

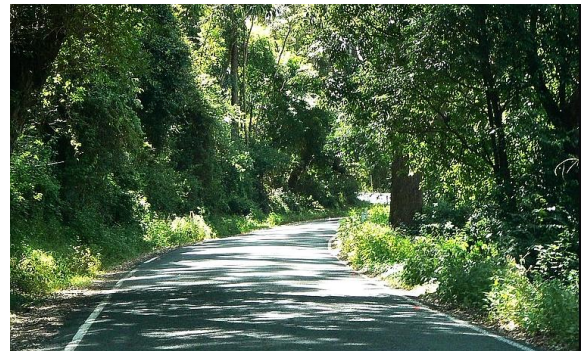
# REGRETS – I HAVE A FEW...

Story: Chris Bult. Photos: Online sources

Prior to moving to Port Stephens, the bride and I lived in the Southern Highlands. There are some wonderful driving roads in this beautiful part of the world, but occasionally they can bite back!

Circa 2014, and I'd been down in Fairy Meadow to the Harley-Davidson dealership buying bits for my ageing 1993 Electra-Glide 'Sport' (*now there's a misnomer if ever there was one*). Living in Moss Vale, my usual route home was up to the top of the 700-metre-high escarpment via Macquarie Pass; but for some inexplicable reason I decided to take the lesser known and even more challenging Jamberoo Mountain Pass. It was mid-winter and by the time I reached the lovely town of Jamberoo it was coming on dusk. Furthermore it had started to rain, albeit light, but nonetheless planted the first seeds of concern in my mind. Undaunted I pressed on and began the steep and twisting climb up the pass – then into thick fog, or more likely low cloud tumbling down the hillside. Suddenly those aforementioned seeds started to sprout alarmingly.

Now for those who know this particular road, they will surely agree it makes Macquarie Pass, to quote the Pythons – “Sheer bloody luxury”. At this time of the year dense vegetation means it sees little sun, the narrow road surface becomes a delicate shade of green from the indefatigable moss that clings on, and there is even occasional water hazards crossing the road when it rains. And it was raining even harder now. Then to make the journey even more treacherous, it was almost dark.



*Parts of Jamberoo Pass – on a good day!*

So there I was, riding a bike weighing over 360kg, on tyres about 4” in width, on a surface that felt like black ice, with rain in my eyes and vision through the murk of about 10 metres; and all up a steep hill. So why not just stop, turn around and roll gently back down the hill? There's no stopping on this pass, especially when almost dark. The road is narrow and convex, to a degree where the camber is very severe on both sides. In short, it's a goat track. On a fine dry day it's challenging, but I found myself in the exact opposite of fine. And I was also very aware that any oncoming vehicles would be taking up the entire road and not see me until the very last second; and the additional risk of cars coming up behind, unable to see my feeble red tail light through the gloom. But I pressed on, middle of the road, endlessly slipping the clutch to prevent wheel-spin, whilst delicately applying the rear brake to stabilize the heavy bike through endless corners. Never mind that I wouldn't even see an illuminated bright orange truck coming toward me through this pea-souper. It was hang on and hope for the best.

Then finally Lady Luck stepped in. I came up behind a car understandably gingerly travelling at a snail's pace. So I tucked in behind this godsend for the remainder of the climb; and although slipping and sliding around like a novice

Sumo ice skater, finally made it to the top; and heaving a huge sigh of relief popped out of the clouds onto a wide level road for the rest of the trip home. It felt like I'd held my breath for the entire ascent and combined with the adrenaline coursing through my hardened arteries, the shakes kicked in when I realised just how lucky I was to have made it in one piece. Hindsight being a wonderful thing of course, it was a poor choice of route. But like many things in life, it started out okay with all the best intentions, then slowly but surely, went pear shaped, with literally no turning back.

I've subsequently ridden that road on many occasions and it's a wonderful ride. But always in mid- summer, sun high in the sky and not a cloud in sight. Lesson learned.