

Slow Motion Across Eastern Australia by BSA

“The National BSA Rally is in Queensland. Let’s ride there. It’s only 1,500 miles”.

There was a palpable fog of testosterone in the shed as we looked at one another – waiting, hoping, that someone else would point out the folly of riding so far on 60 year old, 250cc, BSA C11 motorcycles. As always, male ego prevailed over common sense and there was a grumble of assent,

“Yeah, great idea”. Once committed there was no turning back.

I kept telling myself that this was no big deal. Fifteen hundred miles. About twice the straight line distance between Land’s End and John O’ Groats. Same distance as London to Moscow. Easy. At 40mph we should do it in six days or less. Adelaide to the Gold Coast. Nothing to it.

We’d done a long distance run on the little bikes once before but this was something different. Of the four bikes, two existed only as parts in boxes. The route took us into outback Australia where distances between towns were measured in hundreds of miles. We also needed to cross the highest mountain range in Australia, up 4,500 feet before returning to sea level.

Six months of preparation seemed to fly past. The two unrestored bikes gradually took shape and with only a week to go before departure the last bike rolled off the stand for its maiden run. Checklists were written, re-checked, amended. The final days were a frantic haze of packing and last minute repairs.



At sunrise on the day of departure all four bikes lined up in misty rain. Riders, bulked up by wet weather gear waved goodbye to families, neighbours and friends and thumped off into dawn. Fortunately, the rain eased and the first day was spent on damp roads in pleasant, cool conditions. Less fortunately, we were only fifty miles from home when it became clear that a generator on one of the bikes was not charging. An hour later, the generator on a second bike failed and we began the hourly “battery shuffle” where the flat batteries were moved to the charging bikes and the charged batteries to the non-chargers. This continued all the way to Queensland, an hourly routine which ensured we kept all the bikes running.



The day passed with the little bikes reliably eating up the miles through South Australia, over the River Murray and finally into outback Victoria.

Our first night, and indeed all our nights, were spent in country hotels.

The Aussie country pub is commonly a huge nineteenth century colonial building – often a legacy of gold rush, wool or wheat fortune. They are a stark reminder of past prosperity. Today these magnificent buildings, which can have up to 40 guest rooms, are largely neglected. The cost of maintenance well exceeds the income which can be generated from small rural communities. Australian travellers almost exclusively use motels and the growing number of bed and breakfast establishments so, in pubs, it is rare to encounter other overnight guests. Hotels, whilst generally not offering private



facilities, do present an option for budget travelers. In the course of our journey we paid, on average, £12 pp including continental breakfast.

Our second day took us across the featureless Hay Plain, dead flat to all horizons and almost 100 miles from one town to the next. We skirted ahead of a towering thunderstorm which provided a 40mph tailwind. As we lunched in Hay the thunderstorm hit, tearing down

signs and deluging the town with rain and hail. Ten minutes later it was gone and the rain was drying in the sand.



Travelling east the effects of drought became very clear. This region had not seen significant rain for five years. Dusty main streets were deserted and shops boarded up. Water is the lifeline of these outback townships and until the much-needed rain arrives these towns will continue to decay.

Traffic gradually became heavier and we found ourselves sharing the road with massive 90 tonne road trains. While the drivers of these behemoths were unfailingly polite it was apparent that our slow pace was a safety issue. We consulted our regional maps and, where possible, continued our journey off the main heavy transport corridors.



On the third day we reached West Wyalong, a large rural centre in New South Wales located in the unfortunately named “Shire of Bland”. Leaving the town there was an ominous, almost terminal, noise from Les’ engine and his bike coasted powerless to a stop. We congratulated him for a breakdown in a town, on a bitumen road and under a tree and proceeded to examine the bike. A broken primary chain was discovered, replaced and we were back on the road in half an hour. Later that afternoon we reached the nominal

half way point in the journey and we stopped to celebrate – each one of us slightly incredulous that we’d made it this far!



As we turned northwards on the fourth day the geography slowly changed. Wide open plains became gently undulating country with even the occasional hill to challenge the little bikes. The mountains became visible on the horizon and we travelled through beautiful bushland and along quiet avenues of eucalypts. We spent a memorable night in Bendemeer in a bike-friendly pub with fabulous rooms and great food and set off the next day for the climb over Great Dividing Range.



During the morning we wound our way slowly through miles and miles of tight, narrow roads through national parks surrounded, on each side and above, by towering trees, vines and huge ferns. The trees dripped moisture on the road and the dank-fresh rainforest smell heightened our senses as the little beezas thumped around the twisty curves. In the afternoon the climb started in earnest and the bikes pulled above the forests, up, up, up. Second gear needed on the steeper climbs but they kept

going. Rounding a hill at the summit I saw Peter astride his bike, a silly grin on his face, and smoke pouring from his primary case. “One dead clutch, I think”. He said.



We stripped the clutch by the side of the road – it was indeed dead, the clutch inserts changed from cork to charcoal. We replaced the burnt plates with spares we carried and set off. The descent started at once and we at once understood that we'd made it to 4,500 feet and were heading down the other side!



After a night in Casino we set off on our sixth and last day, the departure to be a repeat of our first morning. Light misty rain. As we rode through the rainforests the rain increased until it was consistently heavy. Trickling rivulets found their way down our necks, into gloves and boots. With only a hundred miles to go no amount of rain could stop us smiling. We crossed the border of New South Wales and Queensland and at Tweed Heads saw the Pacific Ocean for the first time. Along the Gold Coast Highway, rain thrumming on our helmets, visors fogged, we continued, four old BSA motorcycles surrounded on both sides by modern, high rise Gold Coast condominiums. Along the Indy Car street circuit the bikes thump, thump, thumped not missing a beat.



With the entrance to the Treasure Island Holiday Park visible less than 400 metres ahead, Les' bike spluttered to a stop for the sixty-ninth, and last, battery swap of the journey!

We turned into the rally site, soaking wet, oily, ecstatic. We'd made it!

FACT FILE

Bikes:	BSA C11
Capacity:	249cc
Years:	1948-1952
Number of bikes:	4
Miles traveled:	1,372 each
Petrol consumption:	110 mpg
Oil	7 gallons total
Battery changes:	69
Broken:	One dynamo, one dynamo chain, one primary chain, one clutch plate

Tony Morisset