

A LONG RIDE WITH A PILLION

The story of the long ride with a pillion began in around 1979, from memory. I worked in Melbourne and had a girlfriend (later, wife) who lived in Hervey Bay. In those days we would work 10 night shifts and get 6 rest days in a row afterward. I would hop on my bike at 7am and ride it non-stop to Hervey Bay, (apart from fuel stops). I always took the inland route through West Wyalong, Coonabarabran and up through Dalby, St. George. The bike was a BMW R100RS.

I'd stay with the girlfriend for two days, then start riding back. (*Remember when we were young and indestructible?*). Looking back, it was kinda foolish but, as I say, I've always been lucky.

Anyway, on one trip I met a mate who was keen to get back to Melbourne pronto. He suggested he comes back with me, as pillion. I suggested he was out of his mind. "I don't stop for anything but fuel mate. No smoko stops or restaurant breaks." He was undeterred so off we went.

The first 8 hours or so went ok, but as he tired and got bored he, inevitably, started falling asleep. He'd wake with a fright and be ok for another hour or so. As you will know, this is a big problem on a bike. So, we got some ocky-straps and ran them around the both of us. (*I know, this is even dumber and could have pulled me off with him. Didn't think of that. Young, dumb and dangerous!*). But, it seemed to work ok and held him on pretty well.

After about 20 hours, we crossed into Victoria around Tocumwal (from memory). There followed a very long, straight stretch of road without deviations. I'd say we were travelling at around 140kmh. It was night and it appeared that a storm had passed through ahead of us. The ditches were full of water but it wasn't raining. I realised I had become mesmerised by the road and fatigue and suddenly became aware of a large tree which had fallen, completely blocking the road. We were going way too fast to stop in time. I immediately began emergency braking but it was obvious that we were going to hit the tree. Making a snap decision, I reckoned the tree had fallen from the left, and the right-side would be mostly branches. Our only hope was to get as far to the right as possible. I got the bike down to about 80kmh and went as far right as I dared (ditches were full of water). At the very last second I ducked down behind the fairing and we crashed through the branches.

Now picture this.....my mate was on the back, asleep. He woke up with a start to observe that I had disappeared and he was flying through a tree and being showered with broken glass from the wing mirrors. It would be fair to say he was startled; it would be accurate to say he was terrified!

Meanwhile, I popped my head back up and dropped down a few gears and figured, "Well, we can't move such a big tree, may as well keep going." Old mate on the back is tapping my shoulder and *begging* to stop. "Just one cigarette Dave, please!" So we stopped and I watched a very shaky hand light a fag while we considered which of the Road Gods was watching over us that night.

Sadly, old mate was killed on a Ducati not long after that. And I learned a lesson aboutwell, about a lot of things I guess. Avoid "Destination-Focus". Beware of sneaking fatigue; and, most importantly, slow down a bit.