



Kevin and Karen Browne

Kevin and Karen Browne flew from Japan to New Zealand in December 2010, after despatching their bike by sea. Via the Horizons Unlimited website, they accepted an offer of accommodation and the use of a bike from Rhondda, a Kiwi from Auckland. Here are a few of their experiences.

Kiwi Welcome, December 2010

Rhondda takes us home. She has three grown up 'kids', two at home and a large Australian ridgeback/Alsatian called 'Bishop' who greets us enthusiastically. We see our steed for the next month – it is a Kawasaki Vulcan 800, a good looking bike and it sounds great too.

We hit it off straight away with Rhondda (same feather); she has a wicked sense of humour and a heart of pure gold. How we are ever going to repay her we don't know.

We go for a spin with Rhondda to sample some fish and chips and eat them

with a backdrop of the beach. Later we hoon up and down on her dirt bike. Kev is really giving it some and spectacularly falls off – we roll around in hysterics. Now we know Rhondda is our kind of girl.

There is a toy run organised with approximately 200 bikes going over the harbour bridge. We join in and from here we head to the Ulysses rally in Piha (on the coast west of Auckland).

This is the first rally we've been able to take in on route and it's great fun. In addition to lending her bike Rhondda has supplied a tent and cooking equipment and two spare jackets so we can take off for a tour after the rally until our bike gets here. She is intending to do her own trip to South America in the next few years so I said all her good karma will be repaid on her voyage of adventure.

The rally is a blast; in the afternoon there is a motorcycle "gymkhana" in which Kev, Rhondda and many others participate. There are five courses to test them and they get three attempts at each. They include trying to guess the highest part of your bike and setting a bar to ride under approximately 100metres away, a sprint (on the bike of course) to find a hidden object and then a sprint back. Another requires you to keep your front



Kevin and Rhondda



Nice trike at Piha

Father Christmas is real! 24th December 2010

Woo Hoo! There really is a Santa Claus – we got the one present we were really wishing for – we got the bike off the dock today. The paperwork side of things was fairly pain free apart from on the pocket! and we were allowed to ride her ‘home’ straight away.

Having been sitting for over a month with people poking and prodding her, some things were left switched on so we needed a jump start. We only had one battery isolator key left which I had made out of an old bolt in Mongolia. It is an extremely sloppy fit now and it’s hard to make the switch contact. The bike fired up and the alternator was charging but when it died after a few minutes there wasn’t a sign of life in the batteries. It fired up again with a jump but was running straight off the alternator power; that’s fine but it meant that if I stalled it I would have had problems considering I was in central Auckland traffic (although we are equipped with jump leads).

To add to my stress levels the bike was running on a couple of litres of fuel in the rear emergency tank and the main one was empty. Also once I got moving I realised the front tyre was a bit soft so it was handling very oddly as well. I followed Karen who was in Rhondda’s car out into the city and we pulled into a petrol station. Karen managed to put a few litres of petrol in the main tank without the attendant noticing that the Guzzi was still running.

On Christmas afternoon, Rhondda was having a tinker with her bike so I made a start with the Guzz. My first priority was to try and get some life back in the batteries. Rhondda sent a few of her Ulysses mates an email to ask if anyone had a battery charger for AGM (absorbed glass mat) batteries. They evidently haven’t made it to these shores as no one had even heard of them so I put them on charge overnight on Rhondda’s normal

battery charger and this seemed to charge OK. Next morning the batteries both seemed a lot perkier so I fitted them back in and with a bit of wiggling got one of the isolators to work. Vrooom – off she went and sounded sweet, a nice reward for my hard work.

We discuss routes and tactics with Rhondda who has decided to join us for the first day or two on the way to visit her brother. We are still packing stuff at midday but eventually we get going, dropping in on another mate of hers on the way who has a wonderful collection of Ducatis. We met a couple more of Rhondda’s mates (Rex and Liz) at a filling station and set off together for Port Waikato on the West Coast. Everyone is on 250 dirt bikes apart from us as we are travelling down all the rural gravel roads Happy to have the Spada back

wheel between two lines that zigzag all over the place and then a slalom course around cones picking tennis balls off the top of each one as you pass at each. It is all good fun and very lighthearted.

Later in the afternoon there is a sausage swinging competition which we enter with Rhondda and Tony to make ‘Team Vulcan’. Basically you clip a raw sausage to your shirt on a long piece of string so it hangs between your legs and with a combination of pelvic thrusts, aim and timing you have to try and knock a small plastic ball down the course to your team mates in a relay race. It is funny to participate in and even funnier to watch; we make it through the semis and end up in the final. Much pelvic thrusting (and superior technique) later we whip ‘em to be crowned champions – woohoo!

Later after a delicious Christmas dinner (our first in shorts), the band strikes up and we are invited to choose the best fancy dress male and female, then we all join in with much dancing and partying – good fun!

Sunday morning everyone packs up to go. I look around the area and think there is so much to do, so we ask the lady on site if we can stay one more night. She has to check with her boss but a phone call later they say it’s fine. We say goodbye to Rhondda and the last of the Ulysses people and go out for the day. From now on we are back on our own.





Dirt Road Bikers

A Day at the Races, 5th February 2011

We arrive at Pukekohe (pooky as it's affectionately known) in the drizzle. Jared (Mr Moto Guzzi club NZ) and John Blaymires (Mr superquick Guzzi sidecar racer) come to meet us at the gate. John said on the phone he had one spare free ticket and stars that they are they managed to rustle up another one, brilliant!

Pukekohe circuit is like stepping back in time for us. Sharing with a horse racing track, it is delightfully old school circuit racing. The main car park is a big grassy tree shaded area which you can camp in for free so that will save us three days campsite fees as well.

The bike attracts attention wherever it goes but never more so than when it's gone half way round the world and it's at a petrolhead festival. We answer many questions and get talking to lots of different people. It becomes obvious it's going to be a very social weekend.

After dinner we bump into a guy called Chris. I hoped this might happen at some stage. We have never properly met but I have been aware of Chris for a long time – he hails from Brighton in the UK originally but now lives in NZ. He built the sideways Guzzi chop that won best engineering at the Kent custom show (UK) many years ago amongst many other things.



One of the other things he built which I love is a Vincent powered café racer. He is riding it this weekend so I get chance to have another good look along with many other people. A lot of people think it's got a Spondon frame but in fact Chris built it himself. It is all alloy tube in graceful swooping curves designed to show off the engine. It really is a work of art in itself.

We head off that evening with Chris for a few beers and meet some of his friends Marty and Chris (female) who are really nice people. They have travelled a lot in the US and give us some good pointers for when we are there and an invite to stay at their place in NZ when we are passing. We have a nice evening and via a few more people wobble back to the tent in the small hours.

Next morning there is a

to get there.
It's a great ride down exciting windy roads with spectacular scenery. We hugged the coast for a long time before turning inland and riding down through a limestone valley. We could see the gravel track snaking beneath us as we descended. It was Liz's first time riding on gravel and she did really well; it's quite daunting for the uninitiated as the bike is squirming around on the loose surface quite a lot especially if it's deep.

New Zealand's gravel roads are a lot easier to ride than most Mongolian or Russian ones we encountered as they are better constructed with a proper compacted base. Because of this we haven't had any problems riding them as yet; the only real problem is when they have been resurfaced which makes the gravel deep and scary to ride on, a bit like riding on marbles. Mongolian ones are constructed by people driving wherever the least corrugated and most navigable route is and that becomes the road until it's too knackered at which point the cycle starts again.

We took a little offshoot to Te Akau wharf where the locals are surprised to see us as it is off the beaten track; from here we can look across the harbour to Raglan, our next destination. We arrived late in town; Rex ran out of fuel just on the outskirts but by laying his bike on its side he managed to get enough dregs to reach the petrol station.

By now we were all starving and had our hearts set on fish and chips but we were not alone – half the population of Raglan also wants fish and chips. Placing our orders we are number 23 they have just called number 6. Was it worth the wait! The best fish and chips by a long chalk; beer battered chips and such massive portions that we had to leave some, something unheard of with us.

We wave goodbye to Rex and Lyn as they are heading back home to Auckland tonight. Rhondda leads us out of Raglan to a cheeky free camp. We are not the only ones with this idea but the others are in cars. We pitch our tents round a corner out of sight and have a beer before bed.

Vincent special at Pukehohe



crowd of people looking at the bike before we are even up and we hear them outside the tent discussing with one another what everything does as we are coming round. Once we are up and breakfasted we answer a few more questions and decide to take up the Italian Motorcycle Owners Club's offer and put it down on their stand in the bike park.

Pukekohe has a great laid back atmosphere and it's like going back to proper clubman racing before it all got too serious and expensive in the UK. Some of the competitors are riding tuned road bikes with a number stuck on the side and as we wander around the pits people are happy to talk to us if they aren't too busy.



Nice plumbing on the Britten

There is an impressive selection of machinery and we can't believe how many British bikes are out here. We get our first chance to look at a Britten in the flesh; Andrew Stroud's V1000 is here, what an amazing machine!

The other striking machine was in the Henderson display. They are interesting beasts anyway and they had a Militaire on display. These have the strangest steering system I have ever seen on a motorcycle and outriggers on the back. Our timing was good as the owner fired it up and took it for a demo run while we watched.



We take the bike back to the IMOC stand on Sunday morning and then wander down to the pits to wish the guys luck before having a wander around the circuit. Sunday is the big day and there are a lot more people here.



It's been Karen with Dick Hurdeman

good to be here for the whole weekend as we have already had chance to have a good look around the paddock/pits and got some great pictures when it wasn't so busy. John and Charlie win their race convincingly and everyone has a good day helped by the sunshine. We retrieve the Guzz from the IMOC stand and the guy running it tells Karen it was the most photographed bike there by a long shot.

When the racing is done we wander down to the pits to see the guys and say goodbye to Jared who has to get home. When the guys are gone we wander back to the campsite and are pleasantly surprised to discover that the caravan that was parked close to us is now empty and unlocked. We thought someone had brought it in for the weekend but it obviously lives here so we snaffle it allowing us to pack up our gear to give us an early start tomorrow.

Just as we are finishing we bump into Dick Hurdeman. He and his mate Des Malloy did a trip they called the Last Hurrah from Beijing to Arnhem in 2005 on old British bikes. They were both in their 70s at the time. My good friend Nigel bought me the book for Christmas one year and I read it before we left. Amazingly Dick is still riding the same Norton now, the only difference is it now has a sidecar style box on it as he had a stroke last year and his balance isn't so good. What an amazing guy. Retiring to our caravan we sleep well and next day after stocking up with food we head off to the Coromandel.

22nd February 2011, Christchurch Earthquake

Yesterday we arranged to go for a ride today with Anna, our Guzzi riding friend, around the peninsula southwest of Christchurch.

Barry, our friend in whose house we are staying has already gone to work. I have just boiled the kettle when without any warning there is a loud bang and the house shakes violently. My first instinct is get out of the kitchen area away from all the dangerous stuff. I am lucky there is a door frame very close by but I still manage

to bash my arm on something. Kev yells “get out” and grabs the sliding door and throws himself outside thinking I am behind him. The shaking probably only lasts 30 seconds but I would never have believed something as big and heavy as a house could move so much. When the shaking has subsided Kev comes back in to see where I am and we stare wide eyed at each other for a minute and breathing again we survey the carnage.

We are very fortunate to be in a safe place; Barry’s house is a single storey built on a concrete pad and only five years old so of a high earthquake standard. Having lived with the threat of this he is prepared – things are bolted to the walls and the cooker is chained similarly.

In the kitchen, the cooker is hanging by its chain having been shaken out from the wall. All the drawers are open – this is what bashed my arm. By some miracle the china cups and plates are still on the worktop but in the living room it’s a different story. Every picture and photograph is on the floor together with piles of CDs and books. All this time there is also an undercurrent of movement, the closest I can liken it to is being on a boat at sea – it actually makes us feel quite queasy.

The bike is miraculously still upright having been jolted off its centre stand and landed on the side stand which for some reason we left down. We pick up Barry’s bike, running outside when the garage is shaken by another aftershock as its not a safe place to be.

Kev turns on the TV. The power is still on and Coronation Street is playing but soon they switch to an emergency report. At 6.3 on the Richter scale it’s a big earthquake but less than the 7.1 that shook them in September. That one was further away and 30km deep. This one is closer to the city and only 5km deep so it’s much more devastating. It soon becomes evident that the city centre is badly damaged. Barry soon appears back on his bicycle – he took his car into town this morning to get the crack in the screen fixed!

Barry is a calming influence, he ascertains we have no water so pulls out the pre filled bottles from under the sink. We have power and internet so we begin to let family and friends know we are safe – they are still asleep and will wake to the news in a few hours.

Barry goes to check on his neighbours and shows us the liquefaction on his drive; this is bizarre stuff – the ground shakes so violently that the heavy matter drops away and the light stuff with water bubbles to the surface rather like a lava flow. It is grey and a jelly like consistency but it hardens like cement when dry. This stuff has bubbled to the surface all over the neighbourhood but until it stops and hardens it is not worth clearing up.



Liquefaction

We discuss with Barry our best options and decide to stay the night and leave in the morning. We are unsure which roads have cracked and what is still passable; we will have a clearer picture in the morning. The news informs us that of the eleven sewage pumping stations only five are now working so we are advised not to use the toilet and boil all water if it’s still on as they will divert waste to the rivers.

We manage to get some kip but are woken three or four times by the bigger shakes – one almost has us diving for the doors again. Our hearts go out to the residents of Christchurch; we have only had one day and night of this they have suffered six months of aftershocks from the original quake.

In the morning we start to pack up the bike and say goodbye and thank you to Barry who is going out to check on his family and friends. We leave Barry all the drinking water we can spare and some sterilising tablets. When we fire the bike it sounds like a tractor; the violent shaking has cracked the flange off the left hand exhaust manifold and broken one of the side screens. There will be no one open in town to weld it back on so we make a noisy exit from Christchurch but at least she is still going. There are kilometer long queues at the petrol stations as we leave town but luckily we are full of petrol.

We head north towards Amberley – it is our intention to stay with Anna tonight but at only 50kms from Christchurch all the fuel stations are out of supplies or have really long queues and the local shops almost had riots last night where people were fighting over bread, water and tinned items. As we can only carry enough supplies for 4-5 days it would be silly to remain here and run out so we press on towards Blenheim but first we pull into a garage to get the exhaust welded.



Empty shop

The guys here at Hurunui engineering are really kind to us, they are all into bikes so not only do they refuse to take any money but allow us to make coffee and lunch upstairs in their kitchen. They also inform us Kaikoura, the next town, is out of fuel, a blow as we need to fill up there but we could stay a few nights there. We head on and stop in Kaikoura that night. We manage to refuel as they have had a delivery but even here 150km away there is a policeman controlling the queue and the shops are all stripped of bread, milk, water and other tinned food etc. We stay in a campsite, exhausted but grateful we are okay and that the ground has stopped shaking.