

HOW TO BUY A NEW BIKE, HAVE A HOLIDAY ALL IN ONE.

Geoff Edwards

I blame Ben Pickard for all this of course. He left me his R1200GS for three weeks while he was away on the oil rigs at work. Robin Morrith does not escape blame either, as he let me ride his R1150GS Adventure round the block.

I did not have a bike at all from about 1988 to 2005. My previous machine was a nice BMW R100/7, with a color-matched DJP sidecar. When kids came along, the bike was not being used and we decided to sell it and sink it into our huge \$25,000 mortgage (at the time). In 2005, I decided that I needed a release valve mechanism from work and life at home, and did some extra work out of hours machining up bits and pieces to save some \$\$ for a bike. Still having my license intact, I thought I wanted a bike to do some weekends away, long distance stuff, not necessarily weekend rides. I found an R100LT that suited this purpose, at least getting me back on the road and meeting some great people in the process.

My motorcycling aspirations are to do a lap of Australia one day, but I do have a few other trips in mind before then. A trip to Darwin in May 2009 for my brother's 50th birthday bash, and perhaps a trip to the North-West since I have never been up that way before. The R100LT was looking a bit antiquated for this, although it had been well worked over in terms of maintenance items.

I decided to have a look at the GS, mainly as a comfortable touring machine with capabilities. Not being into getting really wet and dirty unless absolutely necessary, the off-road stuff is not a passion, but may well become one day. I do need to be careful as I have broken my back before and still have issues with it, so I am not too keen to get too rough on the bike.

Being a one-track-minded person, once I look, I do. My proposed budget and opinions of the R1200GS vs R1150GS led me to looking at R1150GS bikes, and I decided on a dual spark, non-ABS bike. Finding one with low kms and at the right price was the challenge, but I was not in a hurry. Now, finding one on the other side of the country was a particular mission, as I needed an excuse to take time off work and have a break. BINGO, a 2003 model twin-spark R1150GS with 27,000kms on the clock, no ABS, and as an added bonus, it was in Armidale in Northern NSW.

Now, most people will do an inspection before buying a vehicle. 27,000kms on one of these is not yet run in, and worth the risk at that money. Just as a bit of insurance though, I paid for BMW roadside assist, and made a booking for a service check at Adelaide BMW on the way across. I flew to Sydney, connected onto QantasLink to Armidale, and arrived at 11:00AM on the Saturday before the Coalmine Beach club weekend. After doing the paperwork and packing my stuff on the bike, I was in Armidale at the servo filling with fuel at precisely 12:00.



Geoff in Armidale, just about to leave. A bit tired after red-eye flight.

I headed down the New England Highway, then switched over to the Newell Highway and South to West Wyalong for a night in a motel. From 12:00 midday to about 7PM, I had covered 760kms after only having broken sleep for about an hour on the plane the night before. I realised then how rideable this bike was. The 34 litre tank was an absolute winner, just keep on riding till you feel like stopping, without the bike dictating when to stop. I think my feet touched the ground twice in 7 hours.

From West Wyalong I headed south through Jerilderee and to Deniliquin, where I realised that it was Farrells coffee time. I placed a call through and got onto the mob at Farrells, good to hear familiar voices and not just the ones in my head.

My destination for the day is a place called Rupanyup, just East of Horsham. I have a sister who lives there, a bike rider too (Triumph T100), and thought I should stop in to say hi. Now the Garmin StreetPilot 3 GPS is really good, only if you load all the maps. And what's more, this part of the trip is the only road in the whole week's journey where I had not travelled before. I got lost in central Victoria, not far from the Grampians, and placed a mobile call to my sister. I was a mere 10kms away, and took a short-cut across a few farms as my first off-road experience on the GS, and I have to say it was a bit rough. Uncanny though, as I was almost in view and felt totally bamboozled.

Got there just in time for lunch, another 700 kms done. On the Monday I had some work lined up in Horsham for an hour or so, which paid for the fuel for the entire trip back to Perth. Having got that out of the way, I headed on into Adelaide to catch up with a few old friends from when we used to live there. I also had the bike booked in for the service the following day, so decided to spend a whole day in Adelaide, also doing some other work while there. That made it a business trip too!!

On the Wednesday I left Adelaide early in the morning and headed north to Port Pirie, then on to Whyalla and Port Augusta. While fuelling and caffeining at Port Augusta, I noted the highway sign giving me an instant choice to either head to Perth or to go to Darwin. Having a brother in Darwin, I gave him a call and asked for directions. Deciding that I didn't have time to also fit Darwin into the itinerary, I took the low road.



Now you get to Kimba and realise that you are half-way to nowhere in particular.



Not really being under time pressure either, I decided that I might go for a bit of a ride and planned a stay at Streaky Bay. With water restrictions for a long time, the lawns where the tents get pitched was just sand, and gale-force off-shore winds were blowing right through the place. I had a new single pole tent which was a real scream to pitch in high winds, on soft sand. The 3" tent pegs did nothing at all to help, neither did the 4WD campers sipping on beers cheering the wind on. The tree helped with a bit of shelter from the gale, and I ended up getting the tent up despite the challenges. Revenge was sweet though, as I left at 5AM in the dark, and made sure the engine was warm BEFORE I left the camp ground. And the lights were on high beam too.



Streaky Bay....beautiful place to camp.

Thursday my destination was Border Village. However, making really good time, having perfectly mild weather and a bit of a tail wind (ie no head wind), I reached Border Village at 1PM. Not really time to stop and rest, as it was PERFECT bike weather. I managed to stop a few times to enjoy the Bight, seeing a pod of dolphins herding fish below the cliffs at one spot.

Just a departure regarding the people you meet on such trips. At one of the cliff-top car parks, I stopped for a juice and leg-stretch, and was offered a cuppa by a couple in a really nice 4WD/caravan setup. More bucks in that than my house I reckon. After chatting for 15 minutes, they revealed that they had been on extended grey-nomad time in Tasmania, and heard that their son (40 years old) had been killed in a head-on bike-to-bike smash near York on the weekend, and were heading back to Perth. For them to be chatting to a guy in the middle of the Nullabor who was on a bike must have been tough, but that indicates the sort of people they were. I hope they get over their loss, such nice people.

Anyway, I left the Border Village and headed for Caiguna, but realised that I was getting a bit weary so stopped for a refresher at Cocklebidy. I made sure I was right to go on, but decided to keep myself in check along the way and stop for a smoke and juice if I felt weary. By the time I got to Caiguna the Red Bulls had kicked in and I was fine, so my new destination was Balledonia. I noticed several dead eagles on the side of the road, thinking that they should be more protected because they are a beautiful bird. Then I almost scored one myself just at the end of the 90 mile straight, in fact I heard his wings pushing through the air even through my helmet at cruising speed. Instead of braking or accelerating, my decision was to duck, and just as well.

At Balledonia I checked into the motel, but had a bite to eat and a few cans just as the sun was setting. 1300kms in one day, not a bad effort. I can say I slept pretty well that night.



Just for the record, here is a map with my route pencilled on it, with circles showing stop-overs.



From Baledonia, I set my mission for the day to get to Coalmine Beach. It was Friday, and I knew that a few people normally get there for Friday. I didn't realise that it was 1000kms, and the bit around Ravensthorpe was about 42 degrees and a bit uncomfortable, but once I neared the coast again I got the old sea breeze and the temperature dropped within a few kms.

I arrived at Coalmine Beach at about 5PM, but stopped at the pub first to have a nice cold beer and stock up on a few cans. I didn't have any food with me either, so the supermarket came in handy. On arriving at Coalmine Beach, Mike Henderson was just setting up his tent and looked a bit surprised to see me. I can say that once my tent was up and a few cans were down, I slept like a proverbial log. I stayed for Saturday and Saturday night, then made a beeline for Perth on Sunday. Total 5,500kms in a week, with a fair bit of slacking off in between. The bike went well apart from a few small issues (like no rear brakes), and I fell in love with it as my new touring machine.

So, get a week off work, buy a new bike, have a holiday, see a few old friends and relatives. Totally enjoyed it!!

