

THE RACE FOR THE MOTORCYCLE WORLD LAND SPEED RECORD

CHAPTER SEVEN

“All We Need is One G’Day”

It felt like one of the longest days of my life. For a person not comfortable flying, being forced to spend twenty-four hours hustling between crowded airports and having to sit in a flying *cattle car* for fourteen hours didn't exactly top my list for the most exciting way to spend the day.

Add to that the fact that my best friend, Scott Jensen, and a supporting cast too long to mention made sure I would be feeling my best for the long, bumpy haul. The all-night going away party consisted of copious amounts of alcohol, scantily clad women, and farm animals. *Well, we do have a cat.* The evening ended with a bazaar photo shoot taken by Mr. Jensen, with a beautiful girl wearing nothing more than whipping cream, a hat, and a lovely smile. The pictures were a going away present that would someday cause me trouble...

Squeaky was no longer in the picture, but my new lady friend, whose name will remain anonymous, was on assignment with Mr Jensen, determined to make my last night at home a memorable one. All I can say is it was a job well done.

* * *

From the moment we landed, we knew it was going to be an interesting journey. There

were about a dozen of us altogether, and each one greener than the next when it came to knowing the ways of Oz. We were immediately herded into a minivan limo with the steering wheel on the wrong side. The driver said g'day and put the pedal down. In no time we were weaving in and out of traffic on the wrong side of the road at a pace that was rather unnerving. Our driver swerved off the tarmac into an offbeat, motorhome rental yard.

Here we were, a dozen yanks in the middle of a fairly large city, about to embark on a road trip of epic proportions, in six of the funkiest, diesel powered motorhomes you'd ever laid eyes on. They too, had the steering wheel on the wrong side, and a floor mounted gearshift on the left. They did have a few creature comforts to offer, such as air conditioning and a gas powered fridge. Funny thing, in our motorhome, neither of them worked...

After filling out the six page questionnaire and signing on the dotted line in blood, *swearing we would never take their precious vehicles off the tarmac*, we were free to go. We somehow failed to mention that we would be racing them across the outback for several hundred miles on rocky riverbeds and never ending silt-covered, dirt roads. Nor did we mention the fact that our final destination would be Lake Gairdner, one of the largest natural salt beds in the world.

In less than an Australian city block we were treated to a unique form of sign language from one of the locals. Apparently we had cut them off while trying to negotiate a lane change in our oversized, right-side-steering tour bus that we would fondly be calling home for the next two weeks.

The gesture seemed friendly enough. Two fingers pointing in the air sort of like a backwards peace sign. It was when the disenchanted driver yelled 'get stuffed!' that we

realized the sign carried a different meaning in the Land of Oz. Our only saving grace was the fact that the next five tour buses of our group were having similar problems getting use to the ways of the road, and *each* managed to cut him off quite handily.

In keeping with the spirit of our great adventure, one of the younger crew members made an attempt at returning the gesture with some sign language he picked up back home. It was obvious he was less experienced in sign, as only one finger was displayed. In spite of his shortcomings, the young lad had communicated with a local on a one to one basis. Our only hope was that our next encounter with the locals would be more civilized in nature.

We arrived at our hotel in the town of Adelaide, where we would be spending the next two days. This gave us a chance to recover from the jet lag associated with crossing several time zones, and also gave us some time to become acclimated to our new surroundings.

Port Augusta in South Australia would be the next rendezvous point. Denis had flown into Melbourne beforehand to pick up the race trailer and the bike. He had to buy a dually to pull the trailer once he arrived, as the predesignated truck had somehow disappeared from the program. Racing overseas can become quite expensive at times...

With two days to kill before meeting up with the Bub, (Denis) we decided to use our time wisely...

The men on the crew met in the lobby in hopes of being directed to the nearest watering hole. From the registration desk you could see the bar. In that regard, our hotel was the perfect model of efficiency. *Let it never be said that the Aussies didn't have their priorities in order!* The women also congregated in the lobby, organizing a quest of their own. They said they wanted to take in some of the sites. *It's funny how taking in the sites required credit*

cards and checkbooks from each of their male counterparts. I suppose that's all part of being a 'team' player.

Once the women had left the building, we gathered around the barkeep and explained our situation. We told him (in the name of science), that we had decided to dedicate the rest of the afternoon to discovering the ultimate Australian brew. With his help, our two countries could become closer, sharing a common bond—sort of a goodwill expedition.

He agreed for the sake of humanity, and the potential for a very generous tip.

Pete Davis, a seasoned veteran in the art of brew tasting, had other ideas. He decided while we worked from the inside to bring our two countries closer together, it would be in all of our best interests if he were to voyage outside of our immediate surroundings for a wider viewpoint. It's unselfish acts like this that make our team so great. Pete would begin a journey steeped with tradition from days of old. A walkabout. Besides, rumor had it there was a beach not far from here where the Australian women ran around topless.

Bottles and cans in every shape and color emerged from behind the barkeep's counter one by one. In the end, it was narrowed down to three. VB (Victoria Bitter), was the most popular choice and most readily available brew in all of Australia. Its popularity rivaled that of Budweiser back home. Coopers, a locally brewed beer from Adelaide, was also quite popular. The problem was, they made two different styles, red label or green. More testing had to be done...

In the end, it was unanimously decided that the beer of choice for the BUB Racing Team was Coopers in the red label. A rich, hearty flavor with an alcohol content higher than that of a college freshman on spring break, our inebriated crew fondly referred to the won-

drous nectar as ‘God’s own piss’.

Coopers was bottle fermented, which meant it had a small layer of sediment that would form at the base of the bottle. On occasion, as the hours waned during our intense testing session, the sediment was joined by pretzel pieces, sunflower seed shells, and the occasional cigarette butt. This tended to add a bitter taste to the local brew, the end result being quite similar to its larger counterpart, VB.

A semi-enclosed swimming pool was just beyond the bar, stocked with chairs and tables protected from the sun’s intense rays. One by one the crew gathered, enjoying the cool breeze and shade. We discussed various topics: The extreme heat, the itinerary for the evening, the possibilities of Pete being arrested.

Not long after, a wobbly figure appeared at the entrance to the pool. The shifting breeze revealed a scent of stale beer and sweat. The figure leaned forward and began an awkward jaunt toward pool’s end. ‘Whooooeeeee!!!’ was heard as the fully-clothed figure clumsily leapt from the concrete edge and splashed down in the midst of our congregation.

A half-hearted attempt at the ‘cannonball’ position was recognized. He scored low for form an execution, though he did receive high marks for the enormous splash he created. As the wall of chlorinated water showered its intended targets, the assailant sank to the bottom of the pool like a lead sinker. Oddly enough, his wallet and all of its contents floated loosely to the top.

Our boy Pete had returned from his journey. Eventually he floated to the top and retrieved his belongings from the somewhat murky surface. In native American slur, he recounted his travels. Apparently he had taken it upon himself to see to it that every bar from the hotel to the nudie beach had been explored. Being the thorough lad that he was, the one’s he liked best he visited a second time on his trip back.

One bar in particular, the 'Booze Brothers', was of particular interest to him. Their logo matched that of the logo on his T-shirt. Pete belongs to the Buell Brothers racing team back home. This extraordinary coincidence was something worth having a drink over. Truth be told, I think there were several.

He spoke of the beautiful beaches with brilliant white sand, and half-naked women. It was obvious Mr. Davis liked it here. Out of respect for his day's achievements we bought him a Coopers and handed him a towel. After pointing him toward his room, we let him go and watched him saunter down the hallway. Like a steel ball in a pinball game, Pete bounced and rolled from one obstacle to the next, eventually making it to his room. His walkabout was finally over.

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Dark smoke spewed from the exhaust pipes as the six diesel motorhomes were coaxed to life. One by one, the crew boarded their respective tour bus. After stopping for supplies at the local market, it was off to Port Augusta to meet up with Denis and the racer. We spent most of the day on the road, passing and being passed by the occasional land trains and other various unique looking rigs.

A land train is a very large diesel truck, much larger than ours back home, that tows as many as four to five full-sized trailers at a time. Others only carried a single trailer, but the size of the trailer is massive. Long stretches of flat, boring tarmac with little to look at except for the sporadic sightings of Kangaroo road kill make this possible. The roads are excep-

tionally well maintained, possibly made easier by their lack of use.

We stayed the night in a hotel owned by an acquaintance of Bub's. This would be the last

civilized evening we would spend before heading out to the salt flats where we would set up shop for the next five days. It was here that we learned the ways of the bush, and what deadly animals to steer clear of.

Australia is home to some of the most deadly creatures on the planet. They have a snake that if you have the misfortune of being bitten by, your heart will stop and you'll be dead in minutes. Spiders are also more deadly in this barren countryside than in most other regions. They too, can drop a full-grown man and add his name to the obituary column the following morning.

And then there's the Kangaroos. We were told these lovable, fuzzy creatures were equally deadly under the right circumstances. Their means of defense is their long claws. They've been known to rear back against their powerful tail and frantically claw apart their predators—including the unsuspecting tourist.

The best advice? Walk loud, we were told. As long as the creatures weren't startled, they would usually go away rather than go into defense mode. The mandatory middle-of-the-night urination ritual had to be redefined. Whenever any of us left the motorhome to give back some of Adelaide's finest, we would slam the door, stomp on the ground, and keep our eyes wide open. Returning Coopers to its native soil could at times be risky.

Early the next morning we loaded up and pointed ourselves in the direction of Lake Gairdner. It would take several hours to get there, with the last hundred miles or so on a road that wasn't paved.

Being the racers that we were, the dirt road became somewhat of a challenge. The dry, silty surface gave us the opportunity to practice broad-sliding our rigs. I can honestly say that up until then, I had no idea what it felt like to pitch an overloaded motorhome into a corner at over

one hundred kilometers per hour. I know it now!

Every time my traveling companion Howard Carte would start to dose off, I'd speed it up a little. Driving hard into a slippery corner, the front wheels would push, the top heavy beast would lean, and many of our belongings would fall from the cupboards and crash to the floor. The important thing was we were keeping entertained. It was a long, dirty drive.

As long as you kept your foot in it, it would eventually come around. Getting sideways in one of these oversized beasts had its moments. On more than one occasion the front end pushed so bad we ended up sliding off the road, careening off annoying obstacles such as large rocks or nasty ditches. Bouncing off the ceiling of our makeshift racer, Howard soon found himself wide awake. *Mission accomplished...*

At one point we decided to stop and see how everything was holding up. The six white motorhomes all had a dusty brown tint. The race trailer was also not as bright and shiny as it once was. When we opened it up, the streamliner was completely covered with a heavy layer of brown silt. The toolboxes and their contents, along with all the cupboards and chests, had the same brown tinge. When we finally reached the salt, we would have our work cut out for us.

A few hours later we were finally there. My first thoughts as we crested the final hill and looked down over the great expanse of white, was that of anticipation. I could already see myself barreling across the salt with reckless abandon. I could picture the vibrating view from the cockpit, the feeling of being strapped in so tight I could barely move. The taste of salt as the sweat ran down my face inside my fire retardant, nomex liner that was crushed beneath my helmet. All this and more. This is what we came for. We were finally here...

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Our weathered caravan slowly approached the apron of Lake Gairdner. The endless miles of dirty, dusty, unpaved transit was behind us. As our wheels touched down onto the rock-hard

surface, the annoying vibrations stopped. The squeaking and creaking noises of the abused tour buses went silent as the dirty tires rolled effortlessly across the user-friendly surface.

It was an eerie feeling making our entrance onto the salt bed. All eyes were upon us. Its not everyday that a group of yanks make the long journey across continents to compare toys with people from another land. But here we were. We pulled into the makeshift pits and stepped out onto the pristine surface. At this very moment there was no other place on God's green earth we would rather be...

Denis met up with the who's who of the event while the crew went about the arduous task of cleaning up the racer and all of the contents of the trailer. The motorhomes had to be left behind—about five hundred yards back in the racers camping area. Only tow vehicles, race trailers, and pit supplies were allowed on the salt. A pressurized washer was set up at the base of the hill and all vehicles leaving the salt had to stop and be hosed down. No salt was to leave the lake bed. They had their own set of rules, and we were happy to oblige.

Everyone had a job to do, and it was my job to familiarize myself with the course. I hitched a ride with one of the locals and took a quick spin up and down the course. They were running a little behind schedule. Another American team who made the trip across the pond had taken it upon themselves to prepare the surface. Chuck Salman had one of his crew members pulling a drag across the salt. The course markers were still being put up and the timing lights were yet to be seen.

Back home everything was ready before I showed up. Denis would always see to that. We were serious about what we were doing, and the costs involved made it very important that our time was used wisely.

The Aussies were also very serious about racing. They just went about things at a different pace. They were much more laid back than us Americans. They had a favorite saying: “*No worries, mate,*” which meant exactly that. It would get done when it got done. There was no need to worry about it. I was having a tough time learning their laid-back ways. I wanted to go racing, and their inability’s to stay on schedule only added to my anxiety.

I had a lot to learn about the ways ‘down under’. Over time, I grew to appreciate their methods. They were a less stressful bunch than our uptight, life-in-the-fast-lane boys and girls back home. They knew how to enjoy life. They put less pressure on themselves, and it showed in their happy-go-lucky demeanor. But dammit, I wanted to go racing and they were holding up the show!

When I returned to the pits everything was clean. The bike looked like it did when we originally loaded it in the trailer back home. The canopy was up and our pit was in order. We were all dressed up with nowhere to go.

Denis had heard that they were having trouble with the timing lights and that it would be another day before anyone could run. I was pissed, but somehow also relieved. It gave us more time to go over the bike and our own game plan. Besides, we had a new part on the bike, a high-output ignition coil we were trying that was giving us some problems. Hopefully this would allow us to work through it.

The racer still had to make it through tech inspection, which it would pass with flying colors. All bragging aside, it was the most sophisticated piece of equipment of the entire meet. Next came the safety inspection. The bike was examined from head to toe. Safety is always a serious matter in speed racing. Back home, an ambulance was always on hand in case of an emergency. The nearest town was only twenty minutes away, and in the event of a life threatening injury, Salt Lake City was just over a hundred miles away—thirty minutes by helicopter.

Here, things were quite different. The nearest town was over two hundred miles away, and there was no ambulance to be found. They had a ‘flying doctor’ on call, but even he would take a while to arrive if needed.

Instead, the Kimba Fire Brigade was at our service. These young, athletic, adventurous race fans would be responsible for keeping us alive in the event of an emergency. Typical Australian logic—*no worries*. Don’t get me wrong. I’m sure they were properly trained in administering CPR, and their youthful courage (the oldest of the bunch couldn’t have been over thirty) may have come in useful had they been required to pull an unconscious victim from his burning wreckage, but it made me wonder how good my chances really were should I have to depend on these young lads to keep me alive for several hours until a trained professional could finally examine my broken, bleeding body.

The good news was they were a lot of fun.

These boys knew a good time when they saw one. What better assignment then to be sent to the outback for a week to watch some of the fastest motorized vehicles on the planet sale across a salt lake at nearly half the speed of sound. Not to mention, it was a great place to party...

Back home we have a popular news show that starts the day for millions of Americans—Good Morning America. A good thing travels fast. Down under a similar news show starts the day—Good Morning Australia. Motorsports are such a big thing in their country that they decided to broadcast their show live for the entire week on the salt. Having a serious racing effort from the United States competing against them in this type of venue was news, which they were happy to exploit on a daily basis. In fact, for the entire meet, the morning show was filmed from our pit.

For five days straight, Australia awoke to the likes of Denis and myself recapping the previous day’s events. They tracked our progress, put up with some of Denis’s bad jokes, and

watched with great interest how the boy's from across the pond fared against their own. Luckily for us, when it was all said and done we had the fastest time of the meet. Not only were we the fastest ever on two wheels in their country, we also went faster than any of their streamlined cars. All week they threw everything they had at us. The bottom line was, on this trip, we were the cream of the crop...

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We didn't have an easy time of it. From day-one we had problems. A new high-output coil was being used in hopes of gaining a little more power. It never worked properly and would make the bike miss at high rpm. We had the original coil with us for backup, but it would be a major project to replace. After several unsuccessful runs, it was finally decided to go back to square one. The crew worked most of the night removing the faulty coil and wiring, and installed the original unit. I was a bit discouraged, knowing we were giving away a few extra ponies. We came to kick ass and take names. Now we were just trying to survive.

There were numerous other problems and a few close calls. On one occasion I nearly took out the entire Kimba Fire Brigade. I was running mid-course when a huge gust of wind hit me from the right side. Before I knew it, I was blown off line and heading right for them! My speedometer reading was over two hundred sixty miles per hour when I was blown in their direction.

I have to mention that the boys weren't running on all eight cylinders at the time. The previous night was spent in celebration. The crew had thrown a party in celebration of my birthday. The Kimba Fire Brigade showed up in full force, offering to help with the inebriation process.

We were busy having margarita wars when they showed up to lend a hand. This was something new to them, and as it turned out, very entertaining for us. We had brought along two

of our ‘race version’ margarita machines. The blenders had two-stroke engines, one on race fuel, the other sporting just a taste of methanol for added performance. It must also be noted that Howard’s (my weary traveling companion) was sporting a custom-made straight pipe that made you wince with pain when running at full throttle.

It’s the simple things that make life so rewarding. Such as watching innocent young men from the opposite side of our planet, tasting a favorite drink from back home for the first time. Watching them guzzle down the frosty contents and seeing a salty mustache form on

their upper lip.

Watching them reel with pain as brain freeze sets in.

Sharing a laugh with the Good Morning Australia crew who only moments before, were also reeling with the same pain—but were much happier now that they were not alone. These were great times. Memories I’ll always treasure.

Another was that of one of the younger members of the Brigade. He was so bent on being just like us that I had to seize the moment. On the table next to one of the two-stroke blenders was a large bottle of tequila. It had to be around a half-gallon in size. There was still well over an inch and half of the harsh liquid remaining in the bottom. He held up the bottle into the light and asked the inevitable. It was almost like he was challenging our drinking capabilities.

I responded as any red-blooded American would whose main objective was to see his naïve counterpart suffer.

I lied...

“Back home, that much is no big deal.” I was laying it on pretty thick, “We’d just down it, mate...my sister could drink that much.”

“Serious?” He stared closer at the contents in the bottle, determined to be one of us. He looked to his friends for encouragement. They were just as eager to witness the feat, and were also just as willing to lie for the sake of entertainment.

“Well then, no worries.” he said, as he tilted the large bottle toward the sky.

That was a lot of tequila. We watched as the determined young lad gulped and swallowed. His eyes watered, closed, crossed, and possibly even bled...but he kept drinking. The

party fell strangely silent as all eyes watched his self-induced sacrifice. He kept the bottle tilted until the final drop was emptied. When he finally lowered his arm, in his mind he was one of us.

He wearily examined the large bottle. He was proud—soon he would be nauseous.

“Damn, mate. That much?” he was amazed at what studs us Americans must surely be.

“Well...maybe not *that* much!” I finally let in. The whole place burst into laughter. His teammates toasted him and took turns taking a pull from the alcohol of choice, but none dared equal his performance. He was the man of the moment, a hero to his peers. Not long after, he was seen practicing the art of projectile vomiting behind one of our motorhomes.

Another to get caught with their guard down was the anchor lady herself. A trained professional who made her living in the public’s eye seemed like the perfect candidate. She was attractive, smart, and apparently had a new-found love for our frothy beverage. Howard slipped a rubber cockroach into her glass when she wasn’t looking, then topped it off for good measure. As she worked her way toward the bottom, the disgusting bug revealed itself to the “always composed” morning show host.

“You bastard!” she squealed, as Howard came to her rescue and pulled the bug from her glass with his bare hands. He then tilted his head back and dropped the marinated mascot into his

mouth and began to chew. All eyes watched as the rubber rodent was manhandled and chewed to a salty death by a brave soul who acted unselfishly to restore the morning show host's honor. *American bravery at its finest...*

As mentioned earlier, at over two hundred and sixty miles per hour, I was blown off course and heading straight for the Kimba Fire Brigade. I missed them by probably fifty feet, but at those speeds and being at the mercy of the wind, it seemed much closer than that. When I returned to the pits, we watched the run on the computer so Denis and the crew could see what I was up against. When the wind hit, my handlebars went nearly full lock, trying to compensate to no avail. Future runs would have to be postponed until the winds subsided.

On another pass, at high speed the front end wobbled terribly. As I approached nearly two hundred eighty miles per hour, the front end shook so violently that I had to abort the run. The vibration was so bad that I couldn't see where I was going. It was also very difficult to maintain control since steering input was severely sacrificed due to the nature of the problem. When I finally brought the ill-handling machine to a stop, I was shaking a little myself.

I asked Denis to have a look at the front tire. I already had a pretty good idea what the problem was. We had recently installed aluminum discs on either side of the front wheel to help reduce aerodynamic drag. I never liked the discs because it made it very difficult to check air pressure. Because of this, I was pretty sure the procedure was occasionally neglected.

As suspected, the front tire had lost air pressure during the pass. We usually run about eighty psi (pounds per square inch) in the front tire. We found there was less than thirty psi in the tire when we returned. I was a little disappointed that I was put in harms way simply because a procedure had been overlooked and I expressed my concerns to Denis and the crew. In

his defense, he said the air pressure had been checked before the run, but that the valve stem cap wasn't in place when the tire was inspected upon my return. Whatever the case, it scared the hell out of me and I was promised this would never happen again...

And then there was the final day on the salt. Our last chance.

We had come to be champions. The fastest. Anything else wouldn't do. On the final day, we still hadn't reached our goal. Once again, the wind picked up and we were forced to wait. Wayne O'Grady, the man in charge of the meet, kept us up to date on wind conditions across the course. Everyone else was pretty much through. Blown engines, deteriorating tires, and even a few Aussie records were already in the books. Most of the participants were now more concerned about finding adequate shade and a cold brew than making another pass.

Tension was high among our crew. The bike was wounded. We had a vibration in the engine that was an inevitable death sentence. The question wasn't if, it was when. We came too far to just quit. The decision was made that we would keep running until either the record was ours, or until Tenacious II gave up the ghost.

Waiting was hard for me. One good pass could change everything. Everyone worked so hard to get us to where we were—but we were running on reserve. The event organizers were ready to close up shop. The wind refused to go away. Our crew was beat up and tired. And, we had a motor that was pretty well used up.

We lined up at the end of the course and readied ourselves for war. We were not going down without a fight.

It seemed like hours, but finally the wind decided to take a break. I suited up and climbed inside. John strapped me in and wished me well. Denis gave me his best and told me not to hold anything back. The starter motor was engaged to the crank and readied for deploy-

ment.

Suddenly, Wayne O'Grady came up and put a whoa on the whole operation. "It seems we've got company." he warned. "There's a kangaroo on the track!"

Only in Australia...

I couldn't believe it. We finally had our chance and now we had to wait again. Our window of opportunity was slowly beginning to close. If the wind picked back up, it might already be over.

"No worries, we'll run the little bugger off." Wayne assured.

Imagine making that final pass at over three hundred miles per hour. All eyes are upon you. Good Morning Australia's camera crew has you in their sights. Everyone in the pits is standing on their tiptoes straining to see. The organization that invited us across the pond is finally getting their money's worth. It's that very moment that dreams are made of. And then at mid-course, this bouncing marsupial finds its way into your path. WHAM! Kangaroo burgers for twenty.

The thoughts bouncing through my head were many. It's a little unnerving to think of all the possibilities...so many things that can go wrong. My dad has a saying that has always stuck with me. "If there's a bullet out there with you're name on it, it's going to find you. It's the one that says *To whom it may concern*, that you need to watch out for." Funny deal.

As was earlier feared, the winds returned. I climbed from the cockpit and sat in wait. It's hard to keep the adrenaline flowing at times like this. You get amped up, and then let back down. This process happens over and over. It drains you both physically and mentally. We feared that Wayne and his organization might finally pull the plug. It didn't happen. No

