



NICK SANDERS

When it comes to iconic figures in the adventure motorcycling world, there are none more enigmatic than Nick Sanders. Here, **Harriet Jordan** looks back at his exhaustive list of achievements, and delves into the mindset necessary for such an extreme life in the saddle.

N

ick Sanders is a man of many firsts. On the 9 of June 1997, he achieved a world record 19,930-mile circumnavi-

gation of the globe in a record time of 31 days and 20 hours. This journey set the precedent of what has been an extraordinary 36 years for Nick. He has since been the first person to ride from Alaska to Tierra del Fuego and back in under 49 days, 17 hours. The first to lead paying clients on a concept tour to the Top of the world Highway in Alaska, and to lead 22 riders 33,000 miles around the world in 2002. He is also the first (and probably only) person to have flown Victoria Wood in a hot air balloon all in the name of entertainment.

The guy is still very much on the move,

something I soon learnt after trying to track him down on his canal boat. When I eventually managed to catch him (he was, at the time we spoke, travelling the waterways towards Cornwall) he explained that he splits his time between his boat and his home in Wales, where he stores all his bikes.

"I have four R1s, including the bike I took across the globe in 19 days in 2005, two Yamaha Super Ténérés and an XT660, which I've modified, putting a sidecar on it. Oh, and an old Triumph Daytona that carried me across the world in 31 days as well as the Enfield Bullet from my 1997 record". I asked Nick if they were a trophy cabinet of sorts for all his achievements, he didn't think so. "Despite keeping them all, I don't get too attached to my bikes. I see them differently to most people, as to me they're multifunctional. I'll stick bags on either wing mirror of my around the world

R1 and take it down to the co-op to do my weekly shop". It's quite comical to imagine the people, off on their weekly shop, that have pulled up in the car park blissfully unaware that the bike next to them has circled the world.

In terms of his love affair with motorcycles, Nick was a late bloomer. "When I was in school I wanted to be a professional racing cyclist, to ride the Tour de France and all of the classics". Had he of been into motorcycling? "I would have undoubtedly been a road racer, no question about it. I have a feel for riding my bike on the road and an affinity with the Irish racing movement. I went to live in France when I was just 18-years-old and earned my living as a semi-professional racing cyclist until I was 22, so I got half way there I suppose."

It was cycling that gave Nick that nudge towards a career in long-distance motorcycling. "Cycling allowed me to ►



cover vast distances with hardly any money. I felt in my mind that I wanted to stand out a little bit, as we all do. We're all trying to expose ourselves to an identity which we feel comfortable with, whether that's being a celebrity, or perhaps not. Either way, I wanted to stand out amongst the crowd and create an identity I was comfortable with."

"On a trip to Cairo, I was trying to get into Sudan and I needed a new passport in order to be allowed in. The Vice Consul said to me, 'what do you want to be?' So, I said I'll be an explorer, and he wrote it down. Very pretentious, I know," he laughs. "But that's the way you are when you're 23."

As an 'explorer', it'd be a truism to say Nick has collected one hell of a lot of stories. Tales such as having to negotiate in Mexico to save the life of one of his support drivers, who was being held handcuffed along with their vehicle and two bikes. But, putting the rather osten-

tatious title aside, Nick is a firm believer that sensationalist stories like these arise out of poor adventuring.

As an adventurer, he said, "you're like a surfer, trying to surf the perfect wave. You want a motorcycle adventure without any flaws. You want to be boring. You want to come back without having a gun put to your head, or being handcuffed and thrown into jail. The so-called highlights that some adventurers come back with are based on poor adventuring."

It was interesting to talk with Nick about how the adventure bike scene had changed. What does it mean to be an adventurer nowadays? "It's completely different now, people bank into adventuring. Ranulph Fiennes said recently, 'everything has been explored' and in a sense, he's right. What I did was a first. Not motorbiking around the world as a lot of people have done that, but I went faster. I put the idea that you can put sport into adventuring. You didn't

have to ride a BMW, grow a beard, speak German and travel around the world in two to five years. It was the idea of going around the world in a month that set the bar and I continued to that, one quantum leap at a time to going around the world in 19 days, and so on."

"I like the idea of being the naughty boy; the Dennis the Menace or Alf Tupper who goes and eats fish and chips and then runs a four-minute mile in the *Beano*. I very much relate to these classical, boy's own myths. I was one of the lads. We've sort of lost that now, the days have gone where being a gal or a lad was quite important to a young person's identity."

"The adventuring scene has become very sophisticated, Redbull has come along with their extreme adventuring and it's altogether different. People look for short, sharp impact. It's very much a YouTube world of data collection and free viewing and that's what we're up against. And, because there's so much free view-

NICK'S LIST OF ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- 1981** - Fastest Circumnavigation of the World by Bicycle
- 1983** - First to Cycle to the Source of the White Nile
- 1984** - Fastest Ride Around the Coast of Britain
- 1985** - Fastest Circumnavigation of the World by Bicycle
- 1986** - Cycled across the Sahara Desert from Manchester to Timbuktu
- 1990** - Cycled the Length of the Americas
- 1992** - Longest Canal Boat Journey: from the Black Country to the Black Sea
- 1994** - First to Ride an Enfield Bullet around the World
- 1996** - Fastest Circumnavigation of the World by Motorcycle
- 2002** - First to Lead 22 Riders around the World
- 2004** - Rode around the world twice
- 2005** - Fastest Circumnavigation of the World by Motorcycle
- 2012** - First to Ride the Pan American Highway Twice Non-stop and in 46 days.



ing, you almost don't know which way to look."

Nick is in no way disconnected from this kind of world, though. By documenting his long-distance motorcycle journeys online, he became one of the first internet bloggers. Nick self-filmed every journey, which is quite a feat if you consider the amount of time spent riding past the camera and then looping back to retrieve it, check the shot and do again, and again. And he was working against the clock, remember.

"I've never been interested in fame or money, that's not (and still isn't) my reason for doing things. If it was I'd have been a lot more famous with a lot more money. What I have done is be a storyteller, a chronicler of an epoch, and for me, that's more valuable – that's a sharing enterprise. How rich or poor I become has only relevance to me, whereas my stories are a shared experience."

"I'm a data technician, I'm there to re-

cord everything I can", he told me when asked if travelling at great speed sacrificed an encounter with each new place. "You know when you speed read – you read faster, but it doesn't mean you don't absorb it. I'm acutely aware of my surroundings so speed is irrelevant. Having said that, I'm sure you'd have a different frame of reference if you were travelling slower. It was not my choice, but rather the nature of the beast. It's what I had to do to get funding and not sell my house."

"You can argue that there's a certain amount of compromise, but I try not to compromise too much. For example, I was speaking to Robert Dunlop and he said to me that he can make out people's faces from the crowd when he's riding past them at 180 miles per hour, and I used to be able to do just that."

People often use words like 'mad' or 'crazy' to describe Nick's journeys. He's portrayed as a man that has a different mentality to the rest of us, almost like

he's riding another frequency. And while there's probably some truth to that, when asked about his current tours, he explained that, "people want to be taken on an adventure that enlightens them. The experience is on the verge of being spiritual. You have an itch for adventure that needs to be scratched and sometimes if it hasn't been scratched for a while, it reforms and needs to be dealt with again." When you put it like that, Nick's expeditions across the globe suddenly feel all too relatable.

Nick Sanders's new film, *Extraordinary Life of an Ordinary Man*, is now available to purchase online from www.nicksanders.com. This feature-length film gives you a fascinating overview of his entire adventure motorcycling career, and shows you what the man behind the visor is really like as you hear from close friends, family members and ex girlfriends. **ABR**