

mototorg

your online motorcycle magazine

DESTINATION
Hunter



NEW RUBBER
a tale of two tyres



STAYING UPRIGHT
never too late to learn



ALSO IN THIS ISSUE

- 1 Test Ride - taming the beast on the Snowy Ride.
- 2 Sydney to Picton the long way.

Romantic Interlude

In the past I would have said that riding to the Hunter Valley (say through Wollombi or via the Putty Road) was the best part of the whole experience. However, after the last visit, I am now of the opinion that the ride there is only the beginning.

Sunset on a cool winter evening sees us turning onto the Old North Road, hard-packed gravel that can be attacked with some enthusiasm (even on a touring bike) stretching before us. We cruise past vineyards and fields occupied by kangaroos, before hitting Hermitage Road (sealed) and our destination – Casuarina Country Inn.

Casuarina is a small boutique five star resort featuring nine themed suites and three self contained cottages, all set in a 25 acre vineyard. With a motto 'dare to be different' and suites with names like French Bordello, Casanova's Loft and Moulin Rouge you could be forgiven if you had visions of a Victorian bordello!

Where for art thou?

Luckily, Romeo's Retreat turned out to be a real gem (lucky, that is, for me as it was a birthday surprise for Deb), dripping with antiques like the huge Burr walnut bed from Scotland (c1850), the Victorian chaise lounge, and writing bureau. Not to mention the claw-footed spa bath that dominated the living room, providing a fitting end to a long day on the bike.

Deb liked the small, thoughtful touches, like the fluffy robes, selection of specialty teas and filter coffee, and even an umbrella so you don't get wet walking through the vines to the restaurant.

It even had a DVD player so you could watch your favourite MotoGP round from the spa!

Flaming delights

Casuarina is famous for its 'flambe' restaurant where the chef has a penchant for setting fire to things at your table. More importantly, Wolfgang, the German sommelier takes his job very seriously indeed!



Your guests can recline on the antique chaise lounge while you hold court in the bath!



It's easy to be masterful with a dramatic 'master' bedroom setting like this!

He recommended a bottle of The Clan cabernet merlot from South Australia which was a perfect complement to my honey-smoked lamb. Deb also enjoyed her grilled salmon which she said was cooked to perfection.

The Verdict?

Well deserving of its 5-star resort status. Bikes can be parked safely behind the accomodation wing, and best of all your pillion will be so relaxed she won't mind 7 hours on the bike the next day!

For rates and more information go to:

www.casuarinainn.com.au. We chose the mid-week spa package which included accomodation, dinner for two (you can choose anything form the menu!), a cooked breakfast and a bottle of the estate's wine on arrival.



Wake up ready to explore the many fine vineyards in the region. Photo courtesy of Tourism Australia.



Three for the Road

If Romeo's Retreat is not your thing, don't worry because the Hunter is chock full of hotels, motels, lodges, and B&Bs. Here's a selection of three we've tried and would recommend (with a couple of provisos from the navigator).

Potters Brewery

Anything with the word brewery in the title sounds like a top spot to me. At Potters, they make their own ales (and very tasty they are too), offer good brasserie style food, and have motel style accomodation as well.

Our unit was large and comfortable and also had a roofed terrace around the back which was a perfect spot for the bike. It was the end of summer the night we were there, but after a days riding the heated (lukewarm) pool looked very inviting.

Having worked up a thirst, we headed to the bar to try an ale or two. The Hunter Beer Company's signature brews include: Kolsch, Lager, Bock and Ginger. And good news ladies (according to the brewery's website) beer is good for you: *Beer is not fattening. It has fewer kilojoules than milk, fruit juice and wine.*

For more information go to:
www.pottersbrewery.com.au.

Aberdare Tavern

Now this is a real pub experience. A room will set you back \$60 for a double and you have to share a bathroom – but the tarriff includes continental breakfast (self serve).

The Glasshouse restaurant was a pleasant surprise. Unfortunately, there was also an unpleasant surprise in the form of a loud band (Saturday night) which played directly under our room until the wee hours.

Overall – good value for money, plus they have a lockup garage at the back for your bike!

The Sebel Kirkton Park

The Sebel Kirkton Park is a colonial style hotel set within a 40-hectare estate in the heart of Hunter Valley



Located on 11 acres at the gateway to Hunter Valley Wine Country, Potters Hotel & Brewery was established in 2002.



Aberdare Tavern
196 Vincent St.
Cessnock
Phone: (02) 4990 1014



wine country. We booked an ordinary (Colonial) room, but on arrival were upgraded to a Heritage room. That's \$219 worth for \$165! The super comfortable queen sized bed was an instant hit with the navigator, as was the relaxing view of the countryside from our private balcony. In fact, we liked the room so much we decided to eat in – a glass of verdehlo or two and some antipasto and we were ready to retire early.

At sunrise the next morning (OK, 8am), as we loaded up the bike, it seemed as if the whole world (see the photo above) had been washed ready for the new day.

If you have time for some recreation, the hotel has everything from boules to billiards, plus a Grecian style pool house featuring an indoor heated swimming pool, sauna & spa; a gymnasium; tennis court; plus a beauty and massage retreat!

Log onto www.mirvachotels.com.au for more information.



When is a motorcycle the most stable?

According to Wayne from *Stay Upright*, one rider reckoned the answer was 'on its side'! Obviously that rider was in dire need of some techniques to assist in keeping the bike upright.

So you're a good rider?

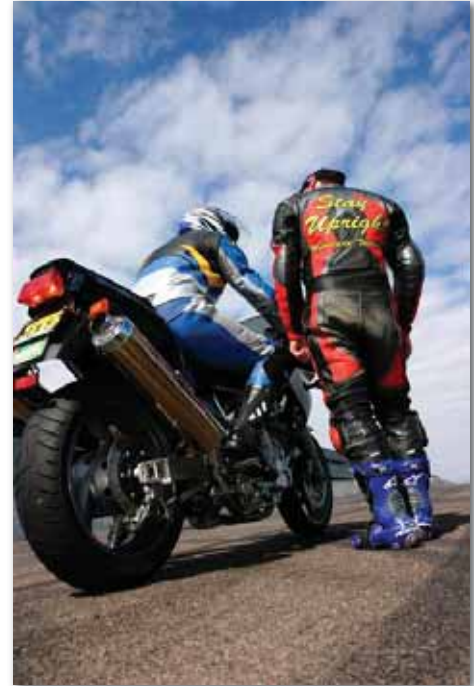
Having had a motorcycle license for 25 years or so (with the obligatory family break in the middle), I thought it was time I upgraded my skills a little. Of course I am a 'good rider' (aren't we all?) but with a few near misses and one major accident under my belt, perhaps it was time to admit that being a 'good rider' is not enough.

Maybe if I had mastered some of the techniques Wayne and his team teach on the Advanced Skills Course I wouldn't have ended up with my bike crushed under the diff of a truck and me on the road about 20 metres away! Sure it wasn't my fault – the truck pulled out in front of me – or was it? If I had been better at emergency braking, or had made decisions that split second earlier maybe I could have avoided the pain.

So I talked to Stew, a mate of mine, who is also a 'good rider' and we thought we'd give it a go – besides even if the course was a drag we would have had a chance to fang it on Oran Park!

Old dog – love the new tricks!

The \$340 course fee included an optional three hour theory session on the Friday before the day at the track. Even though we both thought we were up with the theory and that sitting in a room for three hours would be only slightly more interesting than sitting in rush hour traffic, we made the effort to turn up (as did about half of the other participants). Even if you learn



Yep, that lever you've got your hand on is the front brake!

only one thing, I would urge you to go to the session. For me the value was a discussion on the finer points of counter steering. I had always been taught to push down and forward on the opposite bar to get the bike to turn into the corner; however Wayne said applying forward pressure only was the best way. Trying that on the way home on my rather heavy 1200cc sports-tourer was a real revelation – much smoother and no muscle required.

Different strokes (well four-strokes) for different folks

The day itself dawned bright and sunny but bloody cold! However the excitement soon warmed us up – checking out the other bikes and the track itself. There were about 20 participants and four instructors. Interestingly, no two bikes were the same – there were two Ducati sport machines, a few touring Beemers, a couple of cruisers, naked bikes (including a very nice Triumph Speed Triple), as well as the usual suspects (Yamaha, Suzuki, and Kawasaki).

The riders were also varied and included an L plater, a couple of P platers and a few female riders. So



Right, you lot, follow me!





Slow speed manoeuvring – see it's easy!

don't think the course is for 'boy racers' or guys who want to go to ride days. It's for anyone who wants to get more out of themselves and their bikes.

Stop it now!

The morning started with a brief demonstration on bike setup and had some good tips on manhandling the bike. This was followed by the first track session on braking correctly and manoeuvring around obstacles.

Demonstrations by the instructors on what not to do when it comes to braking were very powerful – particularly what happens if you try to stop using the rear brake only (I think that bike has skidded down to Phillip Island by now). Then it was our chance to try it for ourselves. You really don't want to find out how long it takes your bike to safely stop at 100kmh when you are rapidly approaching the back end of a car that has just rammed on the anchors and stopped in front of you unexpectedly. Being able to practice in a controlled environment using a proven braking system could save your life!

Seeing around corners

The afternoon session covered cornering with plenty of track time for practice and personal feedback from the instructors. A common fault with most of the riders (including me) was keeping the upper body too stiff, or using the body as a lever. For road riding there should be no need to "get your knee down" – Wayne's advice to me was to "hold on to the bike with your knees, drop your shoulder and move your upper body over so that your head lines up, say, with the mirror rather than the centre line of the bike." It felt a little strange at first but once I got the hang of it, the difference was remarkable – more control of the bike, much tighter lines and room to increase the lean angle if necessary.

Lastly, there was an opportunity to "put it all together" with some free track time to practice all my new found skills and confidence. By 4:30pm everyone was tired, but you couldn't wipe the grins off their faces!

Well done!

My thanks to all the instructors (Wayne C, Wayne B, Terry, and Elaine) who made the day such an enjoyable experience, and to Stay Upright for their very professional approach. If you want more enjoyment from your bike, some potentially life-saving new skills, and about 160km on a race track – book for the next Advanced Skills Course – it's a blast!

For dates and venues, visit www.stayupright.com.au.

ANTICIPATION!

The road is calling.
Corners await.

But don't let the anticipation
end when you wind on the
throttle.

At a Stay Upright Course we'll
teach you to anticipate the
unexpected and help you build
a systematic and safer approach
to your riding.

Call 1300 366 640 or visit
www.stayupright.com.au.



Through Rain and the Snowy – BMW's R1200ST Delivers The Goods

Since the launch of the R1200GS in Australia in April 2004, accolades have been pouring in for the latest iteration of BMW's famed boxer engine, so my chance to put some hard miles on the new sports-tourer was very welcome.

When I picked up the bike from Worthington BMW, I asked Ian whether he thought the new R1200ST was a better sports-tourer than say the outgoing K1200RS. He said, "you really can't compare the two. The R1200ST is for people who want a raw motorcycle experience." After a few thousand kms on the ST, I understand what he meant.



The day before – off to get the touring essentials.

The new engine certainly lives up to its reputation as much smoother, lighter and more powerful. Plus, with the new six-speed gearbox with helical-cut gears you lose the old boxer 'clunkiness'. The result is a smooth-changing beast (that is, if you don't count the big clunk I sometimes got when shifting back to first).

Wet, wet, wet

The first real test of the bike came when we decided to take it down to last year's Snowy Ride. The Friday dawned overcast but fine. However, by the time I managed to get my navigator out of bed, dressed (leathers or not?) and on the road it was 2 hours later than I wanted it to be. This was disturbing for two reasons. Firstly, it had started to rain; and secondly, it put us in rush hour traffic trying to get through Sydney!

By the time we hit the highway to Canberra the weather had got worse, but thanks to our matching BMW rainsuits (yes, very sad I know) not a drop of water managed to get in. The rain didn't bother the ST either – its 81kW 1,170cc

Boxer engine with 115 Nm of torque just lapped up the miles. We didn't have to worry about stopping power either 'cause we had BMW's EVO brake system with partially-integral ABS. Many people think ABS on a bike is a sin, but on a wet road with poor visibility it's nice to know (and I had cause to test it a couple of times) you can stop quickly and safely if you have to!

The further we got towards Thredbo, the more bikes we met heading to the Snowy, and by the time we rolled into Thredbo at about 4:30pm we were part of a group of about 30 bikes. Registrations for the ride itself totalled close to 2000. The Snowy Ride has been going for 5 years and has raised about \$800,000 for the Children's Cancer Institute of Australia.

Checkpoint Charlies

Saturday was ride day and luckily turned out to be overcast but fine. The beauty of the Snowy Ride is that you can do as little or as much of the course as you want as long as you check into at least 3 checkpoints (in order to go in the draw to win some great prizes). The best news is that just by entering, you are in a draw to win \$20,000 worth of Honda (your choice: sports or cruise?).

Some of the bravest decided to go around the mountains, but most (like us) chose to cut back and forth and visit as many check points as possible. There are some particularly good motorcycling roads in the region – lots of sweeping corners and little traffic (apart from 2000 bikes). The big beast loved it! Its torquey motor (0-100 in 3.5 seconds) really puts the power down and despite its size, you can take corners with real confidence.

Confidently speaking

My navigator doesn't necessarily share my confidence (particularly when sparks fly off the road because parts of the bike touch down that probably



shouldn't). However, as a pillion she liked the well padded (and separate) seat and the riding position which enabled her to get a good view without being stuck up too high into the wind. The other thing she liked was the 'look' (quite stylish according to her). The fairing is divided into two sweeping sections giving the bike a predatory look, without making it too bulky. Its distinctive look is capped off by the huge 'cathedral' style headlights.

Suspended Sentence

My only criticism is that the suspension system, while excellent, is hard to get just right when shifting from solo rider to fully-laden. Sometimes I managed to hit the sweet spot, but other times no matter how much I fiddled with it I couldn't quite make it. Having said that, the Telelever front end and lightweight Paralever with weight-optimised drive shaft give a smooth, comfortable and faithful response when you do get the set-up right.

We were lucky for most of the day and missed the rainstorms that periodically swept across, except for the huge one just after our last checkpoint in Jindabyne as we headed back for the mass ride into Thredbo, which was cancelled as a result. However, spirits were high and there was a real buzz in Thredbo as people gathered together to share tales and ales and rock into night to the sound of the Angels band (remember them?).



All dressed up – a couple of Harley's taking a break in Cooma

Accident

After two full days in the saddle, we awoke surprisingly fresh and ready for the return journey home (despite the freezing temperatures). However, disaster struck about an hour out of Canberra when a rider just ahead of us went around a corner with a group of riders and was confronted with a car doing a U Turn right in front of him (having let two bikes in the group pass). When we came through the corner seconds later we were greeted with the sight of bits of bike all over the road, but no rider. Luckily for him he had been thrown clear right across the road and landed in a ditch. Unluckily for him he broke both his wrists. My navigator, who is a nurse, helped tend him for over half



Waiting for the mass ride – cancelled again!

an hour before the ambulance arrived and even longer before the police arrived. A number of bikes stopped to help clear the road and direct traffic, which at times, despite clear warnings, refused to slow down!

We eventually arrived home at about 7pm – totally exhausted but very satisfied by the performance and handling of the BMW R1200ST.

QUICKFacts

BMW R1200 ST

Capacity	1170cc
Type	2 cylinder 4-stroke, single cam, 4 valves per cylinder
Bore/stroke	101mm x 73mm
Max Output	81kW (110 bhp) at 7500 rpm
Max Torque	115Nm at 6000 rpm
Drive	Shaft drive
Suspension	BMW telelever (front) BMW paralever (rear)
Wheelbase	1,502mm
Seat Height	826mm
Dry Weight	205kg



Metzeler Roadtec Z6

Tyres maketh the bike! My navigator decided she wanted to learn to ride, so always ready for a good excuse to go bike shopping, we went in search of the perfect mild-mannered learners bike.

Now, the perfect bike in my mind is a LAMS-legal Ducati Monster (I could see myself commuting to work every day on a nice red one!). However, I settled on a sensible Honda VTR250 – looks similar and not such a dent on the wallet if it gets thrown down the road a few times.

Women are from Venus

Imagine my surprise when my “professional” view was not shared! The budding MotoGP rider wanted a sports bike (a bright yellow one to be precise). And there was no way to talk her out of it!

About \$6K later I rode home (no license for the navigator yet) on a brand-new, mango yellow Hyosung GT250R, and to cut a long story short I’ve ended up with this as a commuter. Now having been used to a 1200cc sports tourer, my expectations as to handling were quite modest.

However, I started getting a little concerned when I kept losing the back-end in dry weather, and in corners there was more chatter from the front than on Rossi’s Yamaha! Unlike Rossi, I didn’t have a team of engineers on hand, so I thought before I looked at new suspension (or a new bike), I would try new tyres.

What to wear?

“What do you want new tyres for? These ones look new?” And indeed they did. The OEM tyres were so damn hard and untyre-like that after nearly 3000km they showed absolutely no wear at all!

So having had nearly 10,000km wear out of a pair of Metzeler Roadtec Z6’s on the touring bike, I thought I’d try them on the 250.

The difference was amazing! Gone was the chatter and the skittishness



Roadtec Z6 – less chatter, more control.



Sportec M3 – smooth as!

that had so characterised the bike before. The bike was a joy, rather than a chore, to ride now. I could now tackle corners with confidence and even on a long ride at freeway speeds the bike was much more stable. Metzeler have engineered the Z6 to achieve a good all round performance. The carbon matrix compound ensures excellent dry grip, and in the wet the bike feels solidly in contact with the road. And as I can attest, they will serve you for many kms to come.

The Verdict?

The Roadtec Z6’s have totally transformed the bike – all for a few hundred dollars. While I still yearn for a Ducati Monster, I am now quite happy with my little 250cc sports bike!

Sportec M3

Now it was time to look at the touring bike! While it’s (BMW K1200 RS) a “sports-tourer” I found the handling to be more on the touring side. Having heard a lot about Metzeler’s new M3 tyre – I wondered whether it would transform this bike as it had the 250...

...Check out the next issue of Mototorq for the full M3 story – having gone through a set of M3’s, do I fit them again or go back to the Z6?



Sydney to Picton? Not much of a ride? You'd be right if you took the direct route. But how about going via the Royal National Park and taking the Grand Pacific Drive to Wollongong, then on to Berry, up through Kangaroo Valley to The Southern Highlands, across to Thirlmere and down to Picton.

On a Mission

That was the plan. Two powerful bikes, evenly matched and on a mission!

Beginning at the Royal National Park (the world's second oldest), we had a chance to admire the beautiful rainforest (the Sunday traffic being a bit heavy like), although there were a few sections we were able to open the throttle. At one point, I thought we were going quite hard, only to see a burst of colour in the mirror as a big gixxer went flying past us then hard on the anchors for the blind corner ahead. However, his victory was short-lived, as we came upon him a few clicks later, by the side of the road in intense conversation with the local constabulary.

Pie Stop

Hitting the coast at the end of the Park is a good opportunity to stop and admire the view (ok, and check out the famous pie shop on the cliff), before heading down to travel the Grand Pacific Drive across the spectacular 665 metre Sea Cliff bridge which sweeps around the cliff face like something out of the Jetsons. The Drive passes through quaint coastal villages, boasting some of the state's most beautiful beaches, before heading into Wollongong.

If you need a coffee break in Wollongong, take a left onto Cliff Road (past the Novotel) pick a café and relax and admire the view.

Berry Nice

For those in a hurry just take the Princes Highway direct to Berry (watch out for the many fixed speed cameras). Or take a detour through Kiama like we did. We were back only briefly on the highway before taking



To see views like this in the Royal National Park you'll have to stop and smell the roses! Photo courtesy of Tourism Australia.

a step back to the nineteenth century when we came into Berry.

Berry started life as a private town in the late 1800's on Alexander Berry's sprawling county estate "Coolangatta". Today its beautifully preserved buildings are the perfect backdrop to the many cafes, boutiques and gift shops. Stopping for a bite to eat, I met an oldtimer who was admiring my bike. He had had many BMWs over the years and had gone on all the BMW Safaris – but now fighting cancer he was no longer able to ride. A jolt of reality like that makes you really appreciate how lucky we are to be able to get on a bike and take a trip like this.

Kangaroo Valley

The road into the valley has everything a rider could want – corners, corners, and more corners! Not to mention hills and rolling countryside! Kangaroo Valley is surrounded by steep escarpments, and is reputed to be one of only seven fully enclosed valleys in the world.



Early European explorer, George Evans, described a view that "no painter could beautify". Pretty much says it all!

Now we get to my favourite part of the run – running up the steep slope of the escarpment towards the Southern Highlands – taking a right turn onto the fabulous Sheepwash Road (which has to be one of the best bike roads in the state), before heading into Bowral itself.

Sunset

Bowral, Mittagong and the surrounding region is worth exploring separately, but today the sun was going down and we were anxious to get to Picton. However, that didn't stop us taking the Old Hume Highway (which is now a country road) through to Thirlmere (famous for its railway museum) and down into Picton. We had booked rooms at the George IV Inn for the princely sum of \$33 a night! By the time we checked in and parked our bikes in the courtyard right outside, the temperature had dropped to about 2 degrees. For \$33 you don't get central heating, but you do get an electric blanket that was very welcome even for tough bikers like us.

My room was so small I could stand and touch both side walls, but that meant the electric blanket could heat the whole room. The only problem was the bathroom was outside and through the courtyard – we would just have to make sure we didn't drink too much fluid. Fat chance when the George still brews its own ale!

Geoff Scharer bought the pub in 1968 to 'do something different, make a quick killing and to sell'. Well he's still here thirty eight years later and has been brewing and selling his own beer since 1987. It's one of very few pubs that has survived without pokies – they wouldn't really suit one of the oldest pubs in Australia!

The long way?

Definitely! But well worth it. Some hard riding, stunning countryside and a few beers at the end of a long day! Can't wait 'til the next time!

For more information on the George IV go to: www.stonequarry.com.au/scharers/index.html.



There's some stunning coastline in the Illawarra. Photo courtesy of Tourism NSW.



The bar at the George IV in Picton. Photo courtesy of Tourism NSW.



6:30am on a cold winter's morning. At times like this you really appreciate heated hand grips!

