

Ducati Touring

A lot of us wish we could take a nice trip in our Dukes, usually we go for the big touring bikes for anything over 300 miles, but this dude Schmitt man he took this 250 Ducati all da way t'Alaska. Lawd h'v mussy, all da way to Alaska on an upholstered two-by-four. Now don't get me wrong I think those little 250s were just great for hauling ass around town giving them Yamaha ha ha ha has a run for their money but for a long trip? But I guess it aint all that uncommon, cause I got a letter from this guy in St. Pete Florida who was planning on touring da USA and Canada on a 350. Mmm, oh well.

Dennis Micalletti, who is a veteran DIOC member had this article in one of his books and he mimeow-graft it and sent it in and here I am on a Sunday morning sip'n iced tea and typing in mah patio.....on an absolutely gorgeous day in Florida.....jeez...Oh well I've got to get cracking I don't want to get this out to you folks late like the 16th anyway here it is.

MY 10,000 MILE TRIP TO ALASKA

by William L. Schmitt

New York to Alaska and back on a 250cc Ducati with 20,000 miles already on the odometer is an ambitious trip for a rider with only six months' experience. I had five weeks and 10,000 miles to find out, the hard way, how much there is to learn.

A love for the woods and run-down finances dictated camping out. So, guided by my own ignorance and the wisdom of the local surplus-store salesman, I had bought an old down-filled, mummy-shaped sleeping bag, air mattress with built-in pump, small hat-chet, GI mess kit, gallon water container, liquid detergent, lots of matches in a plastic bag, hunting knife, large plastic tarp (8 by 12 feet), 50 feet of nylon rope (500-lb test), personal gear, spare clothing and a knapsack into which most of this went. The sleeping bag and the air mattress went into an army duffel bag; everything strapped onto the back of the bike with the heaviest shock cord I could find. A luggage rack would have simplified matters immensely.



Spares for the bike

Long distance touring, by definition takes you far from the cozy stockroom of your friendly neighborhood motorcycle dealer. I thought it was a good idea to learn just what parts my bike habitually consumed, and to take replacements along. I paid most attention to those failures that would totally disable the machine. For the tires I had dismounting tools, a patch kit and spare tube. For the motor I had points, a condenser, and a spark plug. (If my bike had used generator brushes I would have taken some of them, too.) I made sure the front and rear shocks were full of the right kind of oil, that the wheel bearings had grease, that the battery was full, and that tire pressures were correct. I also carried a spare chain. Everyone has some favorite goo for the chain; I've found a light graphite oil works best. I seems that once a chain runs dry and begins to rust internally, nothing can get in there and save it. I had to learn the hard way.

Of course, I also had tools to undo every fastening on the bike. I did not deceive myself that the manufacturer's tool kit could unscrew 'em all, (Boy did this guy have a lot to learn about Ducati tool kits...ed.) back in the right places without the repair manual. The more I could fix, the more I enjoyed my trip and, somehow, the less went wrong.

So off I went-north from New York City through New York state and into Canada at Niagara Falls. Eventually I made camp on a bluff overlooking Lake Ontario it was accessible only by motorcycle. I had food with me then. But I soon realized how foolish it was to haul something 300 miles when you can buy it when you get there. I would eat lunch at some well-frequented truck stop (I found them to be best) and at about 5 pm I'd stop in a town and buy enough food for dinner and the next day's breakfast. I simplified my culinary tastes somewhat and found that the system worked well.

Riding is Cold Business

Once on the Tran-Canada Highway heading west I encountered the motorcyclist's chief demon--cold. Leather jacket thermal underwear, and lots of coffee are great for a hundred miles or so, but I found that after a full day of riding I had to be pried off my horse at sundown. A windshield would have helped and even a full fairing wouldn't have been a bad idea. But lacking these I discovered, quite by accident, that a couple of pocket warmers fueled by lighter fluid could keep me comfortable if they were buried in the front of my shirt. The first time I tried it I wasn't careful to keep the warmers away from my body and pulled up the night medium-rare, lacking only the apple in my mouth. After that I made sure there was always a layer of clothing between me and the warmers. Crossing Canada seemed to require more lighter fluid than gasoline.

Clothing was, of course, very important. I found that the temperature seemed to drop from 10 to 20 degrees as I speeded up to 60 mph. The clothing's most important function was to break the wind and I found there was no substitute for leather worn over good insulation, such as thermal underwear. I started out underdressed and on the way bought a thick wool shirt that I still ride in today. Further, in case of a spill the thickness of my clothing well might have made the difference between a few bruises and two weeks in plastic surgery. I have never quite gone for the idea of riding around in shorts and a T-Shirt. (DIOC T-Shirts are excluded from this line of reasoning, of course...ed)