

THE 2009 YAMAHA HANMER SPRINGS SAFARI

WORLD

If there's a dualsporting heaven on Earth,

The whole area looks like this. This pic could almost have been taken from the resort.

BEATER!

it must be the South Island of New Zealand

Last year TBAM was blown away by the Mackenzie Safari on New Zealand's south island and vowed if there were any way to make it happen, we'd be at the next one.

Thanks to Yamaha New Zealand, TBAM was at the Heritage Hotel on a mild January morning when 160 riders made their careful and considerate way down the main street of Hanmer Springs to kick off the 2009 Yamaha Hanmer Springs Safari.

With a brand-spanking new WR250R, a route sheet, and some very high expectations, TBAM headed for the hills. >>



CHRIST CHURCH ● HANMER SPRINGS



A ritzy place to stay. It was included in the entry fee, along with first-class meals.



The logistical organization of the ride was as magnificent as everything else about it. On the second day fuel was left at designated points.



It's not lilac. It's a weed the New Zealanders aren't happy about. It looks nice, but!

Breathe

It's not easy to explain the Yamaha Safari to Australians. We don't have anything quite like it here. Probably the closest ride we have is the Snowy Ride for the Steve Walter Foundation. The Snowy ride has the same easy-going concept of riding which bits you want, or not riding at all if you prefer not to, but the Safari covers three days, crosses properties and offers some challenging riding for those who want it.

The Safari also doesn't have the same luxury of bailing out any time you like. There are plenty of cut-outs and short cuts, as well as optional tougher off-road routes, but for a lot of the time on the Safari the rider's committed to the road or trail in front of them.

The biggest danger is having your breath taken away by the fabulous scenery. Australia may have an advan-

tage over New Zealand in some areas, but very few places in the world could compete with New Zealand's south island for breath-taking views.

And the guys and girls at NZ Adventures seem to know not only where the best scenery is, but they best ways of getting to it.

Stick poking

One of the great pleasures of the Safari is the variety of bikes and people. The 2009 field was dotted with big dualsporters, enduro bikes, pillions, and one Kawasaki Z750. The four-cylinder road bike seemed to take the whole thing in its stride without much difficulty...water crossings, rocks, hills and all - although the enduro loop on second day was probably bypassed.

The variety of riders matched the bikes, with girls, greybeards, throttle-jockies and sight-seers all rubbing shoulders and getting along just fine.

More variety than could be gesticulated at with a fallen branch!

Killer-metres

Having cut-outs and options didn't mean the whole ride could be done without effort.

Every morning began with a quick stop down Jolie's Pass Road - Angelina nowhere to be seen - 11km or so of what our trans-Tasman brethren call "shingle". We Aussies call it gravel. It was a nice way to start the day, allowing plenty of time to settle in before the real navigation began.

The first day kicked off with a short riverbed cross-



The third morning was chilly, and the gorgeous Rainbow Valley Road was spectacular.



Lake Taupo. A big tourist attraction, and a top spot to stop.



The beech forests of the west coast were shady and superb.



Thanks!

TBAM was able to ride the Yamaha Hammer Springs Safari thanks to an invitation from Yamaha New Zealand, and specifically, the calm and likable Peter Payne.

He's an Aussie, so that says a lot straight away!

Yamaha NZ supplied a beautifully prepared WR250R with just a couple of kilometres on the clock, then proceeded to do air filters and chain tension every evening, and even whisked the bike away before we washed it at the end of the event.

Thanks, Petel!

Also, a huge thanks to NZ Adventures for having us. A great bunch of people running really excellent rides all over the world. Check out the company, the ride calendar, and get info on the 2010 Safari at www.nzadventurerides.co.nz

ing, and it was a real challenge for the bigger bikes. A loose, sandy trail on the approach accounted for a few, while the actual creek crossing caught a few more. For those who cleaned the approach and the creek, there was then 200m or so of riverbed covered in gibbers.

From the riverbed there was one last little muddy wallow around a fallen tree, just to shape everyone up.

This was about 20km into a 380km day.

Going the distance

But the NZ Adventures guys know what they're doing, and from there the day became a hoot of single, shingle and mingle (single trail, shingle road and mingling at a superb lunch) as the field headed north into Canturbury.

It was around lunchtime the temperature took a sudden dive and things became chilly, but a coffee or two and a hearty lunch – included in the entry – soon had the core temperatures back where they should be and nobody seemed to suffer a great deal.

Both morning and afternoon included 'trail' loops which gave the trail and enduro guys a chance to twist the throttle a little, but would still have been fun on a big dualsporter, and the scenery rewarded anyone who made the effort.

At the end of the day there were two significant injuries, but everyone was out safe, and the dining room of the Heritage Hotel fairly hummed with the conversation and contentedness of a group of very happy riders and organisers. »

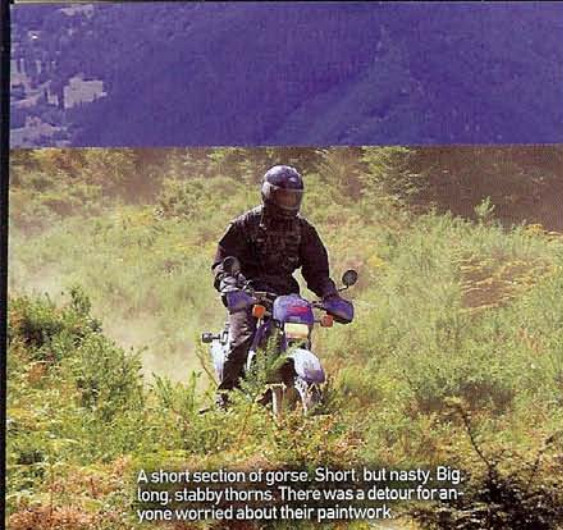


WORLD BEATER!

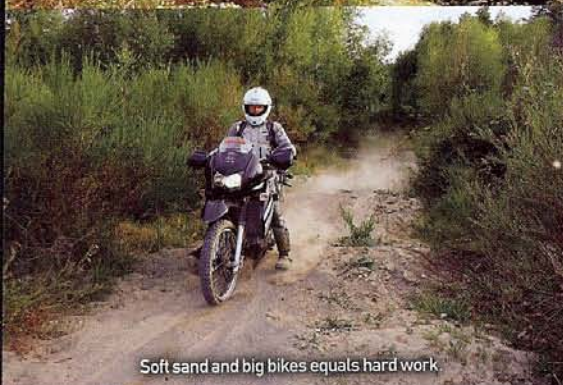
Square deal

Route-sheet navigation while you're riding can be tricky, and NZ Adventures do a great job getting information to the rider in a brief and concise manner. But their sense of humour often shines through. Here's a couple of route sheet instructions to keep a rider on their toes in the 2009 event...

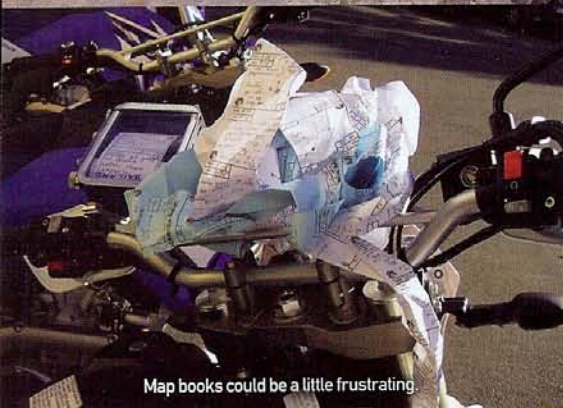




A short section of gorse. Short, but nasty. Big long, stabby thorns. There was a detour for anyone worried about their paintwork.



Soft sand and big bikes equals hard work.



Map books could be a little frustrating.



Two good

Briefings are a definite highlight of the Safari. The whole event is run with a passion and good humour which fairly shines from the course markers when they brief riders over dinner about the course for the following day. Mike and Dave Britten and John Sinclair offer advice on possible difficulties and an insight into the course which is not only gold information, but enjoyable to listen to, especially while munching away on particularly tender rare beef or perhaps a succulent chunk of Pacific Salmon – again, included in the price of entry.

So everyone headed south on Day Two without a qualm.

Jolie's Pass Road finished in an unexpected left-hander, by the way, providing entertainment for the front-runners who propped to watch the arrival of the field. Despite it being the second time on the same run, some over-enthusiastic riders still fanged into the dust and had to execute emergency procedures to avoid a fast, rocky descent to the gully a few metres below.

It was well worth watching!

The day kicked off with 100km or so of shingle to get to the "real" riding and the morning included crossing the enormous Molesworth property. The day also had the only "enduro" loop of the event.

An enduro loop in this context meant no pillions and no big dualsporters. Briefing said it would be tough but passable for any competent rider on most bikes, but urged extreme caution for the big BMWs and so forth.

The eight kilometre loop was a pearler, with views to rival the Mackenzie county of last year, and a loose hill-

climb on the entry that took serious commitment.

According to the instruction on the route sheet, riders were not to leave the track. The way TBAM remembers it, the only way to leave the two-metre wide track across the ridge was to plummet 1000m to a grisly death on the rocks below. Perhaps it was important from a legal point of view to ensure riders were told not to do that.

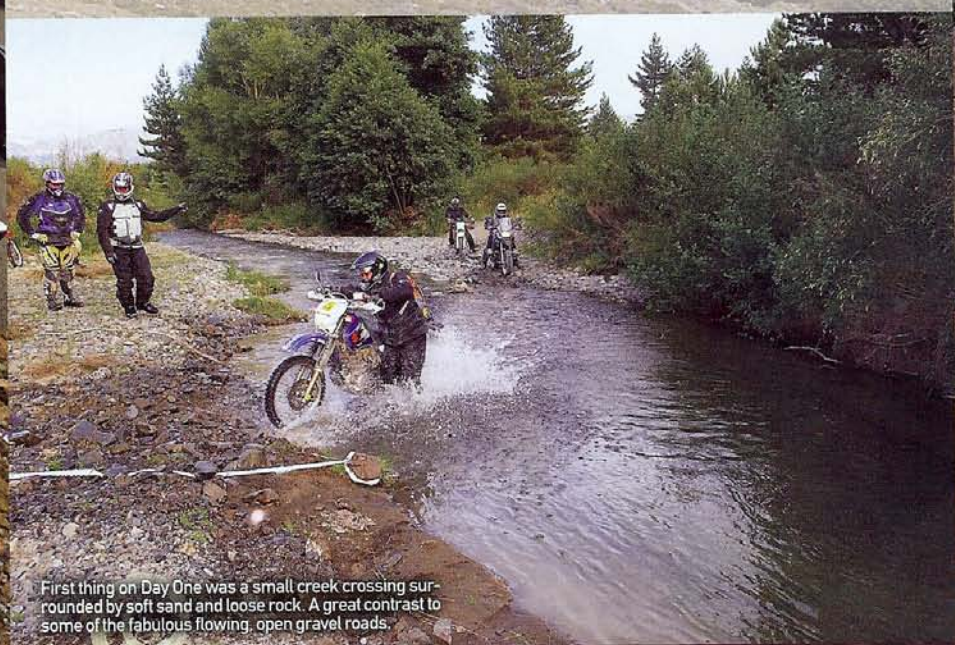
Lost and all alone

TBAM has to admit to a certain amount of geographical embarrassment on this day as well.

There were a number of route options, and the route sheet seemed quite confusing just prior to lunch. Using the time-honoured method, the little WR250R was tagged on behind a big line of riders who seemed to know where they were going, and before long one pulled up for a photo. After a quick comparison of route sheets and odometers, a little mental arithmetic and a silent prayer, TBAM blasted off to make up time and was soon hopelessly lost and lonely again.

With the fuel light on, a panic glance around the horizon showed a long line of riders at a woolshed in the far distance. It turned out to be the field at the refuel, done from trailered tanks on this day.

With a full-tank and a full tummy it was easy to blast through the Blackbirch section – an up-and-back hill climb to a spectacular hill top – and then a high-speed thrash along the shingle to complete the day's 400km and enjoy another superb dinner, fun briefing, and snuggle down to a deep sleep in the well-appointed chateau.

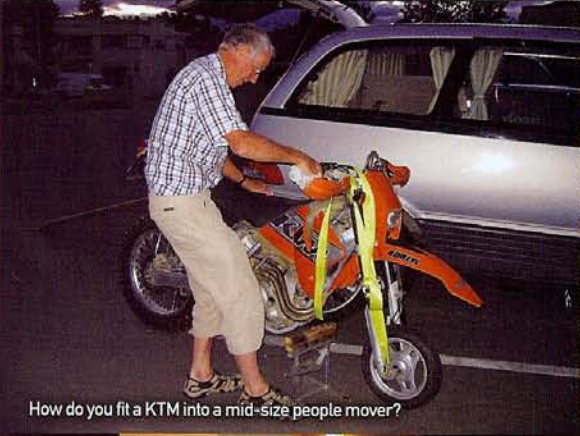


First thing on Day One was a small creek crossing surrounded by soft sand and loose rock. A great contrast to some of the fabulous flowing, open gravel roads.

WORLD BEATER!



Two-up was challenging, but no problem for most. Not much ground clearance there.



How do you fit a KTM into a mid-size people mover?



The hospitable Peter Payne, of Yamaha New Zealand invited TBAM and proved a knowledgeable and cheerful host. Again.



All points west

It'd be very difficult to choose one day as better than the others on the 2009 Safari, but the third day headed to the south island's west coast via an impossibly spectacular valley called The Rainbow, Lake Taupo and the Porica trail, and it was a definite highlight.

Temperatures were in the single figures in the early morning and it was really cold in the long, long, shaded valley before the sun finally climbed far enough to relieve early starters.

The dash through the valley finished at the village of St Arnaud. At 137km, it was a big stretch for fuel in the smaller bikes, but everyone seemed to make it without incident.

The Porica trail offered some challenging hills without being impassable to anyone, and Lake Taupo was a glorious vista of pure, clear water. It was real postcard stuff.

From there the route headed into the beech forests, offering an entirely different range of scenery. The rugged tors and spires of the volcanic mountains were replaced with leafy, shaded forests and some soft ground. Not boggy, but a change from the loose rock and gravel of the first two days.

The route was a little easier on the final day, and most of the field arrived at lunch early, enjoying the time to lay around in the sun or just plain lay around. Lunch was a gourmet affair catered by the local football club, and before long everyone was back on the pipe heading for the refuel at Murchison and then the long run back through the majestic Rainbow.

The wash-up

The end of the day meant the end of the riding for this year's event, and the organisers thoughtfully arranged a session at the hot springs which are a major tourist attraction of the area.

While TBAM prepared for a pre-dawn flight from Christchurch, other entrants wallowed around in the therapeutic springs, soaking away aches and no doubt enjoying a cold bevvy or two.

The presentation and final farewells were taken care of the next morning, before all riders departed for home.

Simply the best

It's difficult not to get excited about the Yamaha Safari. This is the second time TBAM's done the ride, and the second time we've come away overawed at the magnificence of the terrain and riding, and the attention to detail which goes into the planning and execution of the entire event.

Is it the best dualsport ride in the world?

We think so.

We'd be happy to have someone prove us wrong, but we bet it doesn't happen any time soon. ■



There were plenty of creek crossings, and most of them had gibbers on the approach, the bottom and the exit.

WORLD BEATER!