

It had to be done, across Australia on a Vespa. The scooter I did it on I paid \$900 for and had been sitting in a farmer's shed for 3 years. It had the camo spray job already, I just kicked it over to get it working and added A.P.U.A.V. (All Purpose Urban Assault Vehicle) stickers to keep with the theme.



I also wrote a story about it which was published in [Scootering, April, 1997, Issue No: 136](#)

The Scooterist's Guide to Driving Across Australia

by Paul McIntosh 1997 (note some content will be out dated)

One of the things I hate about reading those scooter touring articles in Scootering is that I can't! After the first paragraph I'm off daydreaming about doing it myself, having to force myself back into reality to be able to continue onto the next paragraph. By the time I've finished reading I just feel frustrated, with something that I own needing a good hard thrashing (my scooter that is).

I thought I'd write about my trip from a different angle. If you're frustrated after this article, you should have enough info to whip out you're credit card, raid the moneybox or pawn Granny's jewelry, and scoot off on your own Australian adventure...

Why Do It?

Australia is BIG, really BIG, 7.5 million sq km's in area and 20,000 km's of coastline. The route that I will be referring to, Sydney to Perth via the coast is over 5,500 km one-way.

Why do it? It's fun, Australia isn't just one big desert. You'll experience miles of winding ocean roads, awesome cliff views, really weird wildlife running out in front of you and grand forests with the most amazing undulating scooter friendly roads cutting through them.

What's more, in between all that riding you get to see some of the best cities in the world Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide and Perth. Each have their own charm and are well worth a look, also each have their own scooter scene which should be easy to track down through the local scooter shops.

Well enough with the advert, I intend to cram as much info in as possible, so here goes...

The Route

Read this backwards if you intend driving from Perth to Sydney. Also while you're reading this you might want to calculate out the number of days you think you'd take (I took 12)

Sydney to Melbourne- The Hume highway will get you straight there in 900Km but around this part you are spoilt for choice. I've been told the coast road is worth the extra effort, you can also choose routes that take in Canberra (the capital) or via mountain ranges.

Melbourne to Adelaide- You have a choice, but the only way you want to go is via the Great Ocean Road, this road was named by a scooterist who knew how to name things (he also went on to name XXXX but was later censored). This is another 900 or so km.

Adelaide to Perth- For most of it you don't have much choice, there is only one road the Eyre Highway (The Nullarbor). On the Perth side of the Eyre Highway head South following the coast, it's well worth it, the contrast between winding forest roads and straight dessert roads blows you away. I took the coast and added another 3,500 km to my odometer.

Timing

Heat will make all the difference to your trip. I did it in November which turned out pretty good. Melbourne was cold but not too cold and the Nullarbor only got too hot one day. The day time extremes would have been from 15 to 45 degrees (20 to 30 being the norm). March should also provide similar conditions. Also at these times you'll have lots of daylight which is very important (explained later).

Money (\$1 Australian is about 50p UK)

So you've read this far, daydreaming yet, get out you calculator and work out how much dosh you need to come up with.

Scooter- A scoot that will hack the journey (I need not mention what sort) \$1,000 - \$2,500 used, depending on how pretty you want it to look, or \$4,800 new. Prices are high but then again so is the resell value and registration also covers the minimum insurance requirements.

Fuel (based on 5,500 km)-\$0.70 to \$1.05 per litre, if you drive like I do, full throttle, \$250.00. A litre of 2 stroke oil will cost about \$7.00, so about \$60.00. Total \$310.

Food- cheapo baked beans diet, \$5 per day but only if you shop in towns. For \$10 to \$20 per day you can have a fairly tasty diet of takeaways.

Accommodation - Approx. \$7 for a tent site and facilities, which is really cheap if there are a few of you. You can also free camp. B&B, Hostels, Backpackers etc. \$15 to \$30 a night and they are good.

Beer- \$2.60 - \$3.50 for a glass of VB. \$8.50 - \$9.50 for a 6 pack of VB stubbies.

Extras- Take some extra dosh for break downs. Don't bother with the AA (NRMA) you'll be stranded in the middle of nowhere for days. In comparison you'd easily be able to get some passing local to get you and you're scooter where you need to go for \$50.

So You're Still Reading..

OK. So now you're all clued up on which way to drive, what time to go and how much money you'll need. You're still reading, I will assume that you are now seriously thinking about it...

Driving

Australian roads (outside New South Wales) are pretty good, in fact they are pretty excellent. Most road hazards are clearly marked and they seem to have taken into account bikes when deciding what is hazardous. As far as scooter driving goes the main disadvantage is that everyone else is traveling at 130Km/hr (110 is the limit).

Here is a list of some of the most important hazards and how to deal with them...

Fatigue- this is a major killer in Australia. Not so much a problem on a bike but beware falling asleep is a real danger on a long ride in warm and comfy temperatures. Even if you don't have trouble staying awake, you still have to beware of someone else taking a snooze while heading in your direction.

Granddad- The biggest danger I came across was Grandma and Granddad on holiday in the 4 wheel drive and caravan. On the only intersection for 1,000's of Km's, beware they will forget to look!

West Australian Drivers - these guys are a close second to Granddad. In the country it's not so bad, but as you head towards populated parts the road quickly becomes survival of the biggest.

Kangaroo's - The Australian equivalent of Vampires! The scene... You pull into a lonely petrol station around dusk, only a few people about, acting dark and mysterious. You lift the seat to fill up. Suddenly you notice the silence, you look about, everyone is looking at you with terror in their eyes. Their eyes darting from you to the road you're about to take, which is now sinking into darkness...

Basically don't drive at night, the vampire kangaroo's will get you. You don't need to make a note of this as you'll get sick of every local giving their own personal horror story of someone they knew who had "traveled by night in these parts".

If you do get stuck at night riding, the best you can do is sit in the middle of the road and don't do more than 70Km/hr. Also beware that the odd kangaroo may come out during the day - I saw one (the only one on the whole trip)

Road Trains- These are the mythical monsters of the Nullabor, 100 metre long trucks traveling at 200Km/hr and not stopping for no one. In reality they are just big trucks doing the same speed as everyone else. The only problem you'll ever have with them is if the wind is blowing in a certain direction you'll get a blown about a bit. The biggest annoyance is that they are going just a little too fast to be able to ride the slip stream.

Heat- If you miss all of the above then beware that the heat may get your scooter. At 40 degrees and above your engine will start melting into the road. All you can do is stop. Where the Eyre Highway heads inland is where you're likely to have trouble. The best thing to do is ride in the coolest part of the day - it gets light at 4:30am, again only travel during daylight. Also run a more suitable plug and take off the side panel if you get really desperate.

Equipment

Scooter - Apart from the usual stuff you should take the following. 10 Litre approved plastic fuel tank (200Km longest distance between petrol stations), spark plugs (they don't seem to stock many at servo's), front wheel bearings (my version of a lucky rabbits foot) and as mentioned before a bit of cash.

There are scooter shops in all the major cities (I'll supply a list) and it should be no problem to get something sent to you. If the scooter is completely no go, you can still shift it by truck fairly cheaply. I got mine from Perth to Sydney for \$150 with a bit of ringing about.

You- Full face helmet and a leather jacket (if you're not worried about road rash be worried about bloody big stinging insects hitting you at high speed), sun tan lotion (essential) and warm clothes (not everywhere in Australia is hot).

Other Stuff- Water (those cowboy canteens are quite good because the water stays cool), insect proof tent, extra bits of rope (if it gets windy you can tie your tent to your scooter), credit card (mighty handy when you're in a place with no banks) and a packet of Tim Tam's (because they are yummy).

And Finally

Here a few last things that didn't fit into the above...

Dealing with the locals - In general scooters are not considered a "real bike" and in the outer suburbs of the cities you may get the odd arsehole telling you to get a Harley. Just ignore them and be content with the fact that you could get a Harley if you really wanted to but they could never get a life.

On the whole you should get a pretty good reception. I was pleasantly surprised, considering my previous statement, people in the middle of no where seemed to know more about scooters than the average city dweller.

They may, at the most, be a bit cynical about someone driving a scooter. However this is because in the middle of no where they are the ones that call the flying doctor after scrapping some stupid tourist off the road. If you don't act like a stupid tourist then they'll get over the fact that you're on a scooter.

Nasty Animals- Beware of things lurking under seats and in piles of wood. Especially in the hot parts, there a nasty critters everywhere (hence the insect proof tent), I even sprayed the wheels and stand with bug spray to stop things making a home in my scooter overnight. In general treat every suspicious animal with respect and the only problems you'll have is the odd patch of annoying flies.

More Info

For more info on the actual ride I would check the maps provided by the NRMA here. They produce a little map for the Nullabor part indicating water, petrol stops etc. For \$7 it's worth it. Their other maps should be fairly good as well.

Each state has its own tourist board and offices in every major city. They are excellent, if you pull into a city that is the first place you should head to find out where to stay and what to do.

The following is a list of scooter shops, one phone number for each city will be enough to locate what you need or to get pointed in the right direction.

Sydney – Scootique (2)95190443 or

~~411 242 129~~

~~Melbourne – Vespa House (3) 9417 0342~~

~~Adelaide – EuroCycle (8) 346 5621~~

~~Perth – Pro-Italia (9) 470 2977~~

The scooter scene in Australia is not as big as the UK. 150 people at a run is a big event. However you still should be able to find a few willing Aussie scooterists where ever you go that will share a few beers and make you feel welcome.

Bon Voyage!

Well that's about all I can think of. Hope to see you soon buzzing along our highways.

Cheers

Paul

- We Can't Decide On A Name SC

- The Internet Scooter Club

- Terra Australus Scooter Club