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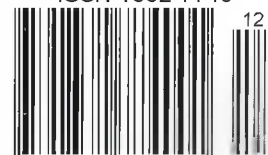
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Western Australia is a huuuge state, with endless trails and far flung places to explore. But knowing where to go and how to find the best riding can be a daunting prospect, unless you hook up with a commercial trail tour operation, like OutYonda Trail Bike Adventures.

Story: Lex Porebski // Photography: Lex & Eric



Headin' Out Yonda



MAIN: Rick and Lex arrive into Kalgoorlie with plenty of enthusiasm. With OutYonda's support, you get to ride your bike unladen, allowing you to enjoy a hard and fast dirt bike riding experience. 1. Camp each night is dominated by OutYonda's three OKA 4x4 support trucks, which make for a fully set-up bivouac experience. 2. Heading east on sandy trails outside Pinjin. 3. So many areas of outback WA are dominated by mining activity and yeah, the mighty mining trucks always have right of way - you don't argue with these big beasts.



WHEN it comes to organising 'a big ride' each year involving a big bunch of blokes and some big kilometres over multiple days, my mates and I always hit the same wall. A lack of time, or a lack of willing 4WD support truck drivers, or a lack of the all-important permission slips from the missus, can make or break getting away for a full-on week of outback trail riding fun. And let's face it: we all need to blow off some steam and get away from the daily grind on the big ride for the year ... so what to do? Well, it's times like this when businesses like OutYonda Trail Bike Adventures can take all the hassle out of everything and turn your dream ride into reality.

A couple of down-to-earth blokes named Brett and Steve (AKA Botch) are the driving forces behind WA-based OutYonda and they offer various packages where they take care of the food, fuel and camping gear, leaving you free to just rock up with your bike and swag. You can join on one of their regular scheduled rides, or OutYonda also do custom trips through their OutBack Logistics arm. You simply tell them where you want to go and they do the rest, leaving you and your mates to just enjoy the fun of riding in usually inaccessible and out of reach areas.

OutYonda are well known through a TV documentary called 'The Ride' which aired last Christmas about four paraplegic riders who travelled around Australia re-visiting the scenes of their accidents. They were assisted by the OutYonda crew, who took care of all the logistics and planned the coast-to-coast trip. If you get a chance to view the documentary, check it out.

I'd heard about OutYonda on the grapevine, then saw some of their promo videos on YouTube, so I decided to tag along on one of their custom adventure tours. I also persuaded some of my mates to come along, with the promise of, 'All riding, no carrying!' In the end around 20 riders turned up, all wishing to experience the WA outback on a trail ride but not willing to give up the fun of riding a light and nimble enduro bike.

BUILT TONKA TOUGH

Brett runs a fleet of Aussie-built, Tonka-tough OKA 4x4 trucks and each one is set up for a particular purpose. One is a dedicated kitchen truck that Brett likes to drive, while another, driven by Adrian and his wife Maree, is for all the riders' gear and camp equipment. The third OKA, with Kevin at the helm, hauls the fuel to feed up to 20-plus bikes for the duration of the ride. The three OKA trucks mostly keep to the highways and gravel roads, meeting up with the bikes at the evening's camp site. A fourth vehicle, a much loved and often repaired Lada Niva, is driven by young Dylan and is used as the chase car in case of unforeseen problems along the trail route.

Our ride was set to take us from Kalgoorlie heading east to the Plumridge Lakes Nature Reserve and then north-west to the remote Laverton area before finally tracking south back to Kalgoorlie. It looked like being an easy eight-day ride with a planned distance of around 1,400km for the trip.

The ride began on a Saturday as we set off to meet the OutYonda crew near Kalgoorlie. However this plan was very nearly derailed by one small town's malfunctioning fuel bowser.

Luckily a phone call to Brett put us onto a mate of his in town who happily sold us 20 litres of diesel to get us to the next larger town and working fuel bowzers.

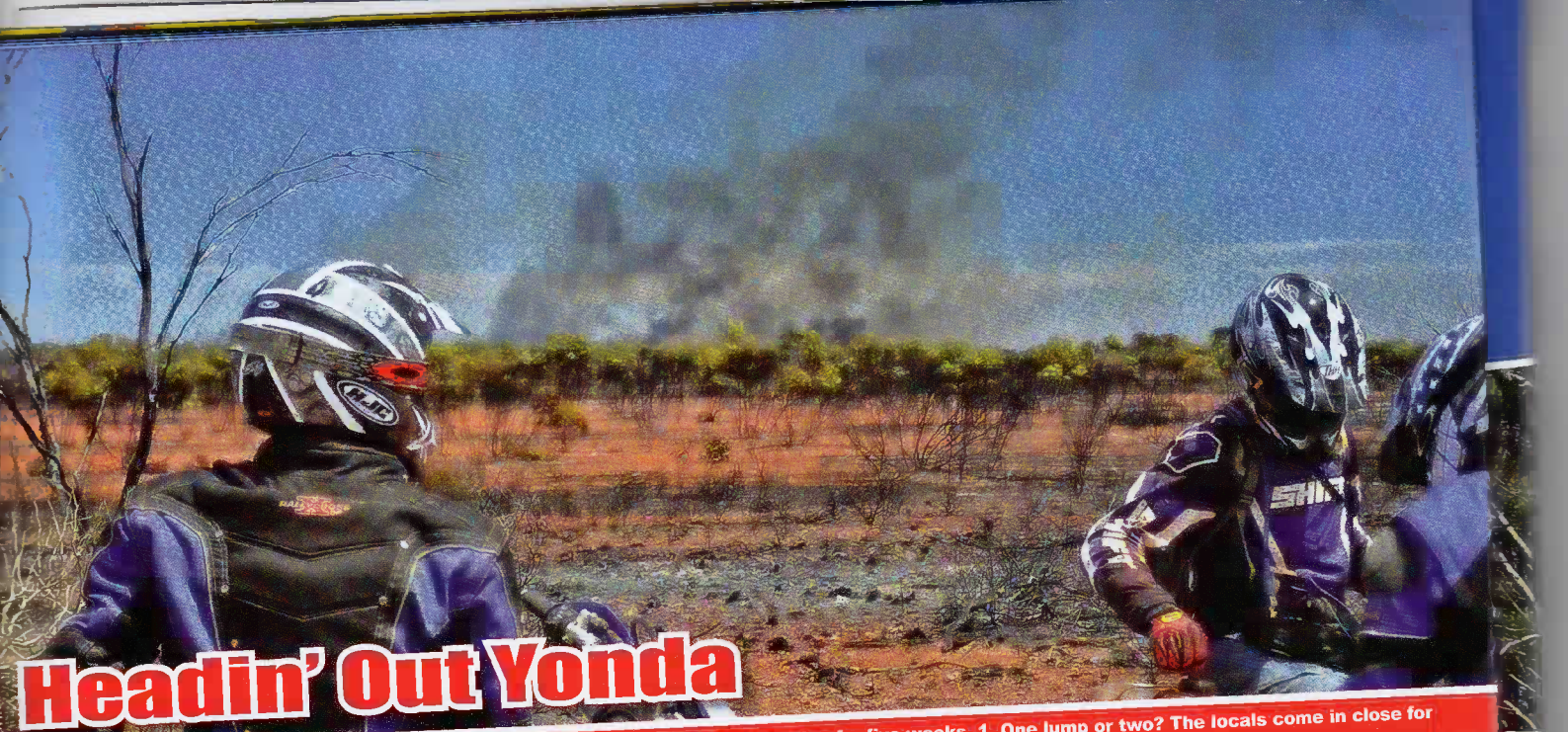
Our crew of riders were already in Kalgoorlie waiting, so we headed east to the gold mining ghost town of Bulong to unload, eat and wait for any other riders to show. In Bulong the three OKAs were ready and waiting, as Maree and Mary had the commercial-sized camp kitchen heated and ready to feed the troops.

FIRING ON ALL CYLINDERS

Despite being far too excited to sleep, Sunday morning finally arrived and it was time to head east. Leaving the OKAs behind, Botch led the way, he and his Husaberg clearly champing at the bit. Mingling with the rest of the riders was Trev the cameraman, with his helmet cam recording the action, while at the rear was Chris, the designated sweep rider – ready and willing to eat dirt for the week.

There was excellent desert riding right off the bat, as we zig-zagged around the myriad of old mine shafts that have been left abandoned throughout the Goldfields. A few feral goats took flight from the noise but there was little else in the way of animals on the first day. A few lads managed to get lost in the initial excitement but were rounded up and returned to the flock. The weather in the Goldfields can be hot and the first day was a good example of the need to be prepared, with good hydration a must. One of the riders got a touch of heat-stroke and was put into a vehicle for the rest of the day with his bike being trucked. A good lesson in drinking water even if you don't feel the need.





Headin' Out Yonda

MAIN: Where there's smoke there's fire and this fire near Lake Rason had been burning for five weeks. 1. One lump or two? The locals come in close for a look. 2. Jacko takes a breather at the entrance to Plumridge Lakes. 3. How did this rock get here? Must have been a heavy lift!



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The ever changing landscape soon flattened out into endless salt pans, with little vegetation. After a few hours riding we came across the OKAs in a grove beside a mud flat. You've got to love turning up for a ready-made lunch under a large shady awning with ample cold water to wash away the grime!

During lunch Jacko took the opportunity to go for a ride around the mud flat but the ground gave way to some underground moisture – resulting in 45 minutes of hard slog in the mud trying to tow the bike back out of the quicksand! It was another lesson learned with a few smiles and much chortling from the riders.

Camp that night was already taken care of by the time we reached our destination. It was located in a shady group of trees on the edge of mining country. Dinner around the fire was spectacular, the OKA lunch truck well utilised.

It was clear Brett and Botch had marked a good trail – one that was new to those of us who predominantly do day rides near home, as opposed to long outback discovery rides. The further east we went, the more the land changed as we approached the edge of the Great Victoria Desert.

JOB'S NOT OVER TILL THE PAPERWORK'S DONE

That evening the kids had a play on the QA50 mini bike (that's stashed in one of the trucks and is at the ready should anyone breakdown and their own bike be unrideable!) and a new use was found: camp toilet transport! Blokes were lining up with shovel and bog roll in hand to ride the pint-size mini out into the scrub to do their business.

The ride was proving to be quite an experience, made easy because of all the planning and preparation by the OutYonda team. Along the way we were surprised to come across a retired Dutch couple in a custom-made Landcruiser who were traveling around the world via one back-track after another. They had just completed an epic African tour ... what a life!

Each camp site had its own rugged outback beauty to it and plenty of space so no one was crammed up against a neighbour. One rider took to baking a loaf of bread each night and as the days progressed the finished product became more delicious – or perhaps we were just less discerning?

One day I found the group stopped by a burnt-out Pajero 4WD. The driver had parked over a Spinifex bush and up she went: a total barbeque! Amazingly the fire left a 20-litre drum of fuel intact, but behind the vehicle for more than 60km the bush was still burning. Riding through blackened country was fraught with danger, as everywhere there were fire-hardened punji sticks waiting to puncture the tyres of anyone silly enough to leave the safety of the track. Unfortunately a volunteer driver from the city decided to navigate around a fallen tree and managed to puncture two tyres in one foul swoop. This seemed to be of little concern though, as Rick plugged the tyres with jelly rope and they never failed again.

THIS IS PARADISE

A few days into the ride we arrived at the paradise of Plumridge Lakes, which is an interesting place with all the camping spots you could wish for. This time the bikes had arrived ahead of the OKAs and with the number of riders it was impossible to stop everyone heading out in all directions to explore the area. Out in the Goldfields new mining super-highways appear regularly, so the GPS and paper maps are often out of date or easily confused when your intended route is now criss-crossed by wide gravel haul-pack roads. One such new road had thrown the OKA trucks off the intended route but within a short while they showed up and made camp before sunset. How nice it was to swing open the oven tops and get the food cooking under a giant tarpaulin, safe from any rain.

Brett, who had a recent leg surgery and couldn't ride a bike anymore, took the little QA50 for a long slow ride to investigate the area, but didn't see a large,



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Headin' Out Yonda

MAIN: A desert mirage near Lake Rason. 1. Setting up camp near Burtville, a deserted ghost town in outback WA. 2. This is the start of a large outback wild fire that burnt out more than 60km. 3. Brett washing one of the OKAs after a desert thunderstorm.



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temperamental camel standing behind him in the river bed. Despite our frantic waving for him to turn around and look behind him, he never saw the camel.

COOLING DOWN THE PACE HEATS UP

The next couple of days the weather cooled down, thankfully, and with no mechanical problems we made good time. For the large vehicles the going got easier once clear of the nature reserve, with the tracks all widened and graded by the mining companies. The lads were stopping more to check out the new sights along the way and as Botch was leading us in a smart fashion, this was no problem. The rocky outcrops grew in size and number, as did the dry salt lakes.

Near Lake Rason we stopped by the edge for lunch in the shade of the vehicles, a welcome relief from the wind but not the outback flies. Continuing north-west we soon spotted smoke on the horizon and as luck would have it our tracks took us directly towards the smoke... All around us was burnt or smouldering bush – this was the extent of the fire caused by the burning Pajero and we were now two days past our encounter with the burnt-out vehicle! It was a slow, relentless fire that we found out later had already been burning for some five weeks.

That night we camped in the lee of some large rocky break-aways, and Brett entertained us with stories of his time working in Africa as an off-road tour operator. With the 25 riders, drivers and family sitting on the chairs provided by OutYonda and having a feast, it seemed like everyone had some food they wanted to share with the group. Despite my love of free food, I couldn't fit another bagel or blueberry muffin in past the roast I had just consumed, all amply washed down with various fluids that everyone offered as well. It was almost the makings of another TV cooking travel show.

After dinner the more vigorous or youthful amongst the group would wander off in the twilight to explore the hills, while those of us who are getting sedentary continued to sit around the camp fire, gnawing on the remains of pork rib and listening to the tall stories and hyperbole.

The following day saw us arrive in Laverton en-masse, a line of trucks and dirty

dirt bikes heading to the fuel station and down to the take-away joint to experience the best chicken and chips we'd had in a long time.

After a few hours of rest and regrouping and we were okay for the final push back towards Kalgoorlie. The OKA trucks departed along the black-top while we threw caution to the wind and took a more direct route down to the historic gold mining town of Kookynie, arriving there before the trucks and with time to spare we paid a visit to the Grand Hotel for burgers and chips.

These old Goldfield towns once were home to thousands of people with dozens of hotels, bakers, hospitals, schools and shops, but now they have almost no residents or are close to dying and it's only the dollars that visitors bring on these outback holidays that keeps the history and memories alive. In any case, a stop was necessary to change a few air filters in the shade of some historic ruins before the big push down the tracks all the way to Kalgoorlie. Not far south of Kookynie is the camping hamlet of Niagara Dam, which is a great place to stop with its gas barbeques and toilets, but as it's usually crowded with caravans, we kept on heading south.

The last 300km was the fastest run along some great undulating tracks, making for a fun blast to the finish and following a few former Australasian Safari tracks into Kalgoorlie. With no issues along the way we all regrouped for the last time just north of Kalgoorlie, then arrived in town to where our vehicles were parked, repacked our gear and said our good-byes.

I have to thank the OutYonda crew for an amazing trail ride adventure that would not have been possible for us without their knowledge and logistical support over the eight days of trail bike heaven. If you feel the need to go and explore the wilds of Western Australia, or even head across the centre to Alice Springs and even further, check out what Brett and his crew can offer you.

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TO find out more about the rides and service OutYonda Trail Bike Adventures offer, call Brett on (08) 9883 2020 or get online and check out the www.outyonda.com web site.