

CYCLE TORQUE TOURING FEATURE

— Continued

But the desire to continue the trip was still burning inside Matz.

"I went to pick up some parts from a bike dealer and I heard that the Dakar Rally was going to be held in Argentina. That was only 20,000 kilometres down the road. A couple of days later I had my bike packed. I left the American dream and headed south to Mexico.

"I travelled through Guatemala, Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Panama, then I had to ship the bike by plane because there is no road from Panama to Columbia. Then to Ecuador, Peru, Chile and finally Argentina. I made it at the right time to see and follow the entire Dakar Rally for the 16 Days and 9500km – one of the most amazing experiences on my entire trip! I actually got to help some racers out when they broke down, including the winner Marc Coma. I planned to go over to Africa from Buenos Aires but I realised that it would be the wrong time of the year with rain. I had some Aussie friends, Ken and Carol, who talked me into riding through New Zealand. A couple of months later I shipped my bike to Australia so I could do all the extremes of every continent."

Matz's Transalp has been his travelling partner for the entire journey, and it has covered over 220,000 kilometres without an engine rebuild. That's not a misprint either. We wondered why he chose that particular bike over others.

"After a couple of trips around South America on single cylinder bikes I knew I needed a twin cylinder machine for my big journey, one which could go for a huge amount of kilometres without a rebuild.

"When I started my apprenticeship in 1987 the Transalp had come out and I'd never heard of any engine problems with that bike and I had worked on ones with 300,000 kilometres on the clock without major work on the engine. That's why I chose a second-hand Honda Transalp. Mine is a 1991 model."

Matz's Transalp is far from stock to cope with the rigours of international travel.

"I needed to carry loads of luggage so I fitted panniers with quick release clips. I had to position the muffler lower to fit the panniers. I also fitted a big tank bag with side bags. I put extra fuel tanks on either side of the engine, holding

12 litres. A bash plate is fitted and I attach spare parts and tools to it, heated handgrips, throttle lock (cruise control), higher bars and handguards. I have a higher screen, cruiser footpegs to stretch the legs, automatic chain lubrication (Scottolier), extra temperature gauge and a modified airbox where I have put a foam filter on top of the original paper element.

"In the top box I have an electronic charging system with an inverter so I can charge batteries and power my lap top computer."

Even though the Transalp is reliable, things eventually wear out. We wondered what parts needed the most attention on Matz's bike.

"The common problem with the Transalp was the falling of one of the CDI units under the seat. Over the years the seat's plastic shell gets deformed and touches the CDI connection, causing problems. I simply lowered the CDI and problem solved. The first real breakdown was in Australia when the sidestand broke, after 19 years and over 200,000 kilometres.

"Other than that I changed the clutch outer and front disc at 150,000 kilometres, and clutch plates every 50-70,000 kilometres."

Matz tries to live as frugal as possible but it still costs money to survive.

"Depending on the continent it costs from \$20-100 AUD each day. Cheapest fuel I came across was 10c a litre in Iran, and its neighbouring



country. Turkey was the most expensive at \$2.20 a litre for fuel.

"I camp in the bush as much as possible because I need my money for food and fuel. I also belong to an organisation called *Comunitie SERVAS* where I can stay for two nights for free with people all over the world. To become a member you need to become a host for travellers yourself."

As Matz's trip is far from over *Cycle Torque* wondered where to next for the intrepid traveller?

"I'd like to go to Cape Town in South Africa but the season is wrong at the moment so I'll try and get there in May or thereabouts. The plan is to then ride north back home to Switzerland in one year to catch the northern spring/summer in 2011.

"When I'm home I'd like to build a motorcycle friendly place so I could host bikers from all over the world. I'd also like to help riders set up their bikes for trips like I have done."

Matz has seen and experienced many cultures during his journey some easy to understand and some not so easy. Danger also lurks everywhere.

"India was fascinating. There were almost no criminals because the Indian culture believes in reincarnation. As a result they try to do nothing wrong during their lives so they can get a better time in the afterlife.

"Other countries have their own idiosyncrasies for a bike rider. Australia is pretty safe except for the kangaroos which jump out in front of

you. I also had a road train sit on my backside at 120km/h which was scary.

"In Canada you have to watch bears which look for food at your campsite. They are big and can eat you. Western Pakistan was very strange. Like out of an early Mad Max movie. Kids run around with guns and people live in burnt out cars with bullet holes in them.

"India is the most dangerous place to ride. It has had dusty roads with big pot holes. Bicycles everywhere, sacred cows in the middle of the road and oncoming trucks, buses, cars and even tractors on your side of the road. A couple of times a day I would be forced into a ditch to miss mad drivers."

"I've had a some close shaves on the bike. I nearly lost my balance at 100km/h at the Bonneville Salt Flats while standing on it (check globalbiking on Youtube). In LA I hit a car at 120km/h after the car had overtaken a truck on a three-lane highway. That was close. I just held control of the bike but my helmet still smells to this day from being sick in it."

If you see a battered but very well-equipped Honda Transalp then flag Matz down. Buy him a coffee and you'll get some great stories. You can also visit his website at www.mathasschmid.com where you'll find great photos and learn more about Matz's trip. It's in German but you can click on the translate button. ■