



## Llewelyn on Wheels

Ken Llewelyn

This edition, we are running a contributed piece by SQNLDR Neil Collie, who takes us on a trek through India and Nepal on a 500cc Royal Enfield Bullet, so without any further ado...

By SQNLDR Neil Collie

My imagination stirred last year after reading an article of motorcycling on the sub-continent while waiting in the Richmond Dental Section. This led to further investigation that ultimately had me joining an Australian tour party travelling by motorcycle through North India and Nepal over the Christmas and New Year of 2001/02.

I rode a two-year-old Indian built Royal Enfield 500cc Bullet of a design and vintage originally manufactured by the Royal Enfield Motorcycle Co in the UK.

The production line transferred operations to Madras when production ceased in Britain in the mid-1950s. The factory continues to produce about 20,000 hand-built bikes annually with little change from the original specs.

The Bullet is a true classic - the single-cylinder engine produces a deep, throaty rumble and powerful torque and at idle you can count the revs.

Among the Enfield's idiosyncrasies are weak front and rear drum brakes. Forget everything you learnt about relying heavily on the front brake. The drum is only useful for attaching wheelspokes.

Another important tip is to remember that the rear brake pedal is on the left. The gearshift pedal is on the right (one up, three down), and you must learn the ancient art of the kick-starting.

High speed is not what the Enfield is about - it's about aesthetics, nostalgia and style; riding an Enfield gives pure, unadulterated, cruising pleasure. It is the perfect bike for touring through the stunning scenery of India and Nepal, and its stability and grunt allows it to take the extremes of road conditions in its stride.

The tour began in Calcutta. We flew north to Siliguri, before picking up the bikes and heading for the hills, getting used to the bikes and the chaos of riding in India.

The 'system' in India is simple; might has right, liberal use of the Enfield double horns is de rigeur, and if you see a gap, go for it. Watch out for buffalo-hauled carts, tractors, bicycles, people, vehicles appearing from side roads, herds of livestock, sacred cows, scabby dogs, monkeys and dung.

Get out of the way of trucks and buses, and when riding through towns adopt an attitude similar to that required for white water rafting - get into the flow and paddle hard - the adrenalin rush is about the same.

# India with a Bullet



The author, SQNLDR Neil Collie, pictured during one of the many scenic pit-stops on his recent tour of India and Nepal riding a 500cc Royal Enfield Bullet.

Once over the initial shock we were able to sit back and enjoy the passing scenery as the route climbed up into the Himalayan foothills. Here the air and roads were much clearer, with long, winding and hill-hugging sections revealing spectacular views as the road climbed higher.

The daily distance travelled (average about 200km) was generally short, but riding 200km in India and Nepal, given lower speeds and variable terrain, is like riding 600km in Australia.

Riders were never pressured to stick together as a mob as we were well briefed on each leg, and it was up to the individual when they wanted to stop for a rest or to take photographs - running out of film was a bigger concern than running out of fuel.

We generally regrouped mid-morning and mid-afternoon for 'chai' (Indian tea) and again at lunchtime where a roadside curry and tall stories of near-death experiences were part of the routine. We aimed to be at our night's destination before nightfall.

A support vehicle containing the baggage, spares and a team of three Indian mechanics followed us. The mechanics were truly amazing. With few tools and no fuss they could have a rear-wheel replaced and a bike going in about two minutes. After one major spill, they had the entire stove-in front end of a wreck rideable within an hour.

The tour took 26 days including rest days in Darjeeling for Christmas and Kathmandu for New Year. We continued on to Pokhara nestled beneath the Annapurna and Machhapuchhare mountain range, before heading south back into India.

We finished in Delhi, taking a bus trip to Agra and the astonishing Taj Mahal the day before flying home.

This was a fantastic, challenging and totally rewarding trip and I would cheerfully do it all again. It was organised by a chap called Mike Ferris, one the best

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logisticians I have ever met. Look up his web site for further information at: [www.ferriswheels.com.au](http://www.ferriswheels.com.au).

You never know, you might find yourself, as I did, surrounded by the highest mountains in the world, sharing the friendship and camaraderie of a diverse range of people for whom motorcycling formed a common bond.

You may also find out what your parents and grandparents mean when they talk about a 'real' bike.

*I'm always looking for interesting articles on your vehicles or adventures. Please send me an email with your ideas - Ken L.*

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