



That doesn't look like the Waimakariri riverbed! Racing Dave hard at it in Far North Queensland.

# TRAIL RIDING IN PARADISE

Officially it was a 'holiday' but when Racing Dave discovered you could hire trail bikes in Cairns.... well, I'm sure you can guess the rest.

**WORDS & PICS:** Racing Dave

In my opinion, the expression 'tropical rain forest' is deceiving, and can lead to false conclusions. i.e. tropical (hot), rain (wet), forest (a bunch of trees). When Maree and I arrived in Far North Queensland however, it was officially the 'dry' season and that expression left absolutely no room for error.

It was hot and it was dry. Racing Maree and I were on holiday in Cairns, having had a week on tiny Thursday Island, off the tip of Cape York, which is Australia's most northern point of the mainland.

And I must say we were enjoying the relatively mild weather (30-degree high, 20-degree low) after the warmer and more

humid conditions further north in the Torres Strait.

However, after some days of doing the tourist thing I could feel the need for something a little less regimented (and more exciting, thinking of skids and wheelies) than an organised bus tour, so I typed 'Cairns Trail Bike' into Google and at the top of the list was a company called Fair Dinkum Bike Tours.



Despite it being the dry season Fair Dinkum Bike Tours can rustle up at least one river to cross. Below: ...he just can't help himself can he?

Started seven years ago by Dave Williams, who has an extensive background in motocross and enduros, this company specializes in the renowned eight-day trips to Cape York, but also can fit in rides of up to five days in between.

All I had time for, however, was a day out.

### A BUSY MAN

Dave's a busy man, and his fleet of 15 current model Suzuki DR-Z400s don't sit idle. The bike I rode on a day trip into the rain forest north of Cairns, in the Kuranda National Park, had over 12,000 km on the clock, and all since April this year. He finds the DR-Z ideal for rental bike duty as they are tough, reliable, and easy to ride at all levels of ability and experience.

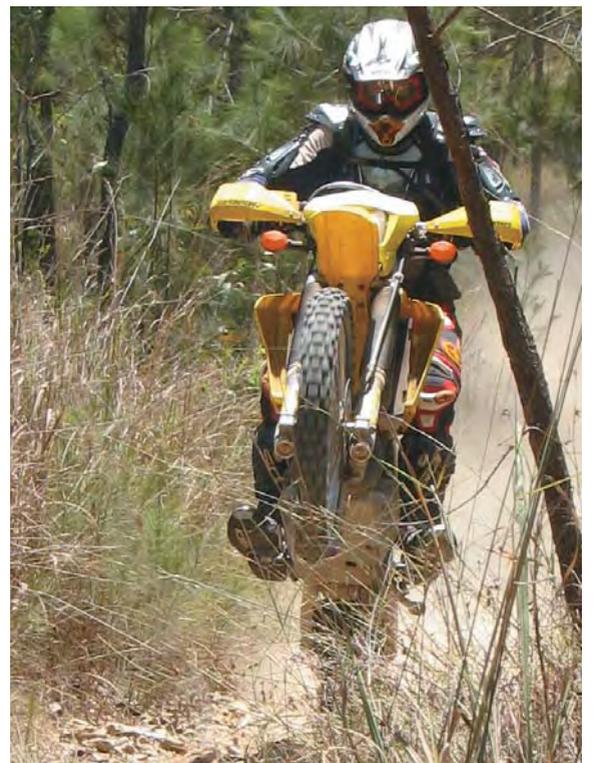
So, there I was, with Simon and Mike who were up from Melbourne for a couple of days' outing, at nine in the morning, and already the sun was beating down. Dave supplies all riding gear, so you just turn up with a pair of socks and your credit card (see

[www.fairdinkumbiketours.com.au](http://www.fairdinkumbiketours.com.au) for full details of pricing and itineraries).

I've done my share of leading and sweeping guided trail bike rides with nzadventures, so it was interesting to experience such a ride from the customer's view. Safety, responsibility, and keeping left all emphasized, we were away, using the familiar corner man system to keep everyone from getting lost.

### DIESEL AND DUST

After a transport up into the hills near Kuranda township, lead guide Wayne took us into the forest, and into the dust. Not wet, remember. The short dirt road gave me the initial feel for the bike, then with no further time to adapt, it was into the rain forest, and onto a narrow and tight single track, over fallen branches, riding around and through ruts (no doubt formed in the rainy season), and all in either first or second gear. Some sections were so tight that a precautionary finger on the clutch eased the tricky turns, all the time ducking left and right, up and





The man himself. Racing Dave enjoying a break and the view on his ride.

down. The trees form a total wind block, and the fine dust hangs in the air no matter how much distance you seem to leave from the rider in front and the high forest canopy obscures much of the sunlight, leaving just a camouflage of dappled light on the ground below, so it was on with the race face for maximum concentration.

**THE ODD DETOUR**

After this section was another, this time in a eucalypt forest, in which it was much easier

to see, as the trees are considerably further apart, and we were riding in full daylight.

No less tricky, though, but we'd speeded up to second and third gear, and now feeling more familiar with the Suzuki, it was time to pop the occasional wheelie over obstacles on the track.

Where trees had fallen, the track detoured around them, and sometimes these detours had detours, as more debris blocked the way, but always the main track was found again.

We rode through a section that just three days earlier had been on fire. Although it's not yet peak season for bush fires, small ones are often accidentally caused (bear in mind that it's very dry!) and generally allowed to burn themselves out, as this removes the fuel that might cause a serious conflagration later in the year.

Before too long the two-day riders left us as they headed for their overnight stop at Cape Tribulation, and just Dave and I continued, now on a formed 4WD track through a sugar-cane plantation, before popping out on the tar sealed road just short of Mt Molloy.

Here we had a very welcome respite from the heat, at the local pub, where a lunch and fuel stop was carried out. Then it was back into the forest, again a mix of single and twin track, tightly winding one minute and the next opening out to fourth or even fifth gear.

**SOMETHING FOR EVERYONE**

One track had raised mounds every 50m or so, and it was impossible not to carry the front wheel a far as possible before the next. Dave is a smooth, fast, and patient lead rider, and with his comprehensive knowledge of the area, and his permission to ride on private land, he can tailor a ride to suit every customer.

All the riding would be within the capabilities of anyone who can negotiate a normal charity-type trail ride without difficulty, although Dave keeps the DR-Z's tyres firmly pumped up to prevent punctures, so the handling is a little lively on the rock-hard clay with its layer of fine powder. The main difference in Far North Queensland being the heat and the dust, my camelback bladder was drained by the time we found our way back through Kuranda.

It's hard to imagine the conditions in the wet (summer) season, but of every creek bed we crossed only one contained significant water, although it was obvious from the banks of them all that flooding could be serious. A dodgy tree trunk bridge we traversed was over a dry stream, but it would have the flow to carry away the unwary when raining.

**TEMPTING.....**

Maree and I had flown over the length of Cape York on our way to and from Torres Strait, and the 8-day trip to the top of Australia looks like a long and challenging one. Dave has just custom-built a new support truck for these journeys, and as well as all the camping, catering, and bike maintenance gear it carries, there is room for five non-riders to accompany the tours, so all needs can be met.

That just leaves me with three questions. Did I enjoy my ride? Would I go again? Would I recommend Fair Dinkum to others? In all cases the answer is yes; a trail bike ride is a great addition to a holiday in Cairns, or even the motive to be there at all. **KR**