

## A Letter From India Continued: Part 2 Ladach Monastery

Some time later.....

Today we are having a rest day in Leh after a couple of solid days riding over the Mountains. So far all of us have had a few "experiences" with the local traffic but have come out relatively unscathed. We've done a few water crossing and some time the road becomes the creek for a few hundred metres and funnily enough snow melt is damn cold! A couple of people managed to find the deepest part of the creek and had to be pulled out much to their embarrassment.

We were up at 5,300 metres yesterday on the worlds second highest road and for all those people who are fit out there (which is one at last count) try exercising at altitude, the bike was being a bit difficult to start and after kicking it over 6 times to start it I was puffed out and had to stop for a rest. Most of us have had some symptoms of altitude sickness The other night we were camping out and I had a blinding headache all night. I was not a happy camper the next morning.

While you ride through the mountains the local roads authority have put up helpful road signs to try and cut the number of road accidents. Signs like "Be gentle on my curves" may not stop a truck from plugging over a cliff but at least you can have a giggle before you hit the deck.



The food has been very good we tend to eat in the Hotel at night but during the day we stop by roadside places and it's always interesting. I can understand why a lot of the locals are vegetarian after seeing a few of the local butchers. Just today on my way to get lunch I watched this old bloke from a food stall on the street wash a plate over the street drain he picked up a hand full of dirt to scrub the plate, I don't know where he got the water from and didn't hang around to find out. With all this in mind you will all be glad to know that I have succumbed to the local bugs and have been contemplating nature several times a day. All praise to the great god Imodium.

It's now several days since I wrote that last piece of prose and I'm nearly at journeys end. We rode to the highest pass (5,660 metres) and did the

standard photos and that sort of thing. We did have a small problem with the army boys on the way up as they threatened to shoot us if we tried to continue up the road unless we went back to town for a permit. While I was riding an Enfield Bullet I knew it was slower than a 308 bullet so we decided that discretion was the better part of valour so we got the permit. I have a new respect for people who climb Mt Everest, I think they are crazy. I climbed up about 50 metres and was knackered doing that!

After this we made our way north, now I have to make a confession here for many years I have no doubts as to my sanity (i.e. there is none) but when our fearless leader told us that we would have to travel over a military road that was only open from 0500-0700 and that we would have to ride overnight on these crap roads with crap headlights and crap TATA trucks, cows and other assorted road hazards I seriously considered swapping my bike jacket for a strait jacket. We were all unhappy campers. As it turned out it was not too bad although one of the people in our group said he heard a grenade go off shortly after we left one check point. Anyway this road took us into Kashmir and we stayed on one of houseboats for a couple of days, coming down from the mountains the heat is incredible (especially in riding gear). I had been told by a good friend about the house boats in Kashmir but had forgotten about the details so we were all overwhelmed by the interiors of the boats with all the turn of the century furniture and fittings. The boats themselves are quite big about 30 metres in length for the two we had. They sit on the islands in the middle of Dal Lake it was a very relaxing couple of days having the odd cleansing ale or thirteen while watching the snow capped mountains in the distance. We also went to a carpet wholesaler and a few of us bought a carpet (including yours truly). The salesman was very good and had brilliant line of patter. There is no way to win with these guys but at least you can laugh as you sign your life away?!?!?!?



**Dal Lake** We left Kashmir two days ago and the heat is killing us again. All along the road every couple of hundred yards is a soldier or two guarding the tarmac We get stopped a few times a

day buy bored soldiers and they look at our passports and wave us on, I realised that I was getting stopped more than everyone else and I thought that I had better take off black/white palestinian scarf (I use this for the diesel fumes, see below) they were pulling me over more often when they saw my Yasser scarf flying in the breeze. Doh!



Yasser bin lan

A final travel tip for India on Enfield, as motorcyclist you have to put up with road pollution but here you have to love the smell, taste and feel of diesel fumes. I have been wearing one of two scarves and my black/white Yasser scarf is black/brown where it's wrapped around my face. Most of the others are not wearing anything like that and it must be horrible on the lungs. As for the rest of the body any exposed bits are black by the end of the day so a shower is fantastic. The joys of an Enfield!!

We are staying in McLeodganj (don't ask me to pronounce it) for a rest day and then we are making our final trip down to Delhi over the next few days with a train trip to the Taj Mahal as a side trip.

And finally.....

Well this is the end of India and motorcycling and best news is I didn't crash the bike at all!!! Of course I don't want to say how many time I nearly rode off the road or tried to hit a truck, car, cow, horse, goat, person, bus, horse, mongoose, dog, bottomless pothole, motorbike, scooter, cliff face or any combination of above. Lets just say it was more than a few times.....a day. It was a great trip, well organised and never a dull moment. I'm glad I did it.

We went down to Agra to see the Taj Mahal and few other sights and had to fight off the local sellers who are really ferocious I was tempted to buy a whip one of them was selling and use it on the rest of them.

Pictures of the Taj don't do it justice and you really need to see it to properly appreciate it.

Delhi is very, very hot and everyone is trying to sell me something or someone.

I think that I'm just about Indi'ed out now so I'm off to Singapore tonight and hopefully a fight up to Bangkok the Vietnam until then.  
Namaste

