

deep, water-filled crater about four miles across. An exhilarating flight around the snow-covered rim leads to a steady descent through forest to Bend, Oregon, and our first oil change. At the bike shop we meet many kindred spirits and chat about the great touring life while we do the change. Hondas get a unanimous vote for reliability, but there is some argument about whether they should be "chopped" or not. I am surprised to find that "choppers" are built more for comfort than for style. Chopping and extending the front forks and the addition of footbars allow one to sit back out of the wind in a comfortable easy-chair position. While our big loads make comfortable backrests, it would be nice to be a little lower out of the wind, and we decide we should ride a chopper just to see how much more unsteady it is made by the extended front fork. For the time being, the only custom modification we make is to add new vaned grips to the handlebars. On the previous day our right arms had become very sore from holding the vibrating small-diameter grip at $\frac{3}{4}$ throttle all day.

The afternoon is hot and gusty, and we cross the vast plains of lava, interrupted occasionally by abrupt gorges with columnar sides. The last of these, that of the Columbia, marks the Washington border, and darkness finds us winding up the gorge of one of its tributaries, looking for a place to stop. The absence of most of the visual cues makes the drive an unearthly and scary float, with only a bright patch of road ahead as the reference point. It is a great relief to get off the road and down to the river for a swim and camp.

Day 3

Yakima to Vancouver, British Columbia

This is an easy 300 miles, heading west toward Seattle and across the Canadian border. The pass across the Cascade Range is quite high, with scattered snowcaps about it, and we put on our windproofs for the first time in the cold, damp air being blown up from the Pacific Coast. The descent to Seattle introduces us to the dark forests of Sitka spruce, which we would see all the way to Alaska whenever we were on the coast. On the green shores of Puget Sound, Rona points out an otter skipping from one waterway to another. Canada reminds us of home, but we could do without the mad Sydney-like traffic of Vancouver, which we strike at peak hour.

The memorable smell of the Pacific Northwest is the aroma of overcooked cabbage that is belched from the pulp mills.



Day 4

Vancouver to Lytton, B.C.

Scorching heat. Have to use chain lube every 100 miles. Frequent stops for swims and to cool off poor laboring bikes. Scenery wild, uncompromising gorges (Fraser River). We find we're the only comfortable travelers (except for truckies in refrigerated semis). We meet two young Adonises on 10-speeds bicycling across Canada. Very effective warnings carried by them: 10-foot fiberglass fishing rods tied to back of bike with day-glo orange flap on top. We can see them easily half a mile away. These fellows are making 100 miles a day. They reckon on better than 200 miles a day across the plains with a tail wind. (Makes us feel slightly decadent with our motors.)

Day 5

Lytton to Prince George, B.C.

Another day for shorts and open-neck shirts. Bikes getting out of tune and missing a lot. Arrive in town for oil change to find drain plugs stuck. Can't budge them with our own spanners (too short for leverage) — so try to borrow one in town, with no luck at all. Honda shop is closed (Sunday), and all service stations carry only British (inches) spanners, while we need a 19-mm metric one. In desperation I try everything and only succeed in burring the nut. Profuse sweat and swearing. Forced to stay overnight to wait for Honda shop to open.

Day 6

Prince George to Prince Rupert, B.C.

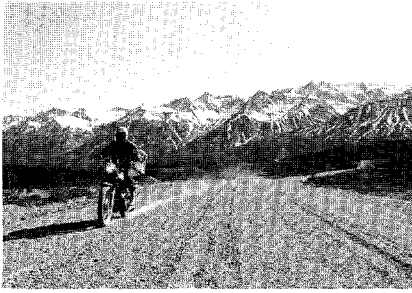
Bike shop closed! Luckily manage to rouse someone by phone. Oil change accomplished as well as a complete tune-up. Rona's bike now running perfectly, mine so-so. We practice the tuning on my bike first and so do a better second job on Rona's. We're sufficiently skilled to do it ourselves next time (which will be soon, since the bikes seem to get out of tune every 1,000 miles, the way we ride them.) Buy myself a long 19-mm spanner.

Very late afternoon start, but have a magnificent ride westward into the sun through fields of flowers (daisies, lupines, and buttercups) and green forest, and beside lakes, with the mountains getting steeper and more snowy the further west we get. We're still getting thrills at every new turn in the road. We drive until dark — about 200 miles. Weather still scorching — wearing practically nothing but helmet and faceshield at 50-60 mph.

Days 7 and 8

Prince Rupert to Haines, Alaska; Haines to Lake Kathleen, Yukon

A 30-hour ferry ride through a spectacular section of the Inside Passage saves us from 800 miles of nasty gravel road. We drive past scores of waiting cars and giant campers, all "on standby" at the dock — no trouble in booking without notice on such a



popular cruise if one has a bike, which can be squeezed in anywhere on the car deck. Luxuriating on the sundeck after a 25-cent shower and a beautiful seafood meal from the restaurant, we take in the mighty peaks looming out of the water. These same peaks feed glaciers which reach the sea, and one ice field (the Mendenhall near Juneau) is actually producing baby icebergs as we pass.

Once off the ferry at Haines we have 40 miles of exquisite riding on paved road through forest, beside a vigorous river, with the wild snowcaps of the Chilkat Range as a backdrop. Then the gravel road begins abruptly at the Alaskan-Canadian border. At this point, the gravel is hard packed, and we take advantage of the long daylight to put as much of it behind us as possible. At 11 p.m. we are still pushing on into the strange light of the sunset to the north. All around us is the eerie taiga or boreal forest — tiny stunted hemlock and spruce, like poor excuses for Christmas trees, golden ground cover, milky blue tarns, distant snow caps. Rabbits everywhere on the road with great, ungainly feet — apparently an advantage on the snow in winter, when their coats turn white to match.

Day 9

Lake Kathleen to the Alaskan border

Retrieve our food from the rucksack hanging high in an aspen, where we had strung it the night before to foil the camp bear. We had been warned of the bear by two other motorcycle tourers on Harley-Davidsons, whose deep-throated revving had been used to scare the offending animal at 3 a.m.

Set off on the least enjoyable day of the whole trip, the principal enemies being dust, semis, and road construction crews. The Canadians maintain what they call the "best gravel highway in the world," steadfastly refusing to accept the American offer to pave the horror because it might mean an end to the bountiful road taxes earned from the armies of trucks moving to and from

Alaska. The maintenance involved is a constant replacement of piles of loose gravel to the center of the road. From here it is quickly redistributed by the wheels of the cargo-laden behemoths and accumulates in loose ridges on the edges — a nasty trap for the unsuspecting cyclist.

For the thousandth time I bend my head and grit my teeth. The huge cone of dust spearheaded by a relentless semi bears on past. My paranoia has increased after being battered with rocks so many times that I could swear that not only did it not slow down, but it had actually accelerated past me.

I stop on the sward and look into the receding cloud of dust for the red and white figure of Rona to appear. Two minutes pass. What the hell has happened to her? After another two minutes I break under the tension. Go, Jacko! Almighty skid around, watch that pile of rocks, painful sigh, acrid dust, thrashing through the gears, fishtail



around the first bend, no sight of her, 60 in the gravel — you're crazy, Jack.

She must have had trouble in the loose rocks near the lake edge — or could it have been that bloody semi? Horror!

An old man struggling to upright her bike in a pile of gravel on the next bend. Skid up, struggle with helmet so I can hear — his mouth opening and closing and his face is trying to tell me something. Can't get my helmet off. Her bike's lights and muffler are smashed up. Panic. "What have you done with her?" He leads me around behind his parked van. Oh, God!

Rona sits calmly applying antiseptic through the great rent in her pants to the graze on her knee. She gives me a wan but reassuring smile, and I turn to set about replacing the broken gear and clutch levers and straighten out the tailpiece on her bike.

We eventually made it to Fairbanks and did a mighty trip on foot in the far north

among the Dall sheep and caribou of Brooks Range tundra. That's another story.

In conclusion, let me say a little about the emotional trip which capped things off on the 3,000-mile ride back to California again.

Because we were fairly new to motorcycles at the start of the trip, we hardly trusted ourselves or each other to ride side by side down the highway. I was usually in front, sometimes irritated when Rona lagged, and she was sometimes unhappy when I appeared not to want to go at her speed. We often lost one another on the freeways of the large cities, and the combination of my aggressive riding through the mess and Rona's sane defensiveness meant the gap often lengthened until we were on the open road again.

On the way home we decided to ride side by side. At 65 mph this required complete trust and knowledge of the other's riding and gave a wonderful reward — a glowing feeling of solidarity. Our two bright headlamps, on at all times so we would be easily seen, presented an unequivocal signal to oncoming traffic to keep out of our lane. We could sense one another's joy and exhilaration with a quick sidelong glance, and communication added immeasurably to the already present fulfillment of the ride. I would indicate the red hawk swooping on a mouse in a field that she might otherwise have missed, while a mile further on she would point out an interesting side road we could take for fun. Isn't that cloud a beauty? Yes, and look at the sun shining off the water down there. All of that and your love by your side, an ever changing fragrance in your nostrils, a zooming panoramic view, a 60-mph cool whistle in your clothes, and a 6,000-rpm tickle in your ass. □



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Motorcycling is riding a motorcycle. For some people, motorcycling may be the only affordable form of individual motorized transportation, and small-displacement motorcycles are the most common motor vehicle in the most populous countries, including India, China and Indonesia. In developing countries, motorcycles are overwhelmingly utilitarian due to lower prices and greater fuel economy. Of all motorcycles, 58% are in the Asia Pacific and Southern and Eastern Asia regions, excluding car-centric Japan. Highest number of motorcyclists having completed advanced motorcycle skill courses. Motorcycle use. A survey targeting European riders was designed to collect information on the motorcycling community around Europe and gain a better overview of similarities and differences in terms of riding, attitudes, and safety needs. The survey was organised as an open participation survey, open to the general public in each participating country for a duration of 6 months.