



PHOTOGRAPHS VILLIERS STEYN

**Dirt tracker.** The access road to the Namuskluft campsite near Rosh Pinah in southern Namibia is very dusty.

## Five bikes and a bakkie from Stellenbosch to Sossusvlei

You don't need a brand-new big BMW GS bike to have a *Long Way Round* experience. All you need are your best friends, a few stalwart bikes and a lust for adventure. A toolbox and a Hilux just in case things go wrong are also a good idea, says Villiers Steyn.



**Washing day.** Tania and Francois Steyn rig up a washing line between their motorbikes at Sesriem near Sossusvlei.



**Damage done.** Francois Steyn looks at his Kawasaki KLR lying in the mud while Westley Wessels takes a photograph. The group were driving south from Sesriem and it took them three hours to drive 50 km.

A few years ago the actor Ewan McGregor and his friend Charley Boorman travelled from London to New York through Europe and Asia on BMW R1150 GS motorbikes. They filmed the tour and called it *Long Way Round* – 32 000 km through 12 countries in 115 days.

I've been dreaming of a similar adventure ever since seeing the first episode of the series, and tonight it's finally coming true. Granted, I'm not travelling around the world, but "only" to Namibia. At least it's a start. A very good start, and a much better way of spending a summer holiday than getting sunburnt and eating yet another plate of Christmas leftovers.

It's Christmas Eve in Stellenbosch. Eon de Kock and Kerneels Venter only met each other half an hour ago, but now they're sitting chatting like old friends. With a Namibia road map on his lap, Eon shows Kerneels where we're going to drive.

The plan is simple: We want to get going before sunrise on Boxing Day. Then we want to explore Aus, Lüderitz and Kolmanskop before spending New Year's Eve in Sossusvlei. After that we'll push on to the Fish River Canyon before returning home on 3 January.

If you think about it carefully, our trip has precious little in common with *Long Way Round*. Besides the fact that we'll only be covering a fraction of the

distance and will only be on the road for ten days, we'll mainly be using old motorbikes, among them a 1989 Suzuki DR 750 BIG. That alone should be cause for a few laughs.

Kerneels and I have the important role of driving the support vehicle, my 2004 Toyota Hilux 2.7 double-cab bakkie. In the convoy departing from Stellenbosch will be four motorcycles – Francois Steyn on a Kawasaki KLR 650, his wife, Tania, on a BMW Funduro 650, Eon and Mari de Kock on a Yamaha XT 600E, Ferdie and Christa Ungerer on a Suzuki DF 750 BIG – and Westley Wessels, a school friend of Eon and Ferdie, will join us later in Aus on his Yamaha Ténéré. >



**Quick doze.** The bikers catch forty winks next to the road between Aus and Lüderitz. Kerneels Venter, who drove in the support vehicle, is obviously not impressed.

**Day 1:  
The bikers are coming!**  
Stellenbosch – Springbok (±560 km)

We hit the road just before 7am and head north. We stop regularly to stretch our legs, fill up petrol tanks and silence hunger pangs. In Klawer, 58 km north of Clanwilliam, we bring out Eon's red toolbox for the first time. In it is everything you'd need to fix a motorbike – from a no 10 spanner to a G-clamp. A bolt of Ferdie's chainguard is loose and Francois's chain is too tight. Half an hour later everything is hunky-dory and we move on.

At 5pm we drive into Springbok. After an ice-cold Windhoek Draught at the Springbok Lodge and Restaurant we drive on to the Springbok caravan park at the edge of town.

We have a great swim, a quick braai and bed down on a groundsheet – right there under the stars. We fall asleep before anyone else in the camp.

**Day 2:  
On the banks of the Orange**  
Springbok – Rosh Pinah (±235 km)

Initially we'd planned to enter Namibia at Sendelingsdrif. Then, yesterday, in Springbok, a biker from Cape Town, Stefan Walrond, advised us against taking the road through Eksteenfontein. Apparently the road had been badly damaged by floods and is too dangerous to be negotiated by motorbike.

Instead, we drive through Violsdrif, and after that keep left along the banks of the Orange River. Here, a beautiful gravel road winds right through the middle of the Ai-Ais/Richtersveld Transfrontier Park. In places the road is corrugated and further on the road narrows dramatically.

The temperature, which by now is hovering close to 40 degrees, starts taking its toll on our group, so we decide to cool down in the river for a while. An hour before sunset we pitch camp at Namuskluft, a small, private camp outside Rosh Pinah. Once again we sleep under the stars, which are shining so brightly tonight that we can almost read by their light.

**Day 3:  
Goats and an empty fuel tank**  
Rosh Pinah – Lüderitz (via Aukam and Aus) (±343 km)

I wake to the song of a bokmakierie. It's just after six. The brightly coloured bush shrike with its golden-yellow throat and

black mask hop-hops from the braai onto the kitchen ammo box in search of a few leftovers from last night's chops.

While I get the coffee pot going, I have a good chuckle at how the motorcycles are doubling as clothes horses. Jeans, jackets, buffs and smelly socks – nothing is left on the ground.

We take a few back roads towards Aus. About 80 km outside of Rosh Pinah we turn right onto the D727. These are rocky parts, but the gravel road is in fairly decent condition.

Every day has a surprise, and today's is a quiver tree forest. Like hundreds of burning torches, these trees grow on the koppies as far as the eye can see.

Where the D727 joins the D446, two thorn trees grow at the side of the road. We huddle in the shade of one, because a family of boer goats are resting under the other one.

Near Aus the fuel runs out on Eon and Mari's Yamaha XT. While Ferdi and I help Eon with the jerry can, Kerneels's Crocs melt onto the tar road. Namibia in summer is not for sissies.

To rub salt in our wounds, we can't find ice anywhere in Lüderitz. After driving around for an hour we finally manage to find the last six bags of ice in town at a garage.

Fortunately the drinks are cold tonight...

**Day 4:  
Wind, sand and a ghost town**  
Lüderitz to Aus (±123 km)

Last night, at the Shark Island resort in Lüderitz, was the first time most of us slept in tents. Only Francois and Tania were brave enough to sleep outdoors in the wind.

We spend the best part of the morning at Kolmanskop, which was a rich man's playground in the early 1900s.

The area around the village once apparently supplied 20% of the world's diamonds. Today it's a ghost town and one of the most-photographed attractions in Namibia. The sand is slowly swallowing the houses, and I can't help but think that one should come and have a look and enjoy it while it's still here.

Today's surprise is not a nice one. At 4.30pm we're confronted with a nasty wind on the tar road between Lüderitz and Aus. Kerneels and I watch helplessly as the bikers are buffeted around. The windblown sand makes it virtually impossible to see the oncoming traffic.



Fortunately everyone makes it through the storm safely, and just before sunset we pitch camp in Aus. Westley has driven up all the way from Cape Town, and tonight all the members of our group are present for the first time.

**Day 5:  
Sand, slog and shade**  
Aus to Sesriem (via the D707 and Betta) (±333 km)

This morning we get up early and pack up in record time. The road to Sesriem is long, and according to our neighbour in the Kia Sportage the D707, which we're planning to take, is very sandy. With the emphasis on *very* and *sandy*.

At 7.20am we hit the D707. This gravel road runs all along the border of

the Namib-Naukluft Park and is marked as "Scenic drive – Recommended" on our InfoMap. Initially the road is very dusty and badly corrugated, but before long we are driving on a gravel road that is in a better condition than many of the tar roads I know, all along the first red dunes of our trip. But it doesn't last long...

Just after 10am we hit the first thick, red sand. Eon and Mari are the first ones to claim a piece of land. The XT just couldn't stay upright.

Two minutes later it's the other XT's turn. Westley turns around to investigate and then also loses control in the thick sand. "A road that has been travelled, is done with. This is what happens when you turn around!" says Westley. >



**Sardines in a row.** Most of the nights the group simply slept under the stars on their tour in December and January. Here they are at the Duwisib Castle, 70 km southwest of Maltahöhe.



**Up a tree.** Trees are few and far between in some parts of Namibia. When you find one, you have to grab the chance. This lone tree is south of Sossusvlei.



**High and dry.** The view from the main dune at Sossusvlei. The dunes here are among the world's highest. The more red a dune's colour, the older it is.



**Battling the elements.** Francois and Tania Steyn fight against the wind and sand near Kolmanskop east of Lüderitz.

Luckily no one is hurt, and we hit the road again.

The hotter it gets, the fewer shady spots we encounter. Every tree we see becomes a pit stop. And when the trees run out, we use the Hilux's awning.

Today is the first real test of the tour, and despite the blinding heat, thick sand and hours of concentration, our group ends the day with big smiles and heavy eyelids around the campfire at Sesriem.

**Day 6:**  
**New Year's at Sossusvlei**  
Sesriem to Sossusvlei and back (±140 km)

Since the motorbikes aren't allowed to drive into Sossusvlei, we have to stuff nine adults into the Hilux today. I remove the spare wheels, jerry cans, gas cylinders and all the food from the bakkie. At first Eon, Ferdie and Westley try to sit in the back, but due to the drawer system and canopy they don't fit in.

Finally Tania, Christa and Mari sit in the back, while Francois, Ferdie, Westley and Kerneels squeeze in onto the rear bench seat. We spend the entire morning at Sossusvlei, the whole afternoon in dreamland while our clothes dry, and all night by the fireside... until midnight.

Happy New Year!

**Day 7:**  
**Summertime, muddy time**  
Sesriem to Duwisib Castle (±200 km)

Today we're sleeping in. It is the first day of 2011 after all.

The plan is to spend tonight at Helmeringhausen. We hit the road at about 10 am and progress well until just after noon, but then we hit the water.

It must've rained a lot the previous night. There's a shallow pool in every dip, and the only way to get through is to speed through it.

Regret always comes too late, because at one stage Ferdie's Suzuki loses power. Something must've gotten wet, but what? Half an hour later both petrol tanks have been removed, and Eon sprays everything that matters with Q20. It works... kind of.

Then it gets muddy. Before long the pools line up for hundreds of metres on end on the road and we're forced to drive next to the road. The motorbikes slip. The Hilux slips. Everybody slips.

At one stage Francois hits the mud too fast and his wheels slide out from under him. Whatever was dry and clean, is now wet and very dirty.

It takes us three hours to cover barely 50 km, and we decide to pitch camp at the Duwisib Guest Farm near Maltahöhe.

www.driveout.co.za

The bikers' bodies are tired, but Ferdie still has time to take three kids for a spin before the sun sets. Everyone agrees – today was the best day yet.

**Day 8:**  
**Apple tart and a view of note**  
Duwisib Castle to Hobas (via Helmeringhausen, Bethanie and Seeheim) (±360 km)

Today is one of the easiest days from a riding perspective, and that's not such a bad thing after yesterday's mud bath. At Helmeringhausen we stop at the hotel to taste its well-known apple tart.

It's nice, but not as nice as the ham, cheese and tomato sandwiches with sweet butter on freshly baked bread.

We shoot through Bethanie, Goageb and Seeheim to Hobas, our last night together with the bikers.

To conclude the day, we drive to the Fish River Canyon lookout near Hobas. Namibia remains one of the most beautiful places imaginable.

For the past eight days we have driven from one beautiful scene to the next – over mountains, through valleys, along red sand dunes and enormous rivers, through thick sand and slippery mud, and on roads that looked as if they will never stop.



**Making a splash.** Francois Steyn tries to keep his Kawasaki KLR upright in the mud with Kerneels and the Hilux hot on his heels.

## Who came along, and on what?



**Eon de Kock from Stellenbosch**

**Bike:** 1996 Yamaha XT 600E

**Mileage:** 61 082 km

**Fuel tank:** 15 litres

**Fuel consumption:** ±18 km/litre

**Current price:** ±R25 000

**Pros:** A lot of power, especially in the lower gears.

**Cons:** It's slow.

**Tips:** Bring a complete toolkit along and get a good map. I love InfoMap's *Namibia* map.



**Mari de Kock** travelled with Eon. Her advice: "Take a Buff with you. It keeps you cool when it gets hot and warm when it gets cold, and it stops bugs from getting into your ears when you're asleep. It's also great for keeping the wind out."



**Francois Steyn from Stellenbosch**

**Bike:** 2006 Kawasaki KLR 650

**Mileage:** 25 635 km

**Petrol tank:** 23 litres

**Fuel consumption:** ±21 km/litre

**Current price:** ±R25 000 – R30 000

**Pros:** Between 1989 and 2006 the KLR remained unchanged and there's plenty of advice available on the internet. It never gives trouble, so I have full confidence in my bike on the open road.

**Cons:** The suspension is not the best, and it

sounds like a hair dryer.

**Tips:** Inspect your motorbike thoroughly every morning before you depart. Also remember to fit new tyres before a long trip like this. We all fitted new MITAS Enduro E-07s – you can easily get 10 000 km out of them.



**Tania Steyn from Stellenbosch**

**Bike:** 1999 BMW Funduro 650

**Mileage:** 14 500 km

**Fuel tank:** 15 litres

**Fuel consumption:** ±20 km/litre

**Current price:** ±R25 000 – R30 000

**Pros:** My BMW is very powerful and accelerates quickly. It's also the only motorbike on which my feet can touch the ground.

**Cons:** The fuel tank is a bit small.

**Tips:** Get a crash helmet with a peak and bring a bottle of eye drops along, especially if you're wearing contact lenses. Also remember a good pair of sunglasses.



**Westley Wessels from Vredekloof**

**Bike:** 2009 Yamaha XT 660Z Ténéré

**Mileage:** 13 200 km

**Fuel tank:** 23 litres

**Fuel consumption:** ±20 km/litre

**Current price:** ±R70 000 – R80 000

**Pros:** Power. It's a Ténéré.

**Cons:** You have to be at least 1.8 m tall if you want to ride this bike – it's very high off the ground.

**Tips:** Know your motorbike. The more you know, the easier it is to fix. And remember to bring a GPS.



**Ferdie Ungerer from Stellenbosch**

**Bike:** 1989 Suzuki DR 750 BIG

**Mileage:** 32 300 km

**Fuel tank:** 33 litres

**Fuel consumption:** ±12.5 km/litre

**Current price:** ±R20 000

**Pros:** The DR has enough power for two people with baggage.

**Cons:** It's heavy – hard to keep upright and it uses a lot of fuel.

**Tip:** Remember duct tape, cable ties and Pratley Putty.



**Christa Ungerer** rode with Ferdie. Her advice: "Don't rush. And remember your cozzie."



**Kerneels Venter** from Pretoria travelled with me in the support vehicle. "When you're ferrying baggage like us, it helps to pack everything in the same way every time. Then every piece of kit has its place and you always know where everything is. Large parts of Namibia are without electricity and it helps to bring a second battery for your fridge and to charge your camera batteries." 