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# ADVENTURE RIDER MAGAZINE



## KTM Rallye Queensland Ranges

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# KTM Rallye Queensland Ranges Two up

Danica Madsen had a unique view of the 2021 KTM Rallye.

Words: Danica Madsen. Images: Nick Fletcher



Main: The first pillion-team riders in Australia to ever participate in a KTM Adventure Rallye, author Danica Madsen and Glenn Chidgey. Left: Danica began her pillion career on the back of the peaky '81 YZ250H with no footpegs.

I asked my KTM obsessed partner, Glenn 'Chidge' Chidgey, how many couples usually entered the Australian KTM Adventure Rallye as a pillion team.

"None," he replied. "Well, never in Australia anyway."

I should have been surprised, but I wasn't. That surprise had already occurred several years earlier on our initial ride together where I literally felt like I'd been reborn, such was the speed and exhilaration of the experience. After that I was hooked. Every time he offered to take me for a ride I was in. We started on road, but quickly progressed to dirt. Then from dirt to single trail, and then it seemed to be a slippery slope from single trail to gnarly, steep, treacherous and downright crazy.

### More the merrier

I was again surprised on our first multiday group ride in the Victorian High Country.

I was under the illusion a host of wives and partners would be doubling along with me in a fun-filled, cruisey, family week away...until I spotted the attendance list with a single column of men's names and then 'Chidge + 1' at the bottom.

He made some vague excuse about them having work commitments or not being able to find babysitters.

Brushing aside my protests we embarked on our first group ride and went everywhere the seasoned riders dared to venture and then some. Each day when we came out unscathed I felt more and more elated and confident I belonged in that space. Multiday group riding was the ultimate.

### Background

We'd considered entering the Tasmanian KTM Rallye as a pillion team, but due to

the potential icy, wet and slippery conditions, Chidge decided it would probably make for more hard work than play. Then the stars seemed to align in 2020 with the announcement of the Queensland Rallye. Chidge assessed it would be perfect for us: right terrain, climate, and just the right amount of challenge.

I guess the addition of me as his pillion was a bonus for us. It's added an extra level of challenge, we get to have adrenalin-infused holidays together doing something we both love, and he'd never admit it, but my 52kg does actually add traction, or ballast, depending on who you're talking to.

My own riding experience was limited to being doubled by my brother when we were kids, tearing around our hilly 81-hectare Dungog property, mostly on the back wheel. I'd hang on for dear



Left: The 2021 KTM Rallye was a six-day ride of over 2000km through the wild mountain ranges of Queensland.  
 Above: From left: Craig Brown, Dan Barker, Steve Wastell and BJ Barlin looked like they had a great time.  
 Below: Going everywhere the seasoned riders dared to venture and then some.

life on the back of the peaky '81 YZ250H, with no footpegs and barely a square inch of seat, squealing with joy at the speed, exhilaration and freedom. I did actually get my bike license when I was of age, but didn't spend enough time in the saddle to become skilled or confident.

The disappointment of the KTM Rallye being postponed until mid 2021 was silently mourned, and after what seemed like an eternity we prepared for the six-day ride of over 2000km through the wild mountain ranges of Queensland, with overnight stops at Kenilworth, Rainbow Beach, Agnes Waters, Cania Gorge, Gayndah and the Bunya Mountains.

**Long story**

Considering all 135 registered riders were issued with a comprehensive 32-page page dossier entitled *How To Prepare*, and then an additional 10-page *Final Instructions* manual, this ride was clearly not for the non-committal, disorganised or safety-unconscious. Accommodation was booked months in advance, with the option to stay in tents at the evening bivouac with Tent City Hire, or organise our own at each town we stayed in. The riding was on public roads, through quiet country towns and on private property where farmers had generously allowed access.

Chidge and I were set up with a 790 Adventure R with adjusted rally pegs for my height (very short), and modified suspension to accommodate the two of us. Other die-hard Rallye riders had travelled from all over Australia to the historic

town of Kenilworth in Queensland where the Rallye kicked off. Martin Kisbee from South Australia logged the longest distance travelled to the start. He rode to and from the event, covered a whopping distance of 7584km over the course of the week, and arrived home just in time for his 70th birthday. Needless to say, Martin earned himself the Longest Distance award.

**Age rage**

Despite the detailed dossier and Chidge's raving about how incredible the KTM Rallyes had been since their inception in 2016, I wasn't prepared for the magnitude of the event. The impact of the sea of orange on Kenilworth showground was astounding, and I wasn't expecting the

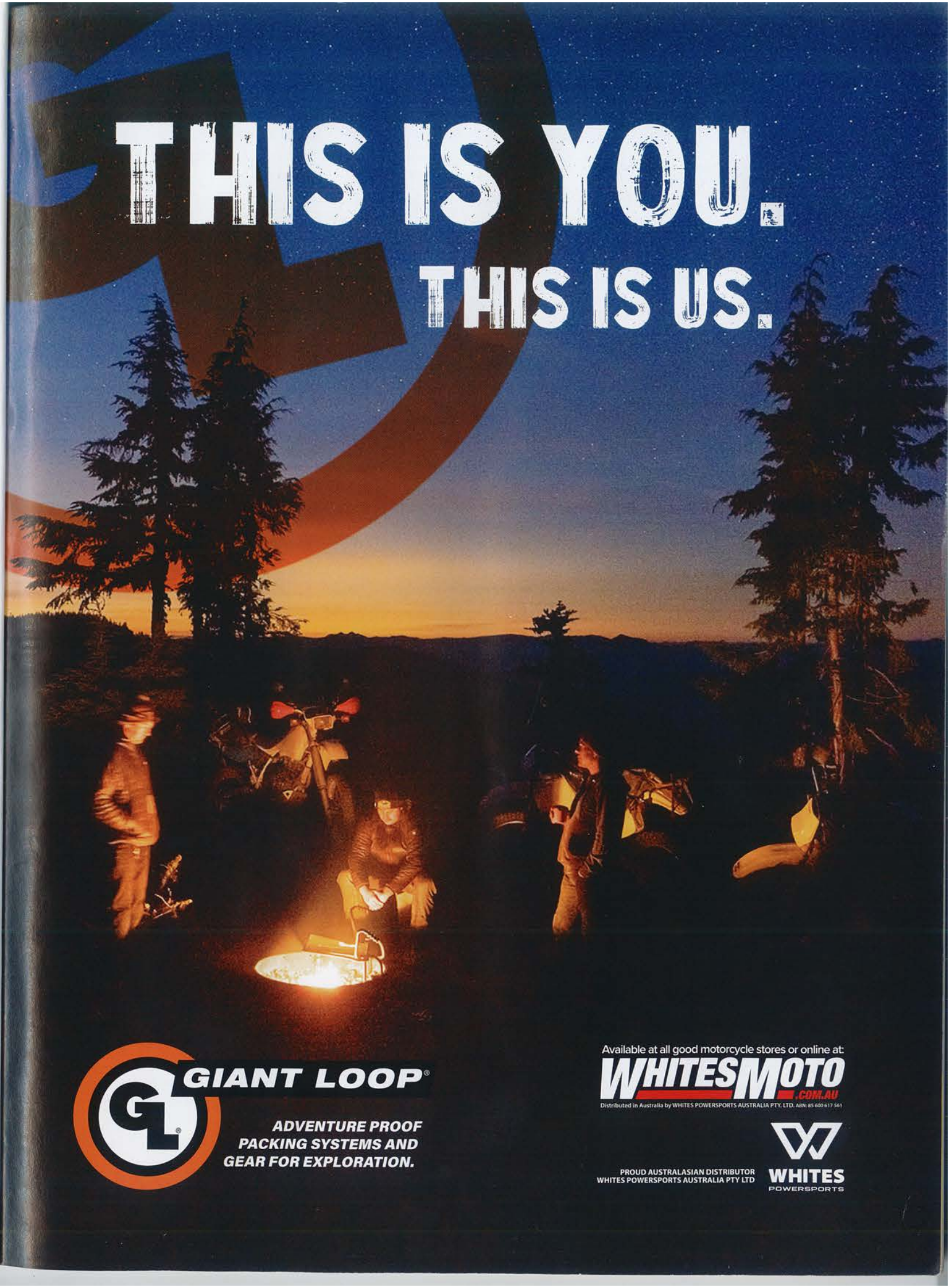
numerous tents dedicated to things like GPS navigation, media coverage, medical support, KTM techs, KTM spares, an air-filter maintenance station, Overlanders tyres and catering.

That first night went off with a bang. I was introduced to a number of riders I sensed had glory days not long passed, and I felt humbled to be in the presence of the greats, including New Zealander Chris 'Birchy' Birch and Toby Price. Price was recovering from injury but still looked every bit the champion.

Over the course of the week we met more national and international champions, along with people who'd been riding for only a year or two, and I marvelled at the range of age, riding background and experience. The youngest rider was Tim ▶



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picturesque Jimna State Forest, Wrattens National Park and Widgee, south of Gympie. The first breakout was cancelled due to a local horseriding and cycling event, but there were still two more breakouts, including a 60km ride up Cooloola Beach, braving the sand dunes, to finally arrive at Rainbow Beach.

There were a lot of elated and



Above & left: Chris Birch was as awesome as ever. Below: Accommodation was booked months in advance, with the option to stay in tents at the evening bivouac.

exhausted riders at the end of that first stint. It was a four-seasons-in-one-day ride: rain, wind, sunshine, cold and heat, and there'd been several rescues on the sand and a couple of early injuries.

The first day had certainly delivered.

### Fast food

On the second day we made our way from Rainbow Beach 400km north through open pine forests to Tairo, with a short, tight, clay-track breakout along the way.

A quick fuel stop at Childers led the way to another breakout route aptly dubbed 'Techo Erzberg' which was tight, ▶



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RIDE YOUR WAY... INTO THE WILD

## TWO UP

technical and rocky. Agnes Waters was definitely a high point, with its pristine beaches, country hospitality, mouth-watering dinner at the Tavern and a cracker breakfast the next morning at the Holidays Café in the local caravan park.

### On track

The beginning of the third day flowed much the same way as the days before, and by now we had our morning routine down to a fine art: roll out of bed, pack, load the gear onto the bike, and fit three suitcases worth of gear into one seemingly microscopic waterproof roll bag.

Well, 40 litres seemed microscopic to me. There was a whole page in the dossier dedicated to the bag specifications, and they were non-negotiable. Luckily there were two of us. I sat on my bag and with excessive eye-rolling Chidge zipped it, then clipped up the straps. Miraculously, the straps made it to the final day before they finally gave way.

With luggage safely in the transport trailer we checked the daily notice board to see what had been cancelled or changed before heading northwest for over 350km to Cania Gorge which was definitely a standout. It started with waterholes and mud on Turkey Beach Track. That was fun and fast, and picking lines and anticipating slips and skids was paramount to staying upright and dry (Chidge knew staying upright and dry was my preference).



After fuelling at Miriam Vale a 'moto-cross track' consisting of open gravel road, hills and rocks saw a few get-offs and flat tyres.

### Sting in the tail

Our group remained together, but somehow we moved ahead momentarily and suddenly Chidge yelled at me through the Sena.

"What are you doing to me? Are you poking me in the back?" he screamed.

"No!" I replied, incredulous. "I'm just sitting here as usual. What are you going on about?"

"Somethings sticking into my back! It's stinging!"

I yelled at him to calm down and stop

the bike. He reefed off all his top layers and I saw a trail of reddish welts. He was madly trying to find the offending thing in his jacket as I examined his back, and as he dropped the jacket on the ground and bent over to examine it I saw the vicious biter heading south.

"Oh my god! It's a wasp!" I exclaimed. "And it's just gone down your pants!"

### Seeing is believing

A string of expletives escaped Chidge as I doubled over with laughter, trying ever so hard to take the situation seriously.

"Get it out!" he yelled hysterically.

I tried to control my laughter as I plunged my hand down the back of his pants, my sides cramping as I tried to breathe through the fits of laughter. "Don't move!" I managed to gasp as I saw the determined insect heading further down, "or you'll have to drop your pants out here too!"

It was then a ute drove up, slowing to a stop as an old farmer asked nervously, "Are you two all right?" His wife sat bewildered in the passenger seat.

"We're okay." I manage to choke out. "He has a wasp down his pants."

Their expressions changed instantly to relief and amusement, and with a wave and a laugh they drove off in a cloud of dust.

"I can't believe they didn't offer to help get it out." said Chidge with a grin, topless, on his hands and knees with my hand ▶

Top: KTM marketing manager Rosie Lalonde hitched a ride.

Left: Boolboonda Railtrail And Tunnel, famous for being the longest unsupported tunnel in the southern hemisphere.

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plunged down the back of his pants.

I made one last desperate attempt to extricate the offending wasp before it disappeared into 'The Crack'.

"Got it!" I exclaimed with triumph as I finally flicked the intruder out for good.

It had definitely left its mark. Clearly the waterproof, windproof, skidproof, everything-proof Klim Adventure gear was no match for a wayward insect.

Red-faced we tried to explain to the KTM camera crew at the next scenic lookout what we we'd been doing. They nodded and winked knowingly, their amused expressions clearly indicated they didn't believe a word we said.

### Eyes wide shut

Back on track, Chris Birch followed us through some open, flowing countryside after the motocross breakout and when we finally pulled up he seemed excited.

"I can see now how you do this," he said. "You move together as one. In total sync. It's unreal to watch."

He told us he had some good footage of us and I was secretly quite chuffed. I didn't really know what he meant by how we 'do this'. It's not something we'd analysed or thought about, but a lot of other riders

had asked about our riding technique and, refreshingly, seemed interested in inviting their partners to join them.

Our pillion-riding technique seemed to evolve as we went, initially communicating our positioning through the Sena until it eventually became second nature. We'd established three main positions for riding: sit, stand and 'gear bag'. The first two were self-explanatory. The third, 'gear bag', was basically for all slower technical riding. I clamped myself to the bike and became part of it, like a gear bag. I crouched as low as possible without obstructing Chidge and kept my centre of gravity as low as I could. This allowed Chidge to manoeuvre the bike quickly and effectively without risk of my weight countering his or the bikes' movements.

Incidentally, I also usually closed my eyes, a fact Chidge wasn't aware of until we wrote this article.

### Sink in

The day reached a crescendo as we rode through Kroombit Tops National Park towards the historical Beautiful Betsy bomber site.

The plane crashed in 1945, not to be discovered until almost 50 years later,

and the ride down to it is a typical four-wheel-drive track with a variety of loose rocks, sand patches, washouts and erosion humps. We descended to the site at considerable speed, with good mate Robert 'Beetle' Bailey – motocross and supercross champion for Suzuki four years running during the 1980s – just ahead in the left wheel track, and Angus Reekie – winner of 10 Australian supermotard titles and four road-bike titles – not far behind.

I watched Beetle dodge, dip and skitter across obstacles on his 1190, but he seemed to be almost dancing as he rode. I admired his bunnyhopping over ruts and rocks and his skill and agility were amazing. I could feel the energy as we rode perilously close together at speed, Angus still on our tail.

We hit a deep washout and, despite preparing myself to absorb the shock, I felt my feet lifting off the 'pegs' for what seemed an eternity before landing back on them in perfect position. I was jubilant. Angus was still behind and would've seen it. I fist pumped the air in triumph.

People talk about being one with the bike, about it being an extension of the body, but until that day I didn't really understand what they meant. I mean,

everyone can appreciate a competent rider and how they manoeuvre and manage a bike, but a human being in sync with a machine always sounded a bit sci-fi to me. Until that day.

### To the Batcave!

From Cania Gorge on the fourth day a quick detour took us to Lake Cania Dam lookout and its breathtaking view. The route was a cracking 300km through Monto, an exciting breakout of steep hills and flowing roads to Bania National Park, and a breakout affectionately termed 'Not For The Faint Hearted'. Rocky, steep and slippery long grass just about summed it up. Numerous gates, which, as the only pillion, I felt compelled to open, also figured prominently.

The third breakout and highlight of the day included the historic Boolboonda Railtrail And Tunnel, famous for being the longest unsupported tunnel in the southern hemisphere. That's not reassuring when you're riding through its eerie darkness with a colony of bent-wing bats flying alongside. It was a memorable experience, especially the smell.

There we met Matt Philpott, founder of Barkbusters, and simultaneously filmed our tunnel experience.

### Local

We reluctantly finished the day at Gayndah, the self-proclaimed citrus capital of Queensland.

By that stage we'd adapted to the hours of riding, the relentless focus and concentration required, and the physical demand of the challenging terrain. We felt like we wanted to go on and never wanted it to end.

That night we enjoyed a hospitable dinner at Gayndah showground hall, hosted by the local community club, which made us feel comfortable and welcome.

### Breathe in

The fifth day was a southbound run to the spectacular Bunya Mountains wilderness range.

At just over 300km, top tracks included the Cherbourg Hill breakout in the Wandii State Forest. At Murgon a local news crew did a story on the Rallye, and locals stopped and chatted, eager to share stories and find common ground.

The rest of the route included a lot of long grass on properties and dodging stock and other hazards in the black soil of



Nangur and Archookoorra State Forests. It was all part of the fun, though.

The final stint from Kingaroy to the Bunya Mountains was a fast, fun, twisting bitumen road that led to the stunning Bunya Mountains Village, where everyone stayed in immaculate, chalet-style cottages surrounded by lush, cool rainforest, including the world's largest forest of Bunya pines.

After changing tyres organised with the wonderful Rob and Anya from Overlanders, and a cold beer or two, the hot showers, blazing fires and mouth-watering meal in the crispy cold mountain air of the Bunya Bistro was a perfect end to the day.

### Too good

The final day was bittersweet.

We stopped at Garry McCoy's café for an essential shot of espresso and racing nostalgia before successfully negotiating the northeastern route from Maidenwell to Cooyah and Blackbutt. The best part of the day was stopping for lunch at a property called Louisavale where an avid young rider named Gus, all of 14



years old, was desperate for a KTM. His supportive parents put on a delicious barbeque burgerfest, with all proceeds and additional donations going towards Gus' bike.

The media crew had an absolute field day at the river crossings, with practical joker Birchy kneeling in freezing-cold water to fool riders into thinking the crossing was neck-deep. The facial expressions were priceless.

Back at Kenilworth the celebrations were raucous and the tales of the journey free-flowing and plentiful, as were the beer and wine.

The KTM Adventure Rallye is all about discovery and experience, the bravado of the biggest-and-best story, of impossible feats and near misses. But it's also about an individual's personal and spiritual journey through some of the wildest and most beautiful terrain on the planet. It's about coming to know yourself, about the pursuit of passion and the connection with powerful machinery designed for performance, agility and speed. It's that irrefutable smell of exhaust, and the deep, throaty engine sound that promises excitement, speed and adventure is just a twist of the throttle away.

Would we do a KTM Adventure Rallye again? In a heartbeat. Do we have any regrets? Only that it ended.

ADV

Top left: The pillion-riding technique seemed to evolve over time.

Top: Tight, technical and rocky.

Left: Enjoying time off the bike as well.