

THE BIG PULL 2

THE BIG PULL! What a cool name I thought. I had been invited to join this group in February already, it sounded like a trip of note! 3 days, 380km's through the Transkei from Port St Johns to Kei Mouth.

I made all sorts of excuses not to go, new business to get off the ground, no free time, other commitments etc. (Even after I was told it would be over the long weekend in September)

The truth was, I was very concerned about completing this ride on My beast "Husky 450" This thing had been trying to tear my arms out their sockets for the past year and has cut me down to size on several occasions this season. Eish!

The other major concern was my fitness and the caliber of riders I was expected to keep up with, I new all to well what sort of terrain "they" would be taking us through, this would most definitely not include many open relaxing "forest trails". A fun days riding for this sick group of puppies was spending 4 hours negotiating there way through a 6km river bed and ridiculous climbs, the more ledges and rocks the better! Shooo! Perhaps if you're fit and don't indulge as I do on Fatty Biltong and Ricky Louw this would be ok.

Well, September arrived sooner than I expected and by this time I was feeling so jealous having to listen to how awesome it was last year and how stupid I was to decline and what a lekker bunch of okes were going up etc. This was after all, an "invitational only" ride and only offered to a selective few. What was I thinking when I declined? Grrrr!

I had to do something and I had to do it quick, I mentioned how "silly" I had been to one of the group leaders and also to a couple of the riders that frequent my shop for beers/biltong after work. The very next day I got a call from the organizer offering me a spot, That was if I still wanted to go he said, I of course accepted on the spot. The other big plus for me was; I had managed to pick up an 09 Gas Gas EC300 only one week earlier, in my opinion, this would be a more suitable machine than the 450 I was currently on. Planning had to start soon and I wasted no time. My bike along with many others would be collected at the end of the week and transported to Port St Johns, so when we all arrived the next week everything would be ready and in place. I was informed that all riders had to carry an additional 5l of fuel with them because day one would be 130km with no fuel stop. This was going to be a big problem for me, I usually carry a 3l & 2l hydration bladder with me, to load another 5kgs on my back was not going to work. After a few phone calls I tracked down a 5l "front mount" tank with siphon kit. I last used one of these in the 80's on my 250 Husky but they had an additional tap on. The new ones come with an automatic siphon kit. (What a pleasure). The breather pipe from your tank fits into the cap on the header tank, as soon as you start riding the siphon pipe simply replaces all the fuel used (So you drain the additional weight from the front first).

With the bike prepped it was loaded and sent off with the support crew to Port St Johns.

Wednesday 23rd September 11h30.

Received a phone call, are you ready? We are 5 minutes away big guy! Get ready! Shooo! Where does the time go I thought, looking down at the half eaten pie in one hand and a pint of milk in the other, I quickly jammed it in my mouth followed by the remainder of the milk. At the same time I was also trying to give last minute instructions to my work shop staff about what needs to go out and when. Needless to say, this didn't work as well as I had hoped. With one sleeve of my shirt I think I got all the milk that had made it past my lips the other sleeve was used to clean up the addition gravy that squirted out the pie when I forced it into my mouth.

With that done, it was time to go.

Sure enough, as I walked to the front door there they where, faces full of smiles crammed into a white Fortuner. I squeezed in, greeted the okes and tried to find a comfortable seating position. With 6 of us now in it was time to pull out and hit the road.

As we started rolling the vehicle came to a sudden stop, I could see my wife running out towards the car and shouting, Love, Love! I thought you might want to take this with as she handed a sealed bottle of my favourite Brandy, 2l Coke & my Steel Cup, you know, she said,,,for later on!!! (Yea right I thought)

Both driver and passenger then turned around with this shocked look of disbelief on their faces and commented "How's this???" My response was a simple smile as I thought to myself, shooo! How lucky am I to have a wife like this.

(Note to self! Try and do something special for her, soon!)

As we pulled out I was still trying to find a comfortable position that would allow me to straighten my back and neck with out denting the roof, this was the first time in the back seat of one of these Toyota's, this was going to be a long trip I thought. At this point the "Bomb Shell" was dropped, "Guys! We just have to make a small detour to Kei mouth to pick up another 2 riders; one was a local who was leaving his vehicle there until we get back, the other was an oke from Harrismith who drove down the same day and also needed to leave his vehicle this side of the Kei. Shooo, that would put our head count up to eight in this already cramped vehicle!

The usual conversation broke out as we discussed and tried to figure out amongst us as to what route we would be taking and what sort of terrain we could expect. Coming into Kei Mouth we saw the okes standing outside the Police station waiting patiently for us. We all seemed to have the same idea, use the opportunity to get out and stretch our legs. In my case, I just needed to straighten up my spine and have a smoke break.

I noticed one of the okes run across the road to the shop shouting he won't be long. True to his word, he appeared moments later with a bag of ice in one hand and Styrofoam cups in the other. Now, I know these okes, I've had the privilege of spending some time with them around the cooler box before. This trip was about to change for some of us. Looking back, this was the moment everything changed for me and a few others.

With 8 of us now in the vehicle we set off to the Kei. It wasn't long before I heard it, the distinctive sound of a bottle cap being twisted off with great enthusiasm, followed by ice clanging in my steel cup. Seconds later the "infamous" SS Cup was presented to me, full to the brim with condensation already dripping off the sides. With half the pie from the morning still hovering dangerously high in my throat I took a larger than usual "swig". I now had a mouth full of what I thought would be "nectar from the gods" instead, I had what I believed to be Plascon Paint Stripper! I couldn't swallow, my jaw had now locked in its full open position and to make matters worse, I think I also had an ice block somewhere in there!

With the bottom of my tongue burning like hell fire, teeth starting to ache and nowhere to spit this out I had to swallow, I turned around to the "Dog Box" seats in the rear, this is where the drink came from. With eyes watering, mouth and throat glands in spasms and I'm sure saliva running out the corner of my mouth. In my best "Firm Tone" I asked; WHAT THE "*Censored*" WERE YOU THINKING?

The response was short and sweet; what's wrong boy? Can't you handle it? I looked at the 3 grinning faces behind me and decided to start planning my revenge. We will see who can't handle it I thought.

After topping up with a bit more Coke all was forgiven, after all, we had a designated driver and co-pilot that seemed to have everything under control. We decided to "GO BIG" and start early. By this time the seating was much better; I had found a sort of side-saddle seating position and had also figured out how to tilt and adjust the rear seat, feeling very relaxed we "tucked Into" the available beverages until the inevitable happened, Ummm Driver! Driver! Time for a pit stop broer! Some of us really needed to drain some fluids here. No sooner than I said this we started slowing down, we had a perfectly timed traffic jam ahead.

Cars lined up for a couple of K's, shoooo! As some of you men may well be aware, at times, this can really feel great; with a sigh of relief and a deep breath we all squeezed back into the vehicle and started slowly rolling forward. Transkei road rules are very different to the standard one we all now, the rule of thumb seems to

be "Every Man For Himself" Drive where you want, on what ever side of the road you feel like and simply blow your hooter when you want to get out of on coming traffics way. It turns out a military vehicle had rolled on the one corner and local drivers wanted to stop and inspect the debris. Well, a couple of minutes later we were in Umtata and pulling into one of the larger fuel stops.

Umtata Rules!

The same oke that disappeared in kei mouth and reappeared with ice did the same or similar trick again. He was gone perhaps 2 minutes when I saw him walking back from the one shop with a sheepish grin on his face. One arm braced up against his chest with a broken Collar bone and in the other, a shopping bag with another 2l Coke and bottle of Brandy. Little bugger I thought, he was a last minute pull out due to injury and became part of the backup crew for one of the five vehicles.

This oke was setting us up for a very "Thirsty" day of riding tomorrow. I figured we only had 130km's to travel the first day so I would play along, after all, how hard could it be? We only had one more stop to load some aviation fuel before heading down to Port St Johns. With the Avgas loaded we headed off again, we apparently had a rendezvous point just outside the city/towns boundaries. Once again, the timing was perfect, the seal was already broken so we again did what men do on



the side of the road while we waited for the other 4 vehicles to catch up. I must admit, at this point I was getting a bit concerned about tomorrows ride, it looked like the heavens above was about to open up on us. 130km's through some of Africa's toughest natural terrain is one thing, to even attempt this in the rain was would be madness! All my fears soon disappeared, all it took was a few more of those "Specials" the guys were pouring me, after all, we are all South

Africans and this was Africa! Not a place to be for the "faint hearted" With a group like this we would manage and conquer anything, bring it on I thought as I looked for my dear friend who was pouring the awesome drinks for us!

With most of the other vehicles now parked behind us and judging by the amount of okes clambering onto the grass verge we were not the only ones who had a cold one or two on the way.

Yeeeha! We had gone way past the point of return! It's on and it's gonna be awesome! 45 minutes later we were in Port St Johns.

The only thing left was to collect the bikes from a local wholesalers house and take them to the place we were staying, a back packers spot called the "Jungle Monkey" This should be interesting I thought, Oh well, live and let live I suppose. After moving all the bikes we quickly unpacked our kit etc into the relevant rooms that had been booked for us.

Jungle Monkey/Funky Monkey.

Let me tell you guys something, these local okes don't stress, I mean they don't stress at all! Nothing! It seems they just take every day as it comes and just chill! This place is almost like a different world! Once settled, all 28 riders and the pit crew descended onto the pub, basically taking over the spot, drinks were flowing, shooters being passed around etc, I had to laugh, I knew some of these guys were going to regret this in the morning. First thing was to get some food in, I needed to put something substantial into my stomach, I called over the manager/owner and enquired as to what time we could expect to eat and what he intended on serving.



The following is in his words. (I think)
Yow Broer! Like, shoo! We can only like, do like 10 meals at a time, so if you wanna like, choon the okes to park off kinda this side, I can sorta have the meals brought out to you okes in like small batches broer. Do you wanna like chow rice with steak or like chips broer? At this point I got a bit concerned and decided to simplify things, I told him to just make steak and chips for everyone!

The food was brought out in batches of ten and let me tell you something! The food was awesome, in fact better than most restaurants i've eaten in. Steak cooked to perfection, fresh steamed veggies and chips. Next time I'm in Port St Johns I won't be going to one of the well known restaurants/pubs for a meal, I'm going straight to the **JUNGLE MONKEY**. Once I had finished chewing the last mouth full and feeling secure that my stomach had been lined I decided to join the rest of the boys, my first round included 3 x energade s, which I took straight to my room and stuck under my pillow. (No ways did I want a dehydration babalaas in the morning). After this was done I headed back to the pub to introduce myself to some of the out of town guys that I did not recognize. The one guy from Harrismith, he was telling us about how hectic the terrain was in his area and explained to us how steep some of the climbs were, another chap from PE was also trying to rally all of us in attending the next Winterberg as a group. This actually sounded like a very good idea, after all the Winterberg is an icon as far as enduros are concerned. He then said something that was going to come back and haunt him the rest of the trip. This is what he said.

"Guys! If you want to see something mean, you have got to see this rocky climb up one of the hills used in the Winterberg, okes, you don't understand, this is mean, rocks every where!" This statement turned some heads in the pub, some of us who have ridden in the Kei and where familiar with what was coming just looked at him and smiled, shame, this oke had no idea what the organizers had in store for us. I smiled and tapped him on the shoulder and said, no worries boet, we'll take again tomorrow about rocks. (And the end of day one he was renamed **ROCSTOMPA**) With every drink now tasting better than the last I decided we needed some live entertainment, full of Dutch courage I climbed up onto the stage and started banging on the drums. Not long afterwards I managed to convince some of our crew to climb up and show us what they could do, this gave me the opportunity to slide off into the shadows and watch the show. (After all, I'm an instigator not a instrument player). I must admit, some of the okes were pretty good, who new we had some old band players with us. It must have been about 2am when I decided I had enough. With only one more important thing to do, I decided to retire to my cottage. It was time to drink/swallow and at least 2 of the energade's. This would most defiantly help with regards to inevitable hangover that would follow.

In my wisdom I added some orange game powder to the naartjie drinks I had bought earlier; why I bought naartjie in the first place I'm not sure? Anyway! I managed to drink two of them and decided it was safe to try and move again. With my head slumped in one hand and a cigarette in the other I needed to do one more thing, I needed the toilet, or any decent bush would do just fine. I slowly got up using the bunk beds to stabilize myself and walked to the cottage door, opened it with a little stumble and grabbed on the railings outside, Aaaaaah fresh air! With a smoke still stuck between my lips and struggling to focus on the dense foliage in front of me I decided this was a good spot. Shortly after I had started relieving my expanded bladder I could not understand why I had so much "splash"???? Oh well I thought, it must be the "Elephant ear" plants and simply lowered the stream. This however did not help at all, I finally decided to grab a handful of railing and slowly shuffle my feet backwards. (Sort of a semi-pushup position) With my head and vision now

focused on the ground directly below me I could now make out a shape below me, it was a pair of takkies! Some thoughtful oke had put them outside the door because they stank. To late know I thought, the tap was open and could not be stopped at this point, Oh well, confession time for me in the morning. Eish! Worst case scenario is, I buy a new pair of takkies for the oke.

Woke up at about 5h30, still hugging the 3rd energade and again nature was calling. Stumbling over kit and boots I made my way to the door, opened it and took a step out into paradise, green foliage all around, birds starting to wake up and call. In the distance I could hear roosters doing there thing and the strong sea/salt water smell was hanging thick in the air. What a morning I thought! We are so lucky to live in Africa! Then I looked down, Oooohps, a black pair of Boots/takkies. What possessed me to pick them up and smell them I still do not know, after a few gags and empty heaves I threw them back down. After sucking down half the remaining Energade I



felt a bit better and took a walk around waiting for the others to wake. After seeing a couple of the faces I started feeling really good again, I was not the only one who Felt this way. LOL!

Yep! Today was going to be fun. A short while later a full breakfast was served and I was feeling great. However, I think some of the guys weren't feeling as strong as I was. Kitted up and my kitbag carried down to one of the support vehicles I was ready, or so I thought. I started getting that cold sweat

again and found myself swallowing air, my stomach was not very happy with me. I decided to find a shady spot where I could sit quietly and try and avoid any movement.

HOW BAD COULD IT BE

Day one was about to start, the group had been split up into two, each with it's own leader and sweeper. The smell of 2-stroke that I had missed so much the past few years was now nauseating! I was taking serious strain, swallowing lung fulls of air in an effort to keep my breakfast down. Strangely enough, all I needed to feel better was to look around me, the sad faces, all puffy, blood shot eyes and sweat already running down some faces. This made me feel better almost immediately; it felt so good knowing that some actually felt worse than I did. The time had come to roll out. We headed up the mountain road and took the first bush path leading off; battling to find my rhythm I slowed down and took up a position closer to the back. The bush got thicker and thicker, the 2-stroke smoke from the KDX 200's just hanging in the air, what was I thinking falling back. Slowly, one for one I moved forward in the pack trying to find clean air until the first Bottle neck. This was a down hill cliff section that will scare the @\$% out of Dassies!

The suicide slide

A 20cm wide path running down a cliff, some of the sections were so narrow you didn't have enough space to keep your leg on the peg; you had to kneel on the bank on the right and stare down at the drop off on your left. At this point I had a guy on a DRZ400 in front of me, he decided to free wheel/coast down was not a good idea and decided to start his bike and use its power and torque to slowly edge forward. Not a good idea I thought, seconds later the rear wheel broke traction and slipped off the side, help was at hand, the guys quickly grabbed the front wheel and dragged up the bike completely destroying the only path in front of me.



With help we managed to hoist the bikes over this section whilst being entertained by other riders that decided to take a different line, yep! Over the bars followed by some classic cartwheels.

We now had an awesome cut out path that weaved through this thick indigenous forest, the occasional small river/tributary crossing followed by a lot of gas again, 3rd/4th gear stuff, lekker to get some air again I thought.

The Wet Willies River Crossing

We all gathered on the banks of this one, it seemed like the leaders of the pack where a bit reluctant to cross this one, hesitantly I saw one of them commit and start crossing it. This one looked a bit deep with the water lapping on the Ktm 300's seat, another, then another crossed. I figured if I cross now and I would have time to have a smoke the other side, surly someone in this group is going to make an oohps. (An upside-down moment) I started My Gas Gas and aimed for the opposite bank, about half way I decided to drop my legs off the pegs as my weight was pushing the bike dangerously low, with the sound of a well tuned outboard I ripped through to the other side. After finding a parking spot, I identified an area to elevate my legs and drain the water from my boots while trying to light a smoke at the same time. No drownings on this river crossing, just a plug and some DWF.

Moving on again and trying to plot a course through this ever changing terrain we found a path leading down into one of the valleys, man was this steep and snotty, full of rocks covered in green moss, not your average moss, this was more like a



carpet of growing algae. I had to keep the throttle open most of the way down, fighting through narrow gaps, roots and loose soil.

If any of you have ever ridden the Transkei you will know the following, what goes down must go up! If you fight to get down to a spot, you're going to battle to get back up!

This was our lunch break area, have you ever been in a place that you think you may be the first person ever? This was a place like that!

Absolutely untouched nature! AWESOME!

As the guys relaxed I could not help but smile, they had no idea what was coming, some of the guys

already looked like warmed up death and where commenting on how this is the most hectic thing they have ever done.

As far as I was concerned, I knew the guys setting/leading this loop, I knew that this was but the beginning, we hadn't seen tough yet. We were going to sweat today. For the few of us that listened the night before new to open our "gift packs" and pack the enclosed lunch in our tripper bags, after sharing out our lunch and making sure all riders where ok we relaxed for about half an hour and took the time to re-hydrate and prepare for the next 4 hours riding. Everything was so quit, no birds chirping, no frogs not a sound. The water lying stagnant in the pools even seemed dead! One guy threw a stone into one of the larger pools only to see the film on the water quickly swallow up all the ripples and even the splash! Perhaps this was the valley of death! Just waiting to swallow us up.

Rocstompa Hill

With lunch over we all reluctantly kitted up again and started up our bikes.

This was one of those places I wanted to get out of ahead of the pack. I maneuvered myself into a position to ensure myself of a good exit. The leader pulled out followed by a few other riders until I saw a gap, taking it, I rolled on the gas and started the beginning of what proved to be one the most grueling climbs of the trip. I noticed up ahead some of the riders in front starting to go "Pear shaped" and decided to take another line which offered a pull out/restart area. I aimed for this and neatly positioned myself for the second attack. Moments later I saw the gap, with bikes littered and broken riders trying to pick them up I took the opportunity to hit it, fully committed I managed to get through to the last rocky section before hooking up on my bash plate on the final rock step. A small shove

and I was over, the Gas Gas really impressed on these rocky climbs, it pulled my 130kg frame with relative ease and was very well behaved as far as keeping the front wheel down. Shooo! A steep climb is one thing, throw rocks into the equation is another. Helmet off, gloves off, it was time to go and help some of the other riders.

What started as my amusement at some of the riders had now turned to pity; some of these guys were truly out of their comfort zone and were taking serious strain. For their sake, I hoped the day didn't hold to many more sections like this.



The rest of the ride was not too serious; however, some of the sections just seemed too much for some. Some of the guys could not keep a line and would wobble and fall on the simplest of small climbs and ruts. Exhaustion and fatigue was setting in fast for some and retirement was on its way for a few of the riders.

At this point the accidents started to happen, first was a "classic flip" the rider ended up falling on his bum and at the same time managed to rip his sub frame and rear fender off. The next one was a torn Hamstring, never ever have I seen



something like this. His entire leg was blue from the knee up to his buttocks! Eish! That had to hurt; he did however manage to ride up to the road to be collected by the backup crew. The same day we also saw one major mechanical failure; a bike had burnt a clutch out completely and had to be towed out to the next pick up point. The poor bugger was out on the first day! The remainder of day one was not too technical only little rivers and tricky short climbs. All that was left was a long downhill

towards Coffee Bay, our first night would be at White Clay, a small resort just the other side of Coffee Bay. As we all entered the town I thought to my self, "*hope we don't have any hooligans in the group*" Without exception, everyone slowed down as we traveled through this small holiday town, I mustered all the remaining strength I had and raised my body into a standing position. One short gravel road left I thought, just up and over that small hill and we would be home for the day. Yep! There they were! The 5 backup vehicles, helicopter and crew, all of them with broad smiles and cold beers in hand. With gloves still on, I fumbled with my helmet clasp, why won't this bloody thing come loose I thought. Grrrr, at the same time I frantically looked around for the cooler box that must have been used to keep those beers so cold. What! Nothing?

The first thought that jumped to mind was absolutely useless bunch of okes. I mean really! Besides picking up our wounded, carrying our fuel, loading broken bikes, changing flat tyres, carting our kit etc, you would have thought they would bring us all a beer after completing 130km's in some of the toughest terrain ever. Next year I'm going to have to have some sort of a backup/drivers briefing before the event. Thing just can't work like this! Haa haa (*Jokes, thanks so much guys*) The kit was quickly removed and the cold beers were found in the back of one of the vehicles, shooo, was I thirsty. Not even the hiccups from the second beer was going to slow me down with the 3rd. Time for lay down on the grass, have a smoke And look at the awesome view, oh! And smell the fresh sea air. Have you ever smelt The ocean after a wild storm, you can almost taste the salt, I could actually taste fresh oysters even when I took a "high school" drag of my smoke. What a day, so far

this was one of the best rides i've ever done. After carrying our kit and bags up to the units it was time for a quick shower.



White Clay, another awesome venue! (*With exception to the shower in the one unit!*) I tried to turn around and ended up wrapping myself up in the shower curtain, slipped, dinged my shin on some idiotic step that had been built in front. I eventually gave up, threw

the curtain to one side and went "free style" unfortunately this resulted in about 25l of water being dumped on the floor. Now with a good limp and what looked like a lost golf ball under by shin I headed towards the Pub, if anything was going to get the swelling down I would most definitely find it in there. We again took over the place and set about in emptying the bar of all its stock. What a lekker group of guys, okes chatting about the day, telling jokes etc. This was really awesome, I found myself looking forward to next year already.

Supper time was announced and we were summoned to help our selves. They had set out a seafood buffet of note!

Plate in hand, I started loading up, Crayfish, prawns, calamari, muscles, oysters, fish and all the other goodies to go with it. All was now forgotten/forgiven with regards to the shower episode. I had a belly full of good food, my thirst had been quenched and I looked forward to hitting the bed. It was time to rest.

Day Two

After a good breakfast we all got kitted up and ready for the next day. This would take us a further 180km south to Kob Inn. This was going to be the stress day; we had a lot of ground to cover and would have to pick up the pace considerably if we wanted to make it during day light hours. With a fuel stop at the half way point we would still need to carry about 4l of fuel, this was rough terrain and involved a lot of slow technical areas which tends to use a lot of fuel. With a couple of guys deciding to load up bikes on the backup vehicle and take the day off, we felt pretty confident we could make it before dark. The first part of the trip took us over huge grass hills up until Hole in the wall. We took the opportunity and had a couple of pics taken, just to prove to some that we actually did ride and had in fact passed this point. With the chopper hovering over our heads some of the guys took the opportunity to show off a bit, wheelies were the order of the day.

The relaxing grass riding was unfortunately short lived, 30 minutes later we were back in valleys and river beds covered by dense foliage, we could hear the chopper above but could not see him, pushing and shoving our way up through overgrown rock river beds. We finally broke out into the open never to see the chopper again that day. Apparently he thought we must be way gone by now, no way could it have taken us so long to get through one small valley. The remainder of the morning was spent going through small rivers and rocky climbs until our first fuel stop and lunch break. The timing was almost perfect, we had just finished removing helmet and gloves when the backup vehicles arrived. Never before has a cold Russian roll tasted so good, smothered in mustard and tomato sauce, excellent heart burn material I thought, on the back of my mind I new I was going to regret eating this later in the day. One of our leaders was a local from this area; I new what sort of terrain was coming up, he would make sure we finish the day off in a big way.

With lunch down the hatch and a couple of minor repairs being carried out on some of the bikes it was time to refuel and top up our trippers. It was almost time to head off again. This part of the trip would involve a bit of gravel road riding as we had to travel around one of the nature reserves before heading back towards the coast.

I must admit, I'm not keen on fast stuff, even if it's a gravel road. Not too far into the first stretch I had one guy come flying past me, only just making it around a corner, foot out and rear wheel only inches away front dropping into a huge rut on the side. I still thought to myself, this oke is going to get hurt. I watched in amusement as he overtook more riders almost getting out of shape a couple of times.



It couldn't have been more than 5 minutes later; there he was, neatly pinned under his bike on the side of the road, coming to a quick stop next to him. I could see this oke was in pain as he clasped his shoulder. It turned out not to be too serious, only torn ligaments and some "road rash". With the gravel road section over it was time to drop into the valleys again and find out what the rest of the day had in store for us. I had to smile as we started plotting a course down a very steep hill with spectacular hills/cliffs on the other side. Thinking to myself, what goes down must come up again, Day two was only about to begin.

With all of us safely down we congregated in a clearing just below one of the larger hills. Yep! This was it; I could see the narrow path leading up into the thick bush and could just make out a turn closer to the top. This was going to be tough!

At this point, the group leader and sweeper were talking about something whilst throwing the occasional look our way.

Something was brewing, something bad was about to happen, I could see the look in some of the guys faces that did this ride last year, It wasn't the look of fear, it looked more like sorrow or despair. A short briefing was held, riders were informed about a hectic left and right turn close to the top with one or two little rocks, one of them apparently had a large step up. Momentum would be very important on this one I thought. With the sound of bikes starting I knew this was it, this had to be the last major one before we got to base camp, well I hoped so anyway. The first bike pulled off, I'm almost certain I heard him shift into 3rd, seconds later the revs picked up again, it sounded like this oke was taking strain. All we could see from the bottom was a bright orange mudguard pop out from above the tree line followed by what sounded like a bike hitting the rev limiter. We all watched in horror as the clouds of dust slowly sunk back down into the trees. Shooo! That sounded/looked like a proper one I thought! Eish!

Seconds later, we could all hear the swearing and figured that he was ok, the bike started again and all we heard was revs and the occasional shouting. Moments later he could be seen standing at the top giving his best "TITANIC" arm stretch.

It's amazing what you can do when you channel your anger and attack a hill full of aggression.

With only two more riders ahead of me I was forced to wait patiently, trying to loosen my aching back muscles by swinging my shoulders from side to side I must have looked like one of those "Morning Live" fitness chics. Waiting just plain sucks I thought. The next oke was up, Honda 450R, one of the shortest and strongest riders of us all! On his 4th attempt he made it up. This is an oke that has the strength of 2 men my size, what the hell I thought! Eish, now I was concerned, really concerned! I tried my best to shake it off and focus on the task at hand, momentum is king I told myself over and over! OK! I was ready; I slowly pulled forward next to the guy in front. This guy looked very hesitant, I tried to encourage him as best as I could, he was on a DRZ 400, perhaps not the best machine for this terrain, BUT! He had made it this far I thought! So I told him in no uncertain terms, you're up bud! Just do it! Off he went, with the thumping sound that only a drz can make.

I swear, I heard the thud of him or his bike hitting the ground followed by a cloud of dust exiting the tree line. Oh no, I thought, I was going to have to wait for him to turn his bike around and come back down again. However, nothing happened, not a sound at all? Here I was, waiting for the go ahead from above, waiting, waiting, then I heard it.

OK! You can come! As I pulled away I heard what I thought was Go Go GO!

I was later told it was No No NO!

As I turned the second corner, there it was, a Drz 400 lying on its side, wheels still on the line! If I back off now I'm going to be in some serious trouble and would probably end up flipping the bike backwards and taking a good tumble back down the hill. I had already committed I thought as I clicked one gear down, as I was about to climb up onto the outer edge of his rear tyre I "dialed it on", this launched me clean



over the next step up in a perfect position to attach the final turn and ridiculous 2m climb at the end. With a bit of “clutch tickle” I was up and over in second gear. Yeeehaaaa. Dropped the bike on the floor and headed towards the cliff face and threw my arms up in the air! As most of you are all aware, this is such a cool feeling, **VICTORY!**

For the first time, I was now ready for anything, everything had just fallen into place, all those little tricks of handling a 2-stroke had come back! Yeeehaaa! No more 4-strokes for me, I’m back! 2-strokes are just so much more fun and easier to ride through techie stuff. All that was left to do was to apologize to the DRZ guy and thank him for the added traction.

At this point I was feeling good, I felt strong and confident that whatever these ookes threw at us I would be able to cope with. The Ec300 2-stroke was less than half the work of my old 450 and still managed to lug me out of any of the serious climbs we had done.

After a few km’s of bush paths and a couple of minor rivers we started to go downhill again, yep! Another proper downhill where you need to keep the gas on so you don’t end up over the bars and doing some farming. This particular hill was called “Mother Cat” Yep! That about explains it! Nothing I can say can top that, this was the mother of all mothers. This had to be the last one I thought, the sun was already very low and I figured we could not be too far from camp now. All of us made it down without incident and found ourselves once again in a sort of tunnel, what an awesome way to finish the day. We all rolled it on and weaved our way through the damp soil, the pace picked up considerably, I think we all knew, it was a matter of time and we would all be chilling in Kob Inn shortly. Yep! We could again see the sea again! A short 3km ride and we were parking our bikes and taking our kit off.



The first thing I saw was a laundry tub filled with beer and ice on the lawn. **YES!** The guys had come through for us indeed! **Shoooo!** What an awesome day **TWO!** Laying on the grass, sucking on a well deserved beer and watching two whales to the “wild monkey dance” Does it get any better than this I thought? We are truly blessed to live in Africa!

It was now time for the final task of the day, kit off and hung outside to air, boots off and placed upside down to drain water out, refuel bike, lube chain and give it a “once over”.,,, With all this done it was time to socialize again, the fire was started and we had some meat burning on it pretty quickly, once again, the food was awesome and the pub well stocked. I think it was about 23h30 before we had consumed everything! This was a blessing in disguise, most of us were already looking for an excuse to go to bed. With the sea smashing on rocks only meters away, windows wide open, I knew I was going to get a good nights sleep. What a lekker spot this was I thought as I drifted off.

Day Three

Woke up early, high tide was again lashing the rocks outside. Got up and helped myself to cereal and yogurt, this has got to be the healthiest breakfast i’ve ever had. Better that left over braai or toasted Saamies from steers/wimpy. I was feeling really good and rolled my Gas Gas out of the covered parking and gave it another once over. This machine had really impressed me, I checked how low I had managed to compress the front and rear shocks the day before, checked chain tension, water level in the radiator etc, all was perfect. I had not boiled this bike once since we left; it had performed very well without missing a beat the entire trip. We had already done just over 300 km’s and wondered what the balance had in store for us. I had the opportunity to race the last two years in the Willowvale Regional enduro, I knew the terrain around here was tough and suspected the worst.

By this time we had all heard about coco pops corner, coconuts and of course Mazeppa gorge. The pace was definitely going to be a bit slower today. After a lot of encouragement and small “white lies” of how much easier it would be, a couple of the guys who pulled out on the first day decided to give it another go. After all, it was only 70km’s to the Kei Mouth.

With the sound of the chopper warming up and the smell of fresh 2- stroke in the air The ride was on.



Feeling very strong I slotted in the middle of the group as we all pulled out. After a short gravel road trip we again found ourselves going down a steep rocky hill and dropped into a river bed, this must be coco pops corner I thought, apparently one of the riders had lost his breakfast there on a previous trip. Must have had a bad hangover or something I thought, this was not as bad as we had gone through the last few days. As we

weaved our way up the rock river bed I could hear bikes revving and the sound of tyres spinning on rocks, hmmm, perhaps some water or rock ledge up ahead I thought. As the dense bush opened up around us I caught a glimpse of something moving in the corner of my eye and looked up to towards the top of this rock/cliff ledge. Yep! It was a ktm 200, throttle wide open, the bike was bouncing up and down like a bucking bronco, with hand fulls of clutch the inevitable had to happen. The bike managed to get away from the rider and shot about a meter into the air and was now trying to cut it’s way into the thick bush on the other side, this was a lucky man I thought. If it had decided to jump the other way it would have been a ten meter straight drop onto the rocks below.

This looked like a good place to have a smoke break, this was going to take a while I thought as I took my helmet and gloves off. After about 10 minutes of waiting while some of the other riders tackled this I decided to take a walk and have a look at what all the fuss was about. Looking like one of those trials riders as they plotted a course through a section, quietly mumbling to myself I walked/climbed up the path carefully planning which line to take and precisely where I would turn on the volume, with my invisible handle bars grasped in my hands I turned the first corner and was faced with a dead end. What’s up with this I thought as I looked back to find the path I must have missed, surely they don’t expect us to go up here? As I looked up I caught the eye of one of the riders that had just completed this section, Looking at him firmly in the eye, I gestured with my head towards this ledge, the response from this rider was a forced smile and a small nod. This was going to be a handful I thought as I peeped over the top to see if I had a safe landing spot if I chose to rather shoot the bike up.

At that point I realized, this was only the first obstacle of three within a twenty meter climb. Quickly forgetting the idea of a well planned attack, I was opting for the old fashion time tested approach, I was going to grit my teeth, hit it and hope for the best. I decided not to even bother looking further up the hill, after all, a couple of the other guys were already on top, if they made it would I. After another 10 minutes or so of watching exhausted riders stumbling and falling all over it was my turn, I had decided not to wait until the entire section was clear, I would rather face each obstacle one at a time, this would give me some time to reposition myself for the next obstacle and have a bit of rest. After climbing out of the river bed I neatly position myself to get the best run up possible. Second gear was my choice, I figured I would get some more speed and would simply kick it down as I get to the top of the rock/stump ledge. With a handful of gas and loads of clutch I shot off motocross style straight up the first part of this rocky path, tickling the clutch all the time to keep the front wheel down, smashed onto a small rock ledge I had seen earlier, using this as a berm I stabbed at the clutch again and got the bike upright with the front wheel high enough to make it just over the worst part of the rock face, it was time to smash it into 1st gear and get the rest of the bike up and over as planned.

Well, as you all know, things don't usually go as well as we would always like. As I tried to gear down a rock hit the gear lever and pushed me up a half a gear, yep! Neutral! Fortunately, momentum had taken me out of harms way and I found myself over the worst. Pulling my weight forward on the bike I tapped it down into 1st and looked up at what lay ahead. By this time we had a lot of riders/instructors advising on what line to take and where to hit the next root or rock. I just smiled and nodded, I knew at this point I was going wherever my bike took me, my only focus was to try and keep it from veering off to the left and down the cliff. I was going to try a different tactic this time, I would pull away in 1st, let the clutch go and try and do a "Foot-up's" thing up the remainder of the hill. Once again, the EC300 didn't disappoint, it lugged it's way up the hill and over all the roots and rocks effortlessly, you gotta just love that power curve switch thingy on the Gas Gas, it pulls like a 4-stroke in tough conditions without stalling.

As soon as I had cleared the section, I quickly went back down to help some of the back riders. On enquiring where they would like me to stand and help I was told I should have been arrested for what I had just done. I honestly had no idea of what they were talking about, I thought it had something to do with the way I just smashed my way up the hill.

The story eventually came out, one of the riders told me that anyone carrying so much crack should be arrested. Apparently my pants had worked there way down exposing the old "plumbers crack" while I was doing the foot-up thing. This section will now be known as "BUTT CRACK CREVICE" Brace yourself okes, this will expose any weakness you may have, it will test any/all of your enduro skills. Once all the riders had been helped through this section we were again off. As far as I could remember, we only had one more serious climb ahead; this was the infamous Mazepa gorge. I took the opportunity to rest a bit and slowly backed off the pace and slipped in amongst the back markers. After a couple more serious downhills we entered the tunnel, this is a section in the forests that has been cut out by the locals and used to pull sleds behind oxen. I knew to well what lay ahead but could not help myself, I just had to roll it on again. Feeling confident and standing I tried to loosen up my back and hips as I lent the bike over from side to side. I needed to warm/loosen up before this big climb, the last thing I needed at this point was cramping. There it was, the start of the climb, with a gentle tap I slipped it down into 3rd and rolled it on as I negotiated the continuous line changes and small step ups. As per usual, I had made a few mistakes and was forced to tap off a bit as I tried to fight the bike out of a rut, because of this, the motors revs had now dropped a bit low for 3rd I thought, tapping it into 2nd I grabbed a handful of throttle again. Unfortunately for me, I woke up the beast in the 300 that had been so well behaved the last few days. The front wheel picked up as the back wheel broke traction on a rather nasty off camber forcing me into a long deep rut heading up the remainder of the hill. Fortunately I still had enough momentum to carry me through this tuff section.



As I got over the last step up I could see bikes neatly propped up in the ruts with riders walking down to come and watch the show that was about to happen. Not to be left out, I also parked my scooter and found a nice vantage point which offered a bit of shade. This was going to be a long stop I thought as I took my helmet off, the next 10 minutes saw about 4 riders making it up, the balance were still out of sight and obviously taking some serious

strain up this climb. Oh well, I thought; time to take some more kit off, chest protector, elbow guards and tripper. This hill was far from the most difficult terrain we had encountered over the last few days. What you need to understand is, the group had been doing this for 8 hours a day for the past 2.5days, most of us had already done 20 hours of riding by the time we got to this section.



PIC 1



PIC 2



PIC 3

Comments from the rider on the day.

Pic 1: PE Rider, okes from PE don't know what rocks are yet, I've had it with rocks!

Pic 2: EL Rider, this was a new Gas Gas last week, but that's what it's about hey!

Pic 3: T/Kei Rider, NO! I don't need help, that's where I wanted to park it!

We could all hear the bikes revving and judging by the clouds of smoke from the few KDX 200's left riding they must have been just around the bottom corner. Some of the okes had just given up and could be seen climbing up on foot, eish! This was a sad sight, some of the guys had really found themselves over there heads with this ride. What was also a concern was the health/well being of some of the riders; it was really hot with no wind at all, with several of them looking like they were dangerously close dehydration/heat exhaustion.

At this point, a simple step up was an absolute mission to get over cleanly, never mind trying to keep the front wheel down on an endless climb like this.

It was at this point the suggestion was made by one of the event organizers. Next years riders will have to complete two 70km's loops at Kei Bridge to qualify for an invitation to this event. Many of you may not know, the Kei Bridge loop is used for the ROOF training, it takes approximately 4 hours to complete the entire 70km loop. This is definitely not for the novice rider.

With a lot of help, all the riders and their bikes had been successfully brought to the top of the gorge, it was again time to head off.

I was expecting a left turn down towards the coast but it seemed that the leader had something else in mind, Aaaagh! Enough already I thought, let's get back and enjoy a cold one!

The trip on the gravel road was cut short by another short cut, this took us through some very thick bush which involved a bit of fighting "lantana vs Cycra", Cycra came out tops on this particular one, but only just!. I looked back at this particular spot and saw no other riders behind me, deciding to wait for the rest of the group I took the opportunity to have another smoke break. Fatigue had set in and was taking it's toll on a couple of the riders, this three day trip had ripped the soul out of a few of the guys. With the leaders far out of site I assumed this was a set path/route that had no alternative turn offs that would involve us getting lost. As soon as the sweeper had arrived we headed off again, it seemed I would be the leader and decided to set a decent pace, I just wanted to get to the end at this point. I dialed it on through the gears as we weaved through this awesome forest section, wow! Moist, dark heavy soil, this was going to be awesome, time to get some air and loosen those stiff muscles.

With handfuls of throttle, my foot held high up ready to catch any mistake I rolled it on through the winding path. Suddenly reality hit, what if quads are heading up this way? Visibility was only about thirty meters ahead and at this pace I would be in for some serious injuries should I encounter any of these machines. Time to slow down I thought, waiting for the group to catch up I removed my helmet to listen for the faint sound of bellowing quads in the distance, as the guys slowly came in I gestured to cut the engines, I sort of insinuated that we may be lost and I needed to listen if we were still on the correct path or how far the other riders were ahead of us. I knew sound would travel well in this forest, with all the silence I heard this meant the path was clear ahead.

After reluctantly sticking my head back into my stinking helmet and fastened all the necessary clips I once again started the Gas Gas and decided this was it!, enough was enough, I wanted to get this kit off and have a cold beer as soon as possible. It was time to light it up and see what this bike could do.

I shifted my entire body forward, raised my elbows and shoulders as far forward as I could and literally grabbed a handful of throttle. It was time to burn all the unused oil out of the power valves and get this thing burning white or at least I light grey! At what seemed to be a ridiculous pace I pulled away from the group. With no chance of riders getting lost I decided this was the only opportunity I would have to really dial it on. I settled into the pace quickly, I had convinced myself that even if I got a bit untidy I would have enough room to reel it in again. As I tore through this section I got a bit distracted by all the dark sections that were closely followed by bright rays of light shining through onto the forest floor, this reminded me of the Stutterheim Fun Ride I thought, that's when it happened! One small lapse in concentration was enough. As I came sideways into one of the corners I used the opportunity to see how far the other riders were behind me, as I turned my head back, I looked in horror at what lay ahead of me, rocks, rocks and what looked like a couple of boulders at the end. Already committed and no chance of stopping I preloaded the suspension and attempted to "lighten" myself as I launched into the mess I now found myself in. A few stressful seconds later I was already very close to the end, with a short blip I was out and clear!

Once again, this bike has managed to pull me through a very close call. At this point, I was so confident with an obvious overdose of adrenalin I kept the throttle open all the way back only slowing down to ensure the riders behind me could see what path I had turned off as I headed back down towards the ocean.



As we headed down the short gravel road the rest of the team could be seen waiting at the loading zone for the pont. Yep! We had made it! Finally it was time to go and visit the famous "Bush Pig" pub. Minutes later the 5 backup vehicles arrived, without support like this it would be impossible to safely complete a ride like this. Thank you so much guys! We all appreciate it! Soon afterwards we found ourselves at the PIG. It pretty much picked up where we left off the night before and the night before that, cold beer,

good company and another day in Africa, what an awesome place we have to call home! I just love it! Where else in the world could we do this?

We are truly spoilt and need to start looking after our riding areas before they all get snatched away.

Stay off the beaches, steer clear of settlements/villages, after all, it is their backyard we are riding through!

Ride safe, think of others, think about our environment and have fun!