

AUSTRALIAN ADVENTURE BIKE

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THE DARK SIDE: ROYAL ENFIELD HIMALAYAN 450 MANA BLACK

ULTIMATE NZ ADVENTURE: KIWI GOLD ON THE SOUTHERN PASSES TOUR

BACK O' BURKE: IN THE STEPS OF BURKE & WILLS WITH MASCHINE

DAKAR DREAMING: SANDRAIDERS GO DUNE SURFING ON CLASSIC IRON

VINTAGE MUSCLE: VINVENTURE RIDING IS A RECIPE FOR FUN

WESTERN EXPRESS

As the only pillion team to ever ride the KTM Adventure Rallye, Danica Madsen brings a unique perspective to the 2025 Bunbury, Western Australia, event from behind Glenn 'Chidge' Chidgey on their KTM 690 Enduro.

BY DANICA MADSEN PHOTOS BY JAWY WILKINSON FOR KTM



There's no better feeling than romping on a beach with your mates, and the WA KTM Adventure Rallye on the southern Western Australian coastline certainly delivered plenty of sand riding good times.



Lush green bush tracks were a big part of the route, but just watch out for the pea gravel when you get back on the forest trails.

W

elcome to Bunbury and the magnificent coastline of south-west Western Australia, home to rolling hills, sweeping forests and pristine ocean views. This is the ninth KTM Adventure Rallye in Australia since 2016, and was my fifth and Chidge's seventh ride with the KTM 'family'. We even had a crack at NZ a couple of years ago.

Each KTM Adventure Rallye is epic in its own way, with its own dynamic and energy. For the 150 lucky riders who manage to score a coveted registration in the event, it's a week of escape, adventure and doing something extraordinary. The energy on this ride is palpable.

Just getting to the Rallye was a challenge for the east coasters, let alone riding it. We'd been notified about riding in sand and clearly it was enough for Chidge to swap our regular 890 Adventure R for the lighter 690 Enduro. Two-up in deep sand on the big bike was, I suspect, his version of pouring lemon juice on paper cuts. Nasty.

This time around the west coasters finally got a break from the travel and transport juggle. We flew in early, making our way to the Mantra Lighthouse Motel, where riders and support staff converged for the start of the event.

GET THIS PARTY STARTED

I get shivers looking over line after line of KTM adventure bikes, set up around tents, flags and other KTM infrastructure. There was a vista of orange and black against the Indian Ocean backdrop. Spectacular! The entourage of professional photographers, videographers and other media crew only added to the electric atmosphere.

Anticipation builds as more riders arrive, sign in, pick up their show-bags full of KTM goodies: shirts, gear and even things this year ... the iconic Aussie double-pluggers! Temperatures hovered between 20 to 25 degrees, so we'd been blessed by the KTM weather gods.

At the evening rider's briefing we get our route map and notes for the next day, including fuel stops and points of interest. Running out of fuel is always a possibility, despite the reminders to fill up. I had a few moments of concern with the smaller tank on the 690 compared to the 890, but we made it without incident.

This time around the Rallye introduced the KTM Gnome-Spotting Adventure Challenge. A KTM gnome would be placed

somewhere on the route, with a sneaky hint given at rider's briefing. Find it, snap a selfie, and you're in the draw for an Ultimate Adventure Moto New Zealand tour, valued at over \$6000. Team Pillion was determined! Standing just over five-feet tall I thought I might have an advantage spotting it ... I was very wrong.

KTM's Rosie Lalonde and Nick Leite once again helmed the event, with plenty of familiar faces and legends in attendance: Gavin McLeod, Dan 'Perko' Perkins, Geoff 'Poolie' Poole, Boothy, Duffy, Jeff Leisk, James



WA local Danny Perkins (right) played a big part in mapping out the course. Nice work, Perko!



With a little more rear brake, of course he'll save it!



Day three's sand section went on forever! But look at that backdrop, what a location!



Look closely: two heads are better than one!
Danica and Chidge set a cracking pace
two-up on their KTM 690 Enduro.



Former Aussie MX champ James Deakin (top) has become a KTM Adventure Rallye regular.

DOUBLE? NO TROUBLE!

What's it like to ride pillion on a KTM Adventure Rallye? Danica Madsen tells all

My pillion riding experience started very early, around four years old, probably about the same age Chidge first threw a leg over a motorbike. He's ridden motocross, Four Days and Six Day enduros, and pretty much every style of riding in between. When we first met he had three KTMs in his lounge room. Honestly, in hindsight I'm surprised they weren't in his bedroom.

My dad had an old postie bike with a homemade back seat, and somehow our whole family used to squeeze onto that poor thing as we pattered around the paddocks of Anambah Estate in the Hunter Valley. My younger brother sat in front 'helping' Dad steer, while Mum, my older sister and I were jammed together on the back like sardines. We'd belt out Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer at the top of our lungs, no matter the month or season. Pure magic.

Fast-forward a decade to where my pillion career really took off. I have equally vivid memories of doubling behind my brother Jeremy, tearing along at breakneck speed on his peaky '81 model YZ250H, mostly on the back wheel, flying around our 200-acre property at Dungog, which backed onto state forest. No footpegs, minimal protective gear, Jeremy having absolutely zero regard for my welfare ... and I loved every dangerous second of it!

PILLION IN A MILLION

Here I am today, late 40s, and I've been pillioning with Chidge since the day we met eight years ago. The first time he took me out on his KTM 1290 Superduke I swear I was reborn. I didn't know you could go that fast on land, and I dare not incriminate us by disclosing the number on the speedo, as my 15-year-old son will undoubtedly read this!

Chidge has been doubling people his whole life. He took his kindy mate Thomo on the back of his minibike at five, and by ten he was tearing through the rugged Watagans evading police, his parents blissfully unaware thinking he and Thomo were innocently climbing trees in the backyard.

We've honed our technique over the years, and people often ask how we manage to stay on, and stay in sync, at the pace we ride. The truth? Connection. Physical and emotional. We were aligned in our riding from day one.

As for balance and trust, yes, absolutely. I explain it to non-riders like horse riding: I'm not clinging to him: I'm balancing with him. I use the Hip Grip 'kiddy belt' (thanks Scotty) like reigns, grip the side with my inner calves, and work with the bike. And let's be real, those KTM adventure bikes do have plenty of horsepower.

ARMCHAIR RIDE

In true Chidge fashion, the bike has been set up with precision to accommodate me. There are rally pegs on custom billet aluminium brackets designed and refined by Bob Payne, a die-hard bike rider in his 70s who raced with the likes of John Hall back in the day. Chidge upgraded the suspension and built a modified seat on the bag rack that doubled as a spare tube bag. Yes, I sat on a tube for a week. Good thing I stand most of the time! We're always tweaking things and doing our own R&D for better performance. He even added grip tape for my inner legs. I've never loved grip tape so much in my life. And of course, the most important thing, the decals. You cannot ride with crooked decals. It affects performance, he demands.

Chidge says he has to change his whole riding style to accommodate me, but I reckon I provide excellent traction



Chidge and Danica are a hell of a team and living proof that the couple who adventure ride together love life together!

control and actually make him faster. He rolls his eyes when I say this, but doesn't deny it out loud.

We make a great team. As lead riders arrowing, he pulls up and I sticker, sometimes barely stopping. Café choices? I pick and point, he pulls up (in theory). On the Rallye I'm the extra set of eyes for arrows and the gate girl everyone benefits from. I can help pick up fallen bikes, lube chains and serve as luggage wrangler and general rouse-about.

The KTM Adventure Rallye is our annual romantic week away, Chidge, me, and about 150 blokes, and a few ladies for reprieve! Romantic indeed. Luckily I grew up a tomboy and genuinely love the camaraderie and banter of a boy's week. These guys just want to have fun, forget about work and responsibility and send it on two wheels.

TO THE CORE

Fitness plays a huge part. He can't ride at peak level for eight-plus hours a day with an extra 50kg on the back without conditioning, and I can't balance in a semi-squat with my core engaged all day without being fit. I only sit on bitumen or flowing fire trails, or when crawling through deep ruts or rivers. On technical sections I adopt the 'gear bag' position, clamped to the bike so he can manoeuvre without being counterbalanced. The rest of the time I stand, watching what he's watching, moving with the bike as naturally as breathing.

People ask why I don't ride myself? I actually have my licence, I've just spent far more time doubling, and honestly, I can't go as fast as Chidge. And now that I've experienced that speed I don't want to go slower.

Adventure riding lights up my nervous system. It's more than Dopamine. It spills into every area of life. Living with risk, passion and energy. I have no desire to live life like a safe sedan. I want to live it like a KTM adventure bike: powerful, responsive, agile and occasionally, airborne.

When I talk to non-riders they look at me like I've sprouted two heads. 'You do WHAT?' Adventure riders get it. KTM Adventure Rallye riders live it. This isn't just community. It's a tribe, a nomadic one, moving together with shared purpose, shared grit and shared love for pushing our limits. Each Rallye feels like completing an ancient hunt. Cementing the tribe for another year. God, I love KTM Adventure Rallye events.

As a life coach, I draw from my pillion experience all the time. The Rallye proves what passion, imagination and determination can create. Things that seem wild, illogical or physically impossible until you do them. With engineering, innovation, experience and teamwork, the KTM Pillion Team rides at an elite level, proving that sometimes, two heads are absolutely better than one!



More oceanside action as the course turns from the beach and Boothy heads for the dunes.

Deakin, and Australian off-road champion Daniel Milner, the five-time AORC winner and founder/rider of the KTM DM31 Racing Team.

Perko, on his home turf, helped set the course and didn't disappoint. His precision planning and adventure mastery were evident from the first kilometre of the ride.

With 150 riders, including a few girls, all high on adrenaline and horsepower, released into the WA wilderness, collateral damage was inevitable. The Rallye is about navigating challenges, making quick decisions and surviving hours of continuous adventure. Bikes ranged from 390s to 1290s, reflecting the riders' diverse backgrounds, experience and tenacity.

DAY 1: BUNBURY TO BUNBURY, 361KM

(3 x Breakouts: Rated from 1 to 4 Chillies = Mouth-Watering to Eye-Watering)

No packing up at the crack of dawn! This was a novelty on a KTM Adventure Rallye, as we don't usually finish a day where we started. Fantastic, so the gear could stay put for another night ... excellent!

Now it's tempting to overestimate your skills on day one, fuelled by adrenaline and caffeine, only for nature (and gravity) to remind us we're mere mortals. You see, nature and gravity have a funny way of bringing us back down to earth.

The route took us through the Darling Range, Dwellingup and Collie, over pea gravel, clay and sand. The pea gravel consists of round marbles up to 30cm deep, which looked smooth but skidded beneath the tyres like skating on marbles. The trick is to lean more, steer less and go with the bike. I relished the flowing fire-trail tracks, as they were scenic and gentle, and perfect for easing back into riding. Others, I suspect, found the surface more challenging.

Dinner was at the Mantra Lighthouse in Bunbury where we were staying. Good food, good drink and great company are definitely hallmarks of all the KTM Rallyes!

DAY 2: BUNBURY TO AUGUSTA, 350KM

(4 x Breakouts: Rated from 1 to 4 Chillies = Singeing to Blistering)

More pea gravel! Perko promised that we would graduate with a degree in pea gravel and that's what is happening. Chidge mastered the pea gravel by day two and several hundred kilometres of it, along with everyone else.

The trick was to go with those marbles, loosen the grip on the bars, use your body for balance and steering, and let the bike do its thing! In short, go with the flow. Good metaphor for life!

The day's ride took us through Blackwood Valley, pine plantations and coastal clay tracks towards Margaret River. Boranup Forest and Cape Leeuwin Lighthouse offered breathtaking scenery and plenty of gnome hunting frustration.

Breakouts were short but intense, from overgrown vegetation threatening to flip you



There he is! Gnome spotting is real on the KTM Adventure Rallye.



Did we mention Day 3's 70km sand section was a monster? Oh yeah!

off the bike, to rutted slippery tracks and steep mountain trails, through twisty steep pine forest and a couple of deep waterholes.

We arrived at the bivouac at the Augusta Hotel, perched up high on the banks of Hardy Inlet where the Blackwood River meets the Southern Ocean. It doesn't get much better than that.

Motorex and tech support crews worked tirelessly on dusty, battered bikes at the end of a hard day's riding. Rob and the Overlanders Team had their work cut out

for them this Rallye on all things tread and tyres.

DAY 3: AUGUSTA TO MANJIMUP, 277KM

(1x Breakout: Rated 5 Chillies = Total Ring-Stinger!)

Sand, sand and more sand is all I can say about day three. This separated the boys from the ... nope, separated no one. We were all humbled tackling 70km of non-stop sand along the coastal track to Black Point

Lookout: 20km was really difficult, while about 8km was excruciating.

This day is 'burned' into my memory. It's hard work being a pillion in sand. The 690 did us proud and was the reason Chidge acquired it. At first I had leaned back too far, going with the principle of lighten the front end. But my extra 50kg had then caused too much lightening. It's a delicate balance. Leaning forward was easier, saved my core, and then criss-crossing the sand track and using the banks as berms and just holding it on was the key to a smoother, consistent experience.

Speaking of keys, even the infamous Steve 'Keyze' Keys at 194cm and 135kg had a moment of humility (and alleged real tears!), when his jacket got caught in his chain. He was sighted rolling in the sand, apparently counting grains and calling out for his mum.

The elation and sense of achievement of getting through that breakout was overwhelming, definitely the highlight of the Rallye for us. Not sure what the rest of the day looked like, as it was a blur after getting through that sand. Fonty's Pool Caravan Park welcomed us that night, and the live music at Tall Timbers reflected the mix of exhaustion, grit, and triumph.



Pumpkin soup in downtown Bunbury as the field gets ready for the start of the Rallye.



Daniel Milner's demo at Manjimup's famed Cosy Creek motocross track was a sight to behold. #canride says it all!

DAY 4: MANJIMUP TO MANJIMUP, 391KM

(No breakouts. Rated: Burn free but still on fire!)

A technically easier day but it still threw some curve balls that kept us on our game and showcased the stunning forest scenery and adventure trails of the west coast. Fernhook Falls and Quinninup Pub were great to visit, and that rascally KTM Gnome at the base of Fire Tower Lookout made for some great pics there and good yarns.

We finished back where we started at Fonty's pool, the energy positive after a fantastic and relatively long day doing what we love best.

GREAT BALLS OF FIRE

After those few intense riding days my quads were feeling it, so I rubbed Tiger Balm into my legs, pulled on loose tights to protect the pristine hotel sheets, and jumped into bed. Chidge climbed in beside me, and we cuddled and chatted about the day.

Then he paused and said, slowly: "Why are my balls ... feeling hot?"

A few seconds later, in pure panic he barked: "Oh my god! They're on FIRE!"

It hit me instantly. Deep Heat is designed to penetrate, and thin pyjama tights are no match for the fiery wrath of Tiger Balm.

I laughed so hard I nearly fell out of bed. Between wheezes, I weakly offered to get him ice. He refused, doubled over in bewilderment and betrayal.

DAY 5: MANJIMUP TO BUNBURY, 268KM

(4 x Breakouts: Rated 1 to 3 chillies = stimulating to scalding!)

We converged on the Manjimup Trail Bike Hub Centre for legal trail bike riding that only just opened. With a rare group photo of the whole WA KTM Adventure Rallye contingent, we felt like superstars, although after a week of riding we were actually dusty, dirty and very worn in.

Chidge revisited his old stomping grounds at Cosy Creek where Milner was spotted whipping over tabletops like the pro he is. Breakouts included ruts, bogs, steep rocky climbs, running streams and regenerating pine plantations, while the Mumby Pub offered a welcome breather.

WRAP IT UP

The final evening is always bitter-sweet. Stories, laughter and reflection about the 'near misses', and then serious talk about



That's a wrap! So many happy smiling faces when everyone rolled back into Bunbury KTM at the finish of the Rallye.

the actual hits, and the realisation that this legendary experience is drawing to a close.

Awards are distributed, including the Muppet (which surprisingly didn't go to Keyze this year), Full Factory, Long Distance and She'll Be Right. Chidge and I were honoured with the Fair Dinkum award.

The KTM Gnome remained elusive for us, but congratulations to the winners of the UAMNZ tour prize! We're determined to be 'gnominated' winners next Rallye for sure.

Thank you KTM Australia, KTM Bunbury, Rosie, Nick, Perko and the whole WA team. Thank you for a memorable experience beyond our wildest orange dreams and expectations. We'll see you on the next adventure! **AAB**