



# ADVMOTO

DUAL SPORT NEWS  
ADVENTUREMOTORCYCLE.COM

## Enchanting CUBA

*Two-Wheeling  
Through History*

**ANYTHING IS POSSIBLE...**  
Even for a Petite Female Rider

**IS IT CHEATING?**  
The Smaller Bike Movement

**TAKING THE  
2% DARE**  
Alaska's Dalton  
Highway

Nov/Dec 2016 | No. 95

\$5.99 US / \$6.99 CAN



**PATAGONIAN  
PURSUIT**

**3 COLORADO  
PASSES**

**SOLO IN  
NEPAL**





SOME CALL IT "CHEATING"

# THE SMALLER



Kyra Sacdalan of West X1000 and her Yamaha XT225.



# BIKE MOVEMENT

by Greg Hilchey

I've heard it said many times, "You're cheating," referring to someone riding a small displacement dual-sport motorcycle vs. a large bike.

**F**or years, there's been a perception in the adventure travel world that if you're not riding the biggest bike possible, you're not a true adventurer. This perception has been created by design to condition the consumer, and is fueled by manufacturers and other businesses thriving on this fast growing market. Search the internet for "adventure motorcycle," and you'll find images of big *BMW*s, *Yamahas*, and *KTM*s with monstrous engines, bikes weighing in at 500+ lbs. Every year it seems manufacturers are coming out with bigger and more powerful "Adventure Class" motorcycles. Hopefully, that's changing.

While the major manufacturers have been pushing bigger bikes, some are going the opposite direction, producing small to mid-sized motorcycles with the adventure traveler in mind. Both the Chinese and the British have introduced small and mid-sized motorcycles that are adventure-ready. The Japanese have been producing high quality small and mid-sized dual-sports for years, but haven't really embraced the adventure travel market until recently.

So, do you need 570 lbs. and 125 hp for adventure travel? Some say yes, that it's "better to have it" for those long stretches of highway. Others say a bike like that is overkill. Noah Horak's recent "Open Letter to the Motorcycle Industry" published on *Expedition Portal* said, "If you cannot pick up your bike fully loaded in any situation, it's not ideal for adventure travel."



An adventurized XT225.



There seem to be two types of bias about smaller bikes. One is that smaller bikes cannot carry as much, or go as fast, as large "Adventure Class" bikes. When you line up the specs side by side the question remains, how much is enough? Modern 250s and 400s can cruise at 70 mph, and have a carrying load of around 400 lbs., more than enough to carry you and your kit anywhere you want to go. And, these bikes often have excellent fuel economy. The other is, "Smaller bikes are for people who can't ride." The truth is, most riders lack the fundamentals for off-road riding whether on a big bike or small one.

Like so many, when I was new to adventure touring, I believed the hype that you had to have a large bike to do an adventure. I traded my 650cc motorbike for a 1200. Initially I thought it was the greatest thing on two wheels, until I took it on a long distance off-road tour. I found myself wrestling the behemoth every day for nearly a month while traveling the backcountry of British Columbia en route to the Yukon. Even with all my prior training, the bike was not very forgiving, and once it reached its threshold, it was going to end up on its side. By the end of that journey, I had made the decision to find a more manageable off-road bike. Since then, I've owned the full spectrum of adventure bikes and dual-sports from 1200s to 650s and have now settled on the

KTM 690 and the WR 250R. On a recent trip up the west coast from San Diego to Seattle, I was beside myself with how much fun my WR was to ride, and how capable it is.

Austin Vince, the godfather of adventure motorcycle travel and author of *Mondo Enduro*, said, "The problem isn't the large displacement motorcycles, it's the industry telling the average person that they need these huge, \$20,000 machines to have an adventure. Younger people generally cannot afford a bike like that, and that's discouraging them from pursuing adventure travel." He added that in order to manage such a large motorcycle, you'll end up paying thousands of dollars more to attend a weekend training school. Austin's philosophy has always been that adventure motorcycle travel can be achieved by anyone, of any age, as long as they don't listen to what the industry is trying to sell them. "One of the greatest adventure bikes out there for the average person is a 250cc enduro, but people have been convinced that a bike that size is incapable of adventure travel."

When I became an off-road instructor at *Puget Sound Safety Off Road (PSSOR)*, I never saw myself as an exceptional rider. Just average, like most. The school has a "come as you are" philosophy and has seen everything from the latest adventure class motorcycle to the "adventure scooter." Having owned a big bike, it's easy to sympathize with students showing up on their new adventure bikes not knowing what they're getting into. By the end of the course,



they have far more confidence in their riding skills, but they have also realized they have limited themselves by selecting such large bikes. Many of my students who have stayed in touch have purchased smaller, more versatile bikes, while keeping the large displacement bikes more for on-road touring than off-road touring.

Although "Adventure Class" motorcycles will most likely remain in the forefront, the smaller bike movement has been getting more attention than ever before. Steph Jeavons, a gal from the U.K., is currently in the middle of a solo, round-the-world tour on her *Honda 250L* named "Rhonda." She has become so popular that she has maxed out her friends list on *Facebook*. Another rider gaining popularity has been adventuring around the world on the world's most popular motorcycle, the *Honda Super Cub*. Ed March rode his *C90* from Australia to the U.K. back in 2009.

The film footage he took during the trip was made into a DVD. He then proceeded to ride his *Honda* to Nordkap in the dead of winter, and is now currently on a two-year journey with his girlfriend, Rachel Lasham, traveling from Alaska to Tierra Del Fuego.

Small displacement bikes aren't built for everyone. Famed adventure traveler Simon Thomas stands tall at 6'3". For him, the *R1150GS* that's taken him through 78 countries so far, is the bike that fits him. Most males are around 5'9" (175cm), and women are around 5'5" (164cm). When you combine a tall seat with a heavy bike it adds up quickly. Most small to mid-size dual-sports have a higher seat height, but with a narrower profile, less weight and softer suspension, an average height rider can sit comfortably with one foot firmly on the ground and only have 300 lbs. of bike to balance. Inna Thorn, manager of the *Backcountry*



Noah Horak and his *KTM 690* went around the world.





Justin Coffey of West X1000.

enough low end power for off-road adventure. It didn't hurt that for the pair of them we were only out \$6,000."

It's not that a big bike isn't capable of taking on gnarly terrain, it's that the average rider doesn't have the time and dedication to build the skills required to manage a heavy bike the way one could handle a smaller bike. Ed March took a group on a tour from Mongolia to the U.K. in 2010—with most riding C90s. Most of the riders had no experience at either traveling or riding a motorcycle. In fact, one rider had just received his driver's license the week before, and his longest trip on a motorcycle had been 20 miles. They all ended up having the adventure of a lifetime.

So, if you believe that you must have a certain "Adventure Bike" to do adventure travel, then you may miss out on the greatest adventure of your life. It's okay, go ahead and "Cheat." **ADV**

Discovery Routes (BDR), decided after training for the Arizona Backcountry Route that her KLR 650 was going to be too heavy for her and the terrain she was about to tackle. She opted for a 250 and had great success. "Bikes like the WR 250R were made for Backcountry Routes," she said in a recent article.

Justin Coffey, who works for Touratech, recently took a trip to Mexico with his girlfriend Kyra on a pair of Yamaha XT 225s. "Justin chose the bikes," Kyra said. "One that would be small enough for me, and large enough for him. One that was powerful enough to travel safely on American freeways, but had



**Greg Hilchey** is an off-road instructor with PSSOR ([PSSOR.com](http://PSSOR.com)). He's been riding for over 25 years and has traveled throughout the U.S., Canada and Mexico. Greg served 20 years with the Army and retired this year. He is planning a two-year journey around the world on his Yamaha WR 250R.



A Yamaha XT225.