

# Postie Bike CHALLENGE



**Brisbane to Melbourne** Via the  
Outback  
[www.postiebikechallenge.org](http://www.postiebikechallenge.org)

## 2009 Postie Bike Challenge

The 2009 Postie Bike Challenge well and truly lived up to the “Challenge” part of its name but it was also a wonderful adventure and great experience!! As one of the *Challengees* said about half-way through the event: “I have no doubt my Postie Bike will make it all the way to Melbourne – the real challenge is whether or not I will be riding it when it arrives!!”

Ron and I were among thirty-four men and eight women from all walks of life (and three countries) who started the 2009 Postie Bike Challenge – and I was one of the thirty-three men and seven women who completed it<sup>1</sup>. This year’s international *Challengees* were a man and woman from the UK, and five men and one woman from New Zealand. One man and two women had also completed the 2008 Challenge, and two other men were back for either their third or fourth Challenge!!

This is a professionally run and very well organised event and the high level of attention given to detail, and the competence of the support crew, is evident from the outset. All *Challengees* are supplied with a Postie Bike that has been carefully prepared and fully serviced, a milk crate (to carry spare fuel, water, a first aid kit and whatever else will fit in it) and daily running sheets. The day before the Challenge started all the *Challengees* and support crew met for introductions (to each other and the Postie Bikes) and briefing sessions (including a run-down on the daily maintenance routine for the Postie Bikes).

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<sup>1</sup> One woman, Susan, withdrew on the fourth day because she had recently had a hip replacement and the rough, corrugated dirt roads were causing her considerable pain.

Unfortunately Ron fell heavily when he had a low-speed tumble in deep sand on the fifth day which resulted in him breaking his right collarbone.



Getting ready for my first ride on a Postie Bike ...

During the Challenge we were accompanied by five – and sometimes six – support crew (most of whom were First Aiders and two of whom were also motorcycle mechanics) in five support vehicles (four 4WD dual-cab utes and the official “Postie Bike Challenge” truck) all of which were equipped with satellite phones. Apart from carrying extra drinking water, fuel, oil, chain lube and spare parts (including spare wheels and tyres) most of the support vehicles also carried an extra Postie Bike in the event that a broken down or accident damaged Postie Bike could not be repaired on the side of the road. Barring illness or injury all the *Challengees* were expected to ride a Postie Bike for as much of the Challenge as possible!!

Each morning one or two of the support crew would set off in a 4WD dual-cab ute before the *Challengees* to place strategic markers (using surveyor’s tape) and, if necessary, setup at the designated refuelling stop (on the days on which we rode more than 300 kilometres) to provide us with extra drinking water and fuel and, if required, engine oil and chain lube.

Another of the 4WD dual-cab utes towed a long, flat-bed trailer capable of carrying six Postie Bikes and this was the designated “tail-end” vehicle which always travelled behind the last *Challengee*. The other support

vehicles, including the official “*Postie Bike Challenge*” truck (which carried our kit bags and doubled as the mobile workshop and spare parts store), travelled along the same route as us during the day. Along the way the support crew offered helpful advice (eg, “*You really should be riding over there on the hard stuff ...*”) and encouragement, took photos, chatted with us when we stopped for a break and, if necessary, assisted us after our spills.

Each day, when the “*Postie Bike Challenge*” truck arrived at our destination, the mechanics setup a workshop, performed any scheduled maintenance on the Postie Bikes and worked their magic with repairs. They did a fantastic job and often worked on into the night as we sat down to recover, relax, share our day’s experiences and enjoy our evening meal!!



The “*Postie Bike Challenge*” truck ...

We camped in tents most nights (for our stay in Jindabyne we were treated to a bed in a lodge) and all our meals were provided by local community groups. With fully cooked breakfasts on offer every morning, a packed lunch consisting of sandwiches, cake, fruit and juice, and a two course meal each evening keeping weight gain to a minimum proved to be yet another one of the challenges for many (especially as “*seconds*” were always offered).

Over the course of the ten day Challenge we travelled almost 3,300 kilometres and roughly one-third of this distance was on unsealed roads. The daily distances ranged from just under 200 kilometres to more than 460 kilometres and some days we rode more than 250 kilometres on unsealed roads. Over the course of the Challenge the unsealed road surfaces varied from hard-packed dirt to loose gravel, deep sand, bulldust, snow and mud (Chris, one of the *Challengers* from the UK,

said he didn’t realise there were so many different types of dirt roads!!). To their credit the Challenge organisers had carefully planned the route so that, taking the capabilities of a Postie Bike into consideration, it would be as diverse, interesting, and enjoyable as possible.

We left Brisbane quite early on the first day of the Challenge and set off for Goondiwindi just over 400 kilometres away. After making our way through the cities of Brisbane and Ipswich we travelled through small towns and along scenic roads on our way to Goondiwindi.

Day two of the Challenge saw us heading for the “*Bokhara Plains*” cattle station near Brewarrina and this was the first day on which we encountered unsealed roads. In all there were about ten *Challengers* who, like Ron and I, were novices when it came to riding on unsealed roads. Not surprisingly we both had a few spills while tackling the more challenging – and usually sandy – stretches of the unsealed roads. By the end of the Challenge, however, most *Challengers* had had at least one spill!!



Sampling some rough red ...

I soon learned that my Postie Bike was really a “*sand magnet*” in disguise and, as a result, I came off in deep sand three times on the third day (Brewarrina to Hungerford) and twice on the fourth day (Hungerford to White Cliffs). Fortunately all my spills were at low speed and I did not hurt myself. My second dismount on the third day was rather sudden and quite impressive – somehow I spun around and ended up facing the direction from which I had come!! Unfortunately Ron could not avoid becoming part of my accident and, as he ploughed into my Postie Bike, he hurt his left shoulder, hand and hip. We picked ourselves

up, dusted ourselves off, untangled our Postie Bikes and, with the help of support crew, checked them for damage. My Postie Bike had a broken front brake lever and bent rear brake pedal but, despite having almost no brakes, I only had one other minor spill as we continued on our way to Hungerford (an hour away).

Ron and I were way outside our comfort zones riding on these types of unsealed roads (eg, deep sand and loose gravel) and we both had spills within the first 20 minutes of setting out on the fourth day. Despite this ominous start we rode the rest of the way to White Cliffs – and another 150 kilometres of unsealed roads – without further mishap. We travelled at fairly low speeds most of the time but even so we still had a few heart-stopping moments!! By a stroke of good luck we both managed to avoid riding into a large patch of bulldust (it caught many other *Challengees* unawares, resulting in, by all accounts, some spectacular spills) and we gained confidence in riding on unsealed roads as each day progressed.



Some more rough red ...

Day five of the Challenge saw us tackle another 250 kilometres of unsealed roads between White Cliffs and Hillston. We were really looking forward to arriving in Hillston as this marked the end of riding along the red sandy roads. Unfortunately Ron had two spills in deep sand just before noon and, in the second fall, he landed heavily and hurt his right shoulder<sup>2</sup>. With the “tail-end” support vehicle not far behind us Ron was given First Aid treatment almost immediately but when the pain in his shoulder started increasing, and he began to feel faint, an ambulance was called.

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<sup>2</sup> He had actually broken his right collarbone but this was not diagnosed until he was x-rayed in Broken Hill Hospital after being transferred there by the RFDS from Wilcannia.

While we were waiting for the ambulance from Wilcannia to arrive Ron and I discussed my ongoing involvement in the Challenge. He wanted me to continue on and complete the Challenge and, if possible, he would re-join me within a few days. If, however, that wasn't possible he would meet me in Melbourne at the end of the Challenge.

By the time the ambulance left with Ron onboard I was almost two hours behind the next closest *Challengee*. To ensure I had enough time to get to Hillston before sunset my Postie Bike was loaded onto the trailer and I was driven to Ivanhoe to catch up to the next closest *Challengee*. Given the situation I was really grateful for this reprieve especially as there turned out to be another 100 kilometres of unsealed – and sometimes very sandy – road between me and the next *Challengee*!!

As it was I didn't arrive in Hillston until early evening but the support and assistance I received from the other *Challengees* and support crew when I did finally get there was great. Some *Challengees* did the end-of-day maintenance on my Postie Bike for me while others offered to help in various ways. The other *Challengees* were disappointed that Ron had been hurt but they were very pleased he wanted me to complete the Challenge and were supportive of my decision to continue on.

The sixth day of the Challenge was a “rest” day as we travelled the sealed roads between Hillston and Tumberumba. By far the greatest difficulty we faced that day was having to share the road with truck and car drivers, many of whom regarded the Postie Bikes – with a top speed of 70 km/h – as mobile road hazards, as we travelled along the highways through Griffith, Leeton and Wagga Wagga.

The following day we were treated to stunning views as we made our way from Tumberumba to Jindabyne. The countryside was very green and lush compared to the regions we had ridden through just a few days earlier and, on top of that, the Kosciuszko National Park had received the heaviest snow falls of the year (down to 1,100 metres) in the preceding few days. As a result we were surrounded by brilliant, white fresh snow as we rode from Khancoban to Thredbo. Some *Challengees* had never seen snow before and only a few had ever ridden along snow-lined roads. With this being the shortest and easiest day of the

Challenge we had all arrived in Jindabyne by early afternoon. This gave us plenty of time to explore the local shops and, for some, the much needed opportunity to do some washing.



On my way to Thredbo ...

Little did we know when we rode through Dead Horse Gap and Thredbo that we would face another two days of riding along roads (both sealed and unsealed) which were lined by, or covered in, snow. We soon learned that the Victorian Alpine region had also received very heavy falls of snow and that our route would take us along both bitumen and dirt roads in this area. Riding along snow-covered, dirt roads was an interesting experience and there were times when the only part of the road surface we could see was a single set of car wheel tracks – the ground all around us was covered in fresh, deep, powdery snow!!



Tackling snow-covered roads with help close behind ...

We also had to contend with temperatures as low as 5°C and altitudes as high as 1,840 metres as we rode from Jindabyne to Omeo via Suggan Buggan and Benambra and then, on the following day, to Heyfield via Hotham and Dargo. And, as if the those conditions weren't tough enough, there were even a few long muddy patches thrown in for good measure!!



One of the *Challengees* getting down and dirty ...

Most *Challengees* had not expected these very cold conditions and, as a result, they did not bring warm motorcycle clothing, gloves, boots or sleeping bags – fortunately they were able to buy warmer clothing, gloves, boots and sleeping bags along the way. Not surprisingly, however, these few days were a very chilly and unpleasant experience for some – especially those who did not have warm clothing, gloves and/or boots or who wore open-face helmets!!

On the final day of the Challenge we had a leisurely ride from Heyfield to Melbourne via the picturesque Yarra Valley. We arrived in St Kilda early in the afternoon and this gave us plenty of time to settle into our motel rooms (with comfy beds and ensuites!!) before the end-of-Challenge celebrations got underway. With both Ron and Susan joining the rest of us in Melbourne everyone who had started the 2009 Postie Bike Challenge (including our fantastic support crew) was together again!!

The 2009 Postie Bike Challenge was far more demanding and difficult – but also much more rewarding – than I had expected.

Would I do it all again? Definitely!!

Kathy Leslie