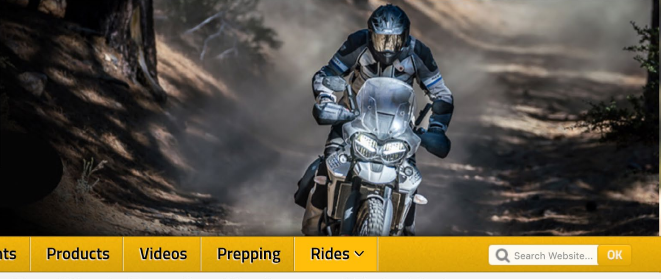

Moto Expedition to Everest on Himalayans – A Test of Endurance

» An ass-kicking moto journey to Everest led by adventurer Steph Jeavons.

Published on 10.21.2019

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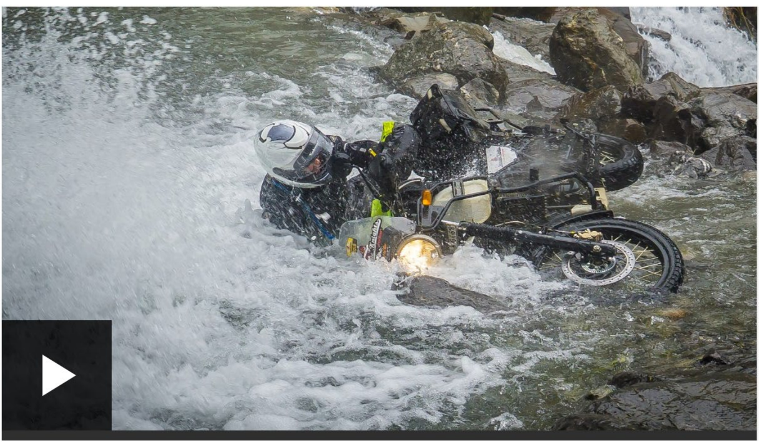


When you sign up to ride motorcycles with famous Round-the-Worlder Steph Jeavons you've gotta know it's not going to be your garden variety affair. Steph, who over the course of 4 years rode 74,000 miles across 54 countries and on all 7 continents (that's right, she even managed to get her trusty CRF250L "Rhonda the Honda," onto a sailing yacht and then a rubber dingy so she could lay tracks in Antarctica), doesn't do things the easy way.

Her recent expedition, leading the first all-female motorcycle group to Everest Base Camp, is a perfect case in point. Surely the 23 women from 6 countries who joined Steph in Kathmandu for a 1,500-mile ride through Nepal and Tibet on Royal Enfield Himalayans were expecting an adventure. The conditions they met straight out of the gate however would test their endurance. Monsoon rains, landslides, road closures, hub-deep mud and bike-drowning waterfall crossings quickly turned Day One into two days. And by the end of that second day enough bones and spirits were broken that only about half the riders were willing and/or able to carry on.

"This was no ordinary tour," says Steph of the heavy rains and horrendous conditions the group faced. "So much was thrown at us…The road was a clay like mud churned up by trucks. The truckers had thrown rocks into the mud to get traction which were hidden to us and causing us a great deal of problems on bikes with limited ground clearance." As the riders carved their way through the deep mud on the first day they made it only halfway to their destination before nightfall. By the end of the second day, several riders had been injured or had given up and many of the bikes had been fully submerged in the raging torrents.

Steph knew from the start that the ride to Everest Base Camp would be a journey filled with extreme challenges. In fact, this was the exact reason she'd chosen such an exacting course. "I believe this is predominantly where we learn about ourselves and what we are truly capable of," she says of the adversity world travelers endure. "It's in those moments we find the greatest of friendships, too."

Getting Totally High

"It was tough going," says Steph of those first days on an improvised landslide-skirting route dotted with mud-stuck trucks and more pounding waterfalls. "The rain rarely gave us respite, but with the help of the friendly locals the remaining riders finally made it through the worst, tired, but happy." From there it was still a long way to Base Camp, but those who made it that far were hell-bent to carry on.

The next hurdle was dealing with the Chinese border. “This is never easy at the best of times,” says Steph. “We were a day late and didn’t have the set up we had promised on paper (bikes/people etc). It was touch and go whether they would now let us through.” The group was thankful to have Alex Pirie, founder of Nomadic Knights, and his Tibetan counterparts along to untangle the red tape. Eventually the group arrived onto a beautifully paved road which brought them to Lhasa, the sacred capital of Tibet. “It was an amazing feeling of elation for everyone, all the sweeter for the challenges we had faced to get there.”

The group cut some corners and eventually caught up with their itinerary, exploring the glaciers and monasteries and turquoise lakes of the Tibetan Plateau, the earth’s highest and largest tableland.

And then finally, on day 11, the apex — Everest. As they approached the road’s end where they would need to ride on an electric bus to North Base Camp, situated at 17,000 feet, the mood was pure jubilation. “The smiles on their faces when we reached Base Camp said it all. To me, that was what it had all been about. The bar had been set high and now the possibilities were endless.”

After an unforgettable night spent sidled up to Everest at the Rongbuk Monastery the group woke to a parting of pervasive mountain fog and and unforgettable reveal of the world’s’ tallest mountain. Their moods were brighter than the snow.

Himalayan vs The Himalayas

How did Royal Enfield’s new darling, the 400cc Himalayan, hold up in these adverse conditions? “The bikes were reliable work horses,” reports Steph. “They got us through everything we threw at them and just kept on pulling.” When the group found themselves riding for hours in deep mud that obscured big rocks, the Enfield’s ground clearance occasionally became an issue and Steph also noted that the 421-pound Himalayan is heavy compared to her CRF250L and it was pretty tiring when you had to pick them up regularly.

"That said, on the road it was obviously nicer to ride than a lightweight enduro bike." Steph liked the Himalayan's neutral riding position as well as the bike's stability, reporting it felt well-planted, regardless of the terrain they encountered during the 1,500 mile journey, including severe switchbacks and treacherous mountain passes. She also says the bikes coped well with the extreme altitudes, which averaged 14,800' across the vast Tibetan Plateau and just over 17,000 feet by the time they reached Base Camp.

The All-Female Impetus

When we asked Steph why she chose the girl's-only angle for her most recent guided adventure, she explained that her mindset, shared with co-creator Alex Pirie, was not as much about excluding men, as it was about encouraging women.

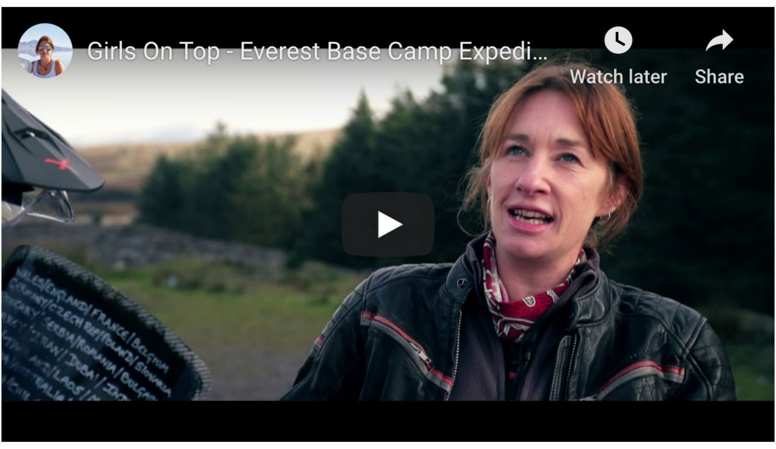
"I wanted to share my love of adventure with women who might get it. I understand the fears they may have faced just to get to the start line. I know that feeling in the middle of being muddy and shattered and wondering why the hell you signed up for this sh*t. I know too the feeling of utter elation and self-worth that comes with achieving your goals despite all of this."

She says what surprised onlookers was that this was not some watered down "girl's ride." From the very first planning stages it was intended to be an adventure that would challenge any rider, male or female. The all-girl's atmosphere simply created a supportive space where the women could be as rough and brave and self-reliant as they needed to be.

Sage Advice

In a recent video the Canadian raised in Wales says she's been many things in her 43 years: a zoo keeper, a human resources manager and a mortgage broker. She also offers that she was once a heroin addict and that her life's greatest epiphany came whilst staring out the window of a prison cell. It was time for change. Time to transform her challenges for adventures.

Steph found combining motorcycles with travel especially empowering. "All these adventures…all of these challenges keep reminding me that I'm alive," she says of riding the world. When she arrived full circle back at the Ace Cafe in the U.K. in 2018, four years after she'd left, she found that what she wanted most was to share the miracle, "to let other people see that they can achieve a lot more than maybe they think they can."



Her latest book, "Embrace the Cow: How to Ride Around the World on a Budget" is a lesson in life as much as it is a guide for would-be world travelers. "I have a saying I stole from a Berber I met in the Sahara many years ago. He said, 'Life is like a cow. Some days it gives you milk. Some days it gives you shit.' This is so true and doubly true of adventure travel. You have to find a way to roll with the punches and embrace it all."

Steph will be leading another epic motorcycle expedition to Everest in 2020. For more information go to nomadicknights.com