



## Journey to Timbuktu

### **If I can't find time to ride the whole 28 days journey to Timbuktu are there options?**

Yes, you could ride the FLY-RIDE version, which is one way to Timbuktu and back to Bamako. You then fly home and we transport your bike to the UK. This will take around 18 days. If you would only like to see the Dakar Rally and ride towards the Mauritanian border and turn back at Tan Tan then try the 12-day option. The 12, 18 day and 28 day options include a guide escorting you back to the start. There your bike will be safely warehoused before being trucked back. All normal freighting insurances apply in Europe.

### **Is there a lot of off-road riding?**

About 700 kilometres. We've now tried and tested the route and I'm taking my R1! A sports bike could do it at a push. There are 200 or so kilometres are piste with reasonable corrugations (rippled surface) north of Bamako and a further 200 kilometres on the last leg to Timbuktu after Bamako, which is tougher but has very little sand. This second section has also to be ridden on the way back to Bamako. Much of the journey across Spain, Morocco and Mauritania is well surfaced with high quality asphalt. In fact the road in Mauritania is brand new.

### **Do I have to be an experienced off-road rider to do this journey?**

No. I have never ridden off-road. I know that the *piste* with its hard packed surface shouldn't pose any problems. The secret is to ride as light as possible and we will be carrying your luggage anyway.

### **Will the unsurfaced route have much deep sand?**

There is very little soft sand – short patches - and as we are there in the dry season it should be much easier to cross.

### **What if I've never ridden in sand before?**

A little practice before hand is always a good thing but this is not the big problem you think it is.

### **What happens if I just can't manage the piste?**

If it just over whelms you, we will discuss the possibility of ferrying your bike across these sections. If there is a way and you have the will, there is no question whatsoever of you not making it to Timbuktu!

### **What happens if I fall off?**

You get up, brush yourself down and carry on. You'll be surrounded by crew and support vehicles at all times plus all the riders. The best thing about a journey like this is the great camaraderie it will engender. We will all be helping each other through the hard times. Great friendships are forged out of such occasions.



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### **What happens if my injuries are serious?**

In all my tours we have only had one bad accident and even then he suffered nothing more than a broken thumb! It's highly unlikely you'll get hurt but if it does happen, all my motorcycle crew will have a good first aid kit, this will be more extensive in the support vehicles. We will make sure you are comfortable and will in the first instance take you to the nearest hospital. If your injuries are more serious we will implement the conditions on your mandatory medical insurance policy which includes if necessary an air-lift home. Don't worry about your bike; we'll look after that for you.

### **What happens if my bike is damaged?**

We'll try and fix it. If that's not possible we'll try and take it to a mechanic – a welder for example in case of frame or wheel rim breaks. Failing that you may use the spare bike but may have to share it with other riders who may wish to use it. Again, in 2007 everyone who wanted to get to Timbuktu managed to get there apart from 1 rider. Please bear in mind that breakages are rare if you ride carefully, it's as simple as that.

### **Will I get to see The Dakar Rally?**

Absolutely. This is one of the major reasons for this trip. The longer you stay on it the more you will see. We think of this journey as being a British supporters contingent to cheer on our riders for having a go. Not only will you see them but we will arrange for you to meet some of the riders and Dakar organisation personally who one can assume will be delighted to have such interest shown for what is a world class event.

### **Will we be able to camp near the riders?**

We will stay in the towns where they stay for as long as is possible en route. In 2007b we saw the Dakar 4 times in the desert.

### **Apart from the published price, are there any other costs?**

Extra costs are kept to a minimum. You will need to purchase a return flight from the UK to Lisbon but if you book early enough this will be very inexpensive. The closer to the start that riders book, the greater the cost of the ticket. Breakfasts will be supplied as part of the costs but lunches and dinners are at the riders own cost. There are the usual bike running costs, mostly fuel. If you are riding one way or are returning from Tan Tan, then you need only the tyres you are riding. 28-day journey riders will need to bring along one spare set of tyres, which we will carry. There are no tyre changing facilities so these must, and can, be done by hand.



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### **What standards of accommodation are we to expect?**

We will supply you with good quality hotels where possible. In Morocco, these will be individually selected inns used by Nick for many years and are excellent, friendly and safe, with safe bike parking. In the desert between towns and cities there are no hotels so we will create our own campsite. The estimate at the moment is that at least 75% of the accommodation will be in a minimum of 2 star hotels, better wherever possible. Part of the beauty of being in such a ruggedly wild place as Africa is the uncertainty. Plan as we might, things happen, booked hotels close down and new ones are built which we are able to take advantage of at the last minute. If we want to see *'The Dakar'* then we will be in the desert and like them we will have to build our own bivouac.

### **If we have to build our campsite, what does this mean?**

You bring your own tents and sleeping bag. A campsite kitchen will be erected and simple food will be served. Everything else is *al fresco*, as they say.

### **What will it be like riding in Morocco?**

Luxurious compared to further south so enjoy it. Hotels are good, food excellent and the people are hugely friendly.

### **What will it be like riding in Mauritania?**

Harder than Morocco but the people are still friendly. Not many motorcyclists pass through here so expect curiosity without being hassled. You will be riding through the western quarter of the Sahara Desert, which is barren and isolated but beautiful.

### **What will it be like riding in Mali?**

Malian people are said to be amongst the friendliest in Africa. Certainly it is an important democracy and home to many proud tribes such as the famous Tuaregs. The Dakar Rally doesn't always pass through these parts so you are the heroes now and crowds will greet you as you cross the line into Timbuktu.

### **Will we actually get to Timbuktu?**

We did it in 2007 and got 18 riders there, the most in one go anyone has achieved. So as long as the political situation remains stable and there are no reports of banditry we will get there. I've been to Africa several times and myself, along with my crew, have been around the world many times between us. Collectively we have more travel experience than any motorcycle-touring outfit in the world and if we can't get you there, then no one can. So the answer to this is, *'if you put the effort in, we will get you there!'*

### **How many riders do we need to make this event viable?**

A minimum of 10 riders is required, which we have.



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### **How does this journey differ from an ordinary tour?**

An ordinary tour usually tells you what to do and what to think! I have known riders switch off from all responsibility when they go on tour and this is not unreasonable as they are on holiday. However, this is closer to an expedition than a tour. It's tougher than a tour and at times you will be uncomfortable, arrive late into a hotel and the hot water has run out, because you are in Africa. You will need to be alert at all times. A simple mistake might mean you going home early. This is unlikely however. In 7 years of leading riders around the world, no one has had to go home early through any fault of their own.

### **PRE-JOURNEY INFORMATION**

#### **What bike spares do I need to bring?**

This will be posted on the site nearer the time. Once we have an idea of what bikes are being used by riders we will have a clearer idea. The reassuring thing about modern motorcycles is that they rarely break down and we don't anticipate having to deal with something we can't fix.

#### **Who will carry my spares?**

We will in one of the support vehicles.

#### **What sort of personal equipment will I need to bring?**

Again, a proper evaluation of needs will be discussed nearer the start but in the first instance you will need simple toiletries, one change of lightweight clothes, a pullover for the desert as it gets cold once the sun sets. Winter riding gear is necessary for Spain and Morocco, as we will be crossing the Atlas Mountains twice. Plus of course you can bring a camera, video camera and so on.

#### **Do I need maps, compasses?**

GPS is always a good idea; otherwise we will supply you with your maps.

#### **Will I get lost?**

Not if you stay with the pack on the main road / *piste*. There will be strict measures enforced to make sure procedures are in place to counter this happening in the first place.

#### **Who organises visas and other paperwork?**

You do. You will need a Mali visa only. The Mauritanian visa will be purchased by you at the border.



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### **Will I need a carnet for my bike?**

Yes and this is something you will have to organise yourself in conjunction with the RAC. A carnet is like a passport for the vehicle. It also indemnifies you against import duty charges and is a legal requirement. It is not a difficult process but once applied for takes several weeks so last minute applicants will be difficult to process. Please bear this in mind when thinking about applying. Only under special circumstances and in agreement with the RAC can you apply to join London – Timbuktu after October. We will pay for the cost of the carnet but the indemnification is at your cost. Not difficult and if you do it the right way this process is almost at no cost.

### **ON ROUTE INFORMATION**

#### **What support will there be on the journey?**

Depending on the number of riders that apply, there will be a total of two support vehicles, a total of 6 crew including 2 motorcycle guides. We are looking at a support vehicle with 2 crew and 1 motorcycle guide per 12 riders.

#### **What will the weather be like?**

Cool in Spain, much warmer in Morocco and warmer again as we ride south. The Sahara Desert is at its coolest in the winter, quite cold at night (although quite warm in 2007) but beautifully warm to hot, maybe as high as 30 degrees centigrade and more. There will be a low risk of rain in Mauritania and Mali. 80% of the journey will be dry and bright.

#### **What happens if I want to go back early?**

You can but you'll have to ride back alone at your risk or join the 12 day group that turns back at Tan Tan. You cannot switch from the 28 day trip to the 18 day trip because truck / van space to return riders will have been allocated.

#### **What happens if, for whatever reason, there is a disruptive rider?**

This is difficult. In 2007 I had to dismiss one rider, the first time in nearly ten years of running tours. If you are dismissed, and this is done for the morale and therefore safety and enjoyment of other riders on the trip, you will be given return support with crew unless you wish to return alone at your own risk. Let's hope it doesn't happen.