

IT'S FUNNY how life can throw you a sudden twist: one moment you're doing your everyday humdrum thing, the next you're off on an adventure that you would never have thought possible! This is exactly what was going through my mind as I flew across the Pacific Ocean to the good ol' US-of-A for a four-day trail ride in Baja, Mexico.

You have plenty of time to think on the flight, and most of the way I was pinching myself to make sure it was all real. Three weeks earlier I had been flogging myself up to Cape York for the final trip of the season for my business Fair Dinkum Bike Tours Cairns; now here I was flying to the other side of the world to go riding in Mexico ... yep, I've just gotta love my job!

IT'S NOT WHAT YOU KNOW, IT'S WHO YOU KNOW!
So how did this whole ride of a lifetime come about? That's easy. Last year I had a couple of guys from San Diego visit Cairns for a two-day ride and after their tour we kept in touch. So, at the end of last year, I received a message from one of the guys – Morgan – who told me a

bunch of guys were doing a ride in Baja, Mexico, over the Christmas and New Year break. 'Lucky guys,' I said to myself ... but then came the clanger: Morgan offered that if I could get a flight to California, they would have everything else organised for me to join them on the ride. Faster than you can say, 'Dust to Glory, here I come!' I launched into a mad panic and got myself organised enough to book an airfare, pack a gearbag and bludge a lift to the airport. I was on my way!

THE AMERICAN WAY

As soon as you arrive in America, there are a couple of things you learn real fast. First, you will always climb into the wrong side of the car! Second, everything is still measured by the imperial system, so you buy gallons (not litres) of fuel and drive miles (not kilometres) down the freeway. Third, all the US dollar notes look exactly the same, especially when you're packing a gutful of Budweiser after a long night at the bar! Finally, any time you go out to eat at a restaurant, you don't need to order an entree and a main, as both courses are absolutely huge, just

BAJA BANDITS

If you've seen Dust to Glory, you'll want to ride the Baja peninsula of Mexico. Fair Dinkum Bike Tours Cairns trail boss Dave Williams got to ride Baja recently. Now he's hooked on the place and is fired up to take a tribe of Aussies there in January next year!

Story & Photos: Fair Dinkum Dave Williams



like the majority of the American population!

For the most part, Americans are friendly folk, especially when you share a common bond, such as dirt bike riding. Morgan was looking after me in real style from the moment I arrived, with the first task to be achieved getting the bikes ready for the ride. Morgan was lending me his KTM 525EXC, while he was riding a Husaberg 650, which was wrapped in bling. Yes, the Yanks love their bling, so if it's shiny and looks cool, they'll bolt it onto their bike.

With the bikes ready, Morgan took me to meet Bob Bell from Precision Concepts, which is the company that does all the suspension and engine work for American Honda's off-road race team. They look after the bikes of riders like Johnny Campbell, Steve Hengeveld, Mikey Childress and Robby Bell. Bob was a great guy, giving us a look right through the Precision Concepts facility, including the race team workshop that housed the Honda team's race bikes, plus the XR650Rs that have previously won the famed Baja 1000 desert race.

Christmas Day was spent doing the family thing with Morgan and his

family, with a lot of time devoted to teaching them plenty of Aussie slang, which had them stuffed there for a while. But by the time I left they were all saying 'G'ay mate' like the best of us.

BEWARE THE BAJA BANDITS ... OR ELSE!

Our ride kicked off with a very fresh, early morning departure to meet in Tecate, Mexico, across the border from California. There were six other riders in the group, most of them on Honda XR650Rs, except for a guy called Ken, who pilots a KTM 950 Super Enduro (he also has the only 750cc Husaberg in the world!). As you can clearly tell, big-bores are the choice of machines for a Baja run.

Now, the first words of warning from Morgan at the start of the ride took a little of the wind from my sails: "If you see people on the side of the track waving you to stop, keep going – run them over if you have too, unless they are the army, who will be checking for drugs. Anyone else will be bandits trying to steal your money and your bike!" Hmm, good tip, Morgan!



MAIN: Golden beaches and sensational sunsets are all part of the Baja peninsula. Little wonder it's so popular with tourists crossing the nearby American border from California. 1. Hey, is that Johnny Campbell? No, just some dummy in Johnny's gear – but the Baja 1000 winning XR650R is real! 2. Downtown Ensenada doesn't quite have the same glitz and glamour of nearby San Diego. 3. Fair Dinkum Dave gets set for the start of his four-day ride from Tecate in northern Baja. 4. Hard to believe, but this is a local Mexican gas station – not quite your typical BP roadhouse, is it?



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BAJA BANDITS

MAIN: The Baja coastline is pretty spectacular! 1. One moment you're checking out the coast, then before you know it you're up in the mountains. 2. Beware cantinas were men blow trumpets and ladies serve margaritas! 3. Mike's Sky Ranch is a popular stop-over in the middle of nowhere in Baja.



The first day's ride was a mixture of open desert with single-track and a lot of cactus. We rode sections of the Baja 1000 course, and the rule there was, if you don't like big whoops, it's not the place for you! It would be great training for the Finke Desert Race, that's for sure! Do yourself a favour and get the Dust to Glory DVD to see some of the places and trails we rode.

We finished the day's ride some 240 miles later in Ensenada, which is on the west coast of the Baja peninsula and is the town where the Baja 1000 race starts. We checked into our motel and then hit the town. Of course we had to visit the famous Hussongs cantina, drank gallons of Tecate beer, got the Mexican band playing totally fired up and then hit the fart sack – which is more Aussie slang the Yanks picked up on.

Oh, and while I remember, the locals don't drink Corona in Mexico: it's their export beer and they reckon it tastes horrible, so they don't touch it ... just like we Aussies don't drink Fosters.

A BIG V-TWIN IN A BIG DESERT

Day 2 of the ride started out a little fuzzy. It was freezing cold and we copped a rainstorm to go with it, so it wasn't the kind of start to the day we had hoped for. Still, we hit the trails early, stoked to find there was no dust after the rain as we continued down the coastline of Baja. The scenery was awesome with plenty of photo stops as most of the day featured open desert riding. Ken offered me a blast on his 950 Super Enduro and what a blast it was! The Austrian V-twin had power to burn, but you had better have a good deal with your tyre guy, as this thing will peel them in no time. Admittedly, the 950 felt like a whale after the 525, but hell it was fun!

The second day's ride ended in San Quintin, another beautiful coastal town, but after riding in rain and cold most of the day, we were all looking forward to a hot shower. After dinner Ken and I hit the local cantina, and after

who knows how many margaritas, we woke everyone up and then fell into bed. I found out later that Ken got the bed-spins and had to drive the porcelain bus during the night. What a waste of good tequila – talk about soft!

FROM SEA LEVEL TO SNOW LINE

The morning of day three of the ride promised to be cold again but with the weather expected to clear up, we were a happier bunch of campers. Morgan and I headed off into the mountains for more trails and single-track, while the rest of the group rode a different route to meet up with us later.

Before we knew it we had ridden from sea level to 6,000 feet elevation via great single-trails. It was a crystal-clear day with a fantastic view from the top of the ranges, where we rode amongst the melting snow, even if it was

Johnny Campbell was riding alone when he was pulled over by bandits

freezing cold. We rode another section of the Baja 1000 course before making a visit to Mike's Sky Ranch, which is a famous Baja hang-out. Mike's is located in the middle of nowhere, with nothing but a vast emptiness surrounding the ranch's accommodation, bar and pool.

As we took a breather at Mike's, Morgan told me a story about Johnny Campbell pre-running the Baja course one year, not far from where we were. He was on his own when he was bailed up by bandits. They took all his money, tools and were going to take his bike but because he was well-known, they let him go. Only in Mexico!

After riding back down the mountain via a mixture of rocky trails and sand, we ended up at a local village where we had to fuel up, which is another Baja

BAJA BANDITS



MAIN: Main Street, Ojos Negros. Plush looking kind of place, huh? 1. When the sun came out the views of the mountain ranges that split the Baja peninsula were spectacular. 2. The things you see in America: yes, this is a big-bored 750cc Husaberg! 3. Dave wrapped up his USA tour with a visit to the Anaheim Supercross.



experience you just have to go through! At the gas station (if you can call it that!) they have plastic bottles kind of like four-litre water bottles that you use to fill the bikes up with ... as they say in Baja: 'No problema!'

The day had been a big one, covering around 280 miles through some pretty rugged country that was dry, sandy, dusty, uninhabitable and spectacular all-in-one. The Baja peninsula is a vast expanse and you literally are riding in no-man's land. We finally arrived back in Ensenada just on dark, so we were feeling pretty hammered. But a good shower did the trick and once again we hit a local restaurant and then another cantina for more beer!

TECATE OR BUST!

The fourth and final day of my Baja experience started off with pine forests and single trails as we aimed to head north back to toward Tecate and 'civilisation' on the other side of the Californian border. We were all feeling a

HEY SEN'OR, YOU LOOKING FOR A LITTLE BAJA ACTION?

As you can tell, my Baja ride has me fired up to share the experience with Aussie riders next year. So I'm planning a 10-day tour to Baja and California in January 2008. The tour will include a five-day ride in Mexico, combined with a visit to a round of the 2008 Amp'd Mobile AMA Supercross Series. Check out my www.fairdinkumbiketours.com.au web site for details of the tour or contact me on (0412) 950 192 for more information - but be warned: limited spaces are available!

little groggy from the night before, so the pace was pretty tame, but with another 200 or so miles on the agenda, there wasn't too much time to cruise.

By lunch time we were all coming good, but then just as quickly as this epic ride had begun, it was over as we made it to the trucks to pack up and head for home for the post-ride clean up. It had been an awesome ride and I can't say thanks enough to Morgan and Ken for making it happen. Four days on the loose dodging Mexican bandits and romping around Baja was the ride of a lifetime.

At gas stations they have plastic bottles you use to fill the bikes

BUT WAIT, THERE'S MORE!

As awesome as the Baja ride had been, there was still more to come. I had tickets for the following weekend's Amp'd Mobile AMA Supercross Series round at Anaheim Stadium in Los Angeles, so a few days later, there I was, in the pits checking out all the big rigs and factory bikes and riders. Aussie legend Chad Reed had a practice crash during the week, so he wasn't feeling too good, yet he bulldogged it and pulled off a podium finish behind Ricky Carmichael and James Stewart, which was sensational to see.

To sum it all up, I had a great ride in Baja, the supercross was a blow-out experience, while visiting all the bike shops in Southern California is another must-do as riding gear and accessories there are so cheap ... oh, and I can't drink Tequila anymore ... until next time!

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