes, the rest of my motorcyclists. You must be frozen." We were, and awfully dusty to boot. Our jackets-of-many-pockets were all the same color, brown. And we looked like raccoons with clean spots around our eyes. We were a sight, enough to repulse most straights. Nice Lady.

Showered, we found Mel and Dick in the bar. Mel's had three or four Scotch transfusions and is looking better. "Thought we'd have to send you home in a box there for a while," I observed.

Mel smiled, "I wasn't too sure myself. I've ridden a lot of street but hell, that's nothing compared to this. Today was fantastic though!"

Mel really had suffered. The Highline runs along the Mogollon Rim. It's up high in the pines and oaks, running over ridges and into the head of every canyon. There were springs and small streams of cold water. The trail was basically nice, but it hadn't been maintained in a long time. Downfalls and washed out rocky uphill were moderately challenging for us, crucifying for Mel. But he'd kept going, yielding only in the last mile or so. John and Jim rode, pushed and carried him out. He'll remember that day for a long, long time.

DAY THREE

The river was 50 to 75 yards wide. What had been a knee-deep pool the last time I was this way was now all riffle, and probably a lot deeper. Across



Mel, Dick, John and Jim saddle up at Punkin Center.

shouted up at Jim. He'd fought the 500 Yamaha thumper up the trail from the canyon, and obviously didn't want to give up that strategic position. "What time is it?" He shouted back. "Ten till 5, we've an hour of light left." "Think you can get back up that last hill?" John asked me. "Well, I can at least make the switchback." John nodded in agreement, and called up to Jim, "Let's go!"

The three of us had left Mel and Dick at the last jeep road that intersected the trail, with instructions on how to get to Kohl's Ranch by road. Mel was nearing terminal exhaustion from the 12 miles of trail, and Dick was sick with a cold. We were to press on with the original plan to ride the

From what I've read it looks like times are tough at Dirt Rider. If you like the story send me what you can afford.

Outa site—

Phil

The thumper made it to the switch easily, and Jim tried a wheelie turn off the rock face. It didn't work. Carefully balancing the bike where it stalled, Jim climbed off and started to drag the rear wheel around. John and I sat at the base of the trail, too far away to help. Jim's small and the bike outweighs him two-to-one. But he was also determined, if not desperate. Slowly he dragged around in the rocks, chocked in place and got ready to try again. This time he made it.

John on his Honda thumper, made it around the switch, and a little strug-



the river there was a party going on. I looked at them and looked at the river. They looked at me. It would be dark in an hour, and we were still 35 miles from home. In I went.

As I started into the shallows, the party quieted down, all eyes were on me. A few more feet and I was in deep water. My eyes and attention were riveted on the river around me. The velocity piled water on the upstream side of the bike (the air cleaner side) and shoved me downstream. Feet out, struggling to maintain balance in the rocky stream, arms straining to keep the bike on line, I was only vaguely

aware of the exhaust note. Rev's rose and fell in response to some subconscious control as the bike butted and struggled through the slippery round rocks. The exhaust was crisp still but any second I expected to hear coughs and bubbles. The top of the air cleaner was only a couple of inches from going under. This couldn't last long. Miraculously, it kept running. Running strong enough I began to think I'd make it. Then, silence.

"Oh, no!" A spectator wailed from the far bank. Watching me struggle to midstream, they chose sides and they were as disappointed as me.

Dismounting on the downstream side, I felt the lever into neutral and began to push. But it was no good. The water, now tank deep, was pushing the bike into me and I couldn't keep my balance. Gingerly, I crossed over the bike and started again. The bike weathered downstream and tried to lay down. Holding it upright was tough; pushing it in the rocks was exhausting. One step at a time. Brace. Push. Pant.

The party across the river groaned en masse at my struggle, but they stayed on the bank. Man alone against the hostile environment. You asked for this! New plan; angle downstream with

the current. Slowly, one step at a time I made the shore. An oldtimer (50 looks ancient to a 36-year-old) stepped in the water to help me up the bank. He was impressed.

The party was a group of snowbirds down to Arizona on vacation, and out to see the wilds. They were intrigued. (There's nothing like this in Minnesota.) Shortly, there was a Scotch in my hand. Panting, I answered questions: "We've come 150 miles today. Rode from Kohl's and heading for Phoenix. We've been out three days. There's four more behind me. I told them it would be gas-tank deep, but they aren't going to believe this." The bike needed a full drying out, so I broke out the tools and set to. "Yes, you've got to be part mechanic to ride off-road," I answered. The rest arrived shortly (they'd been shepherding Mel) and attention turned to their crossing.

John waded out, looked the situation over and waded back. Capitulating, they doubled up and pushed across. The bikes filled with water just the same. Soon, there were soggy air filters, mag covers and tools spread around inverted bikes. One by one, the bikes yielded and started. Each burst of noise was received by cheers of hip, hip, hooray! Those oldtimers were really mellowed out. I imagine we were the most exciting thing to happen out there all day.

Up till the river, we'd had an easy, pleasant day. The ride from Kohl's followed fire roads down from the pines to Young, a ranch town in rolling grasslands. Yet untouched by progress, the village received electricity only two years ago. We traveled south from Young a ways and then across a shortcut from the Buzard Roost Ranch via jeep roads to Punkin Center. Lunch, gas and a little pool. Bikers mingle easily with cowboys here, partly because my club's annual enduro comes through here and we always raise some money for a local cause in conjunction with the event. They're grateful.

Tanks and bellies full, we headed South, and then towards home over Four Peaks. The mountain fire road was slippery, treacherous and soon ate up Mel.

"Marveling at the scenery, 'ay?"

He nods. "Ride your own pace, we'll wait for you."

Jim and John were bored and started playing games. John passed me, ran up the bank and hid in the brush. Highway Patrol. Jim rode by and John leaped out of the brush. Tag, your it!

Going down the mountain, in a rough stretch, I was up on the pegs, on the gas, front wheel light in the rocks. Zoom, they both passed me. I turned up the wick, attempting to catch up, then realized they were coasting!



Out on the desert, the road got better. I was leaned over in a corner, going moderately fast, when there was a tug at my sleeve. Startled, I looked around. Jim tucked inside me, smiled and motored off.

Heading down a sandwash going to the river, I noticed the kids had turned off the main trail and were hiding up a side wash. Around a couple more corners to a junction in the trail and I did the same. Presently, they arrived, puzzled, as they hadn't expected me to be there. Touche! (Us oldtimers aren't entirely out of it.)

Back on the river, we gathered around Mel's Husky for a group picture to take back to Minnesota. It was good and dark by then. We were cold and wet. The plan was to gather around the working headlights and head for civilization, stopping at the first saloon to call for the trailers. We passed that bar. Stubborn now, we had all resolved to finish this ride as planned. We closed ranks around the lights and sneaked to town down back streets. The last mile or so was under street lights. Damn the tickets, full speed ahead. Around a corner, and there was John's house. Success! ●