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Around the world with Kudu and BMW Motorrad



Ever felt like packing your panniers and heading off into the great unknown? Former bomb disposal expert Lee Mears did exactly that and has since made a career of leading other intrepid adventure riders down some of the same roads that he has travelled.

After leaving the British Armed Forces in 2005, the avid off-road motorcyclist set up Kudu Expeditions, a company that specialises in quite literally expanding people's horizons. Lee and his colleagues offer riders of all abilities the chance to ride across some of the most spectacular terrain in the world, some experiencing off-road motorcycling for the first time, others seeking new opportunities to hone their skills in challenging conditions.

One of the most popular expeditions Kudu organises is an expedition from Paris to Dakar that features a three-day ride through the Atlas Mountains and includes three days experiencing Mauritania and the Sahara desert. Lee explains: "The Paris to Dakar expedition that we run is probably one of our most popular trips, probably due to the fact that it only lasts three weeks, compared with the big 16-week trips through the Americas that we also organise. We've just finished our third Paris to Dakar trip and we are constantly scouting for new routes, new accommodation and ways to make each one different."

So what made a successful Officer in the Armed Forces turn to motorcycle riding as a profession? "I was in the military for seven years working as a bomb disposal operator. I had a fantastic time with the Forces, but was keen to set up my own business. I remember being on a bus in Algeria and I saw a British man on a motorcycle in the middle of nowhere, blasting past the bus in his sandals and shorts. I immediately made up my mind that I would love to do that one day, so I passed my motorcycle test and then when I was on leave from the Forces I

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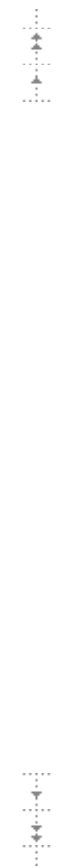
packed my bags and rode from the UK to Ghana.”

For most people, these kinds of expeditions – the likes of which Ewan McGregor and Charley Boorman have brought to the masses via their Long Way Round and Long Way Down television programmes – are usually the stuff of dreams. However, Lee and his Kudu colleagues aim to turn these dreams into reality for people who may not have the courage to ‘go it alone’. The company offers inexperienced riders a pre-event preparatory training course and even special off-road lessons while en route in the wilds of Morocco! Participants can either elect to take along their own motorcycle or use one of the fleet of BMW F 650 GS Dakars that the team relies upon.

However you decide to approach one of the trips, Lee guarantees amazement and adventure in equal measure. “Every day is out of the ordinary on the African trips!” he exclaims. “There are many problems that you can face there, the main one being the isolation. I can remember one guy who disappeared into the desert and we didn’t see him again for another two hours. The look on his face when we found him again was priceless! Also, on another African trip I remember crossing the Congo River into Kinshasa. Among all of the frantic activity on this riverboat, we were just a bunch of travel-worn motorcyclists staring in disbelief at the goings on around us. Africa does that to you!”



So what kinds of people join these adventure tours? “We get a varied mix on the trips,” says Lee. “We have all types including successful businessmen, plumbers, mechanics and IT workers. Likewise, people of all nationalities take part. On the journey we have just returned from we had guys from New Zealand, France, Sweden and Holland so it’s a great place for people to meet and when they get back they have new friends for life.”



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Those who participate on a Kudu expedition are treated to a full back-up team including support vehicles, trained medics and mechanics, and of course Lee himself. An experienced all-terrain rider, he explains how he first got to grips with the challenges of riding off the beaten track: "On my first trip to Africa I got to the border between Morocco and Mauritania, and was confronted with 400 miles of desert and a minefield to contend with before I got to the next section of tarmac. Needless to say I learnt pretty quickly."

That's hardly what you call a weekend ride in the country! But it does raise the issue of security and how safe it is to ride through some notoriously volatile areas. But with his military background and experience in the region, Lee assures potential participants that they are in capable hands. "I really enjoy taking the relative novices on the Paris to Dakar trip as they learn all they need to know on the training course in Morocco en route," he says. "We take them to some really remote places where you barely see another person – let alone another vehicle – and by the end of the course they are fully capable off-road. In terms of security, if you know where the problems are likely to be, you avoid them. Having travelled through Africa many times in the past, I know the trouble spots and potential flash points so I can steer our riders clear of them."

For Lee, 2008 represents a year of discovery. His unstoppable vision to create memorable motorcycle journeys on BMW bikes has led him back to the drawing board to plan a round-the-world expedition for next year. This will involve travelling the globe aboard his BMW F 800 GS finding the most remarkable terrain and scenery for a once-in-a-lifetime experience to offer to his customers.

For more information on Kudu Expeditions visit www.kuduexpeditions.com

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