

CROADY'S HONDA AFRICA TWIN

# ADVENTURE READY

Words: Paul | Photos: Kerry/Paul

With a plan to do some adventuring in the South Island, Steven Croad from Northern Accessories sprinkled his Africa Twin with a smattering of aftermarket products to turn it into a pukka adventure machine.

Let's face it, most people who buy adventure bikes are really looking for a comfortable tourer with the off-road look. The manufacturers know this, and – much like your family SUV – most models need a bit of fettling and some modifications if you want to really use them to travel off-road.

Steven Croad is a familiar name within NZ motorcycle circles, and is usually found racing motocross, supermotard and occasionally supersport bikes. But his new-found passion is adventure riding, and with an Africa Twin joining his toy shed slightly over a year ago, it wasn't long before parts were being swapped out to make it more useful off the tarseal.

With 100 horsepower pumping out of the Honda's parallel twin, it's more than enough grunt to get the CRF1000L through, over and along anything you want. But despite the 'off-road' look, it's the areas of weight, protection, personalisation and suspension that need to be addressed before any serious adventuring can take place.

## PROJECT BIKE

As Steven's day job is running Northern Accessories, he had a catalogue nearby from

which to choose the required parts from. Protection came in the form of a good, solid bash-plate which is big enough to cover the header pipes (you don't want to squash those, especially when they're Yoshimura!), and the bottom of the engine, which should ensure any over-exuberance on Steven's behalf, or pesky wayward rocks, won't do anything disastrous like knock the oil filter off. The Honda crash bars should hopefully protect the plastics and radiators in the event of a tumble, and the solid Zeta handguards should be more than up to the task of deflecting an errant branch or rock. Zeta also supplied the frame guards, which should not only help with gripping the bike, but also keep the frame looking good underneath.

Being a big bike, you really need to be able to grip it when the going gets rough or slippery, so Steven swapped the standard pegs and levers for grippy Zeta items, which are sharp enough to ruin your road boots in a day, but provide excellent grip when you're armed with dirt bike boots. The levers also add adjustability, as you're able to alter their angle and distance to make riding while standing up much more comfortable. If you haven't tried it, you'll discover that the levers need to be higher, as your feet are much flatter on the pegs. ➤









More personalisation happened with the removal of the standard screen, as it sits quite high and gets in the way when leaning forward while standing up. The new MRA short screen fixes that and still retains a bit of adjustment.

The Yoshimura exhaust system not only saves a decent chunk of weight (slip-on saves 2.2kilos / headers save 1.5kilos) but sounds the business too, with the bark enough to let people know you're coming, but not obnoxious enough to drive you crazy after an hour in the saddle. Another swap out was the air filter, with Steven saying the standard filter doesn't do too well. The Twin Air foam filter he now uses, not only lets the Africa Twin breathe better, but also helps keep the dust out which is inevitable on any big adventure.

## MANUKAU HEADS

Meeting our main dirt bike tester, Peter 'Broxy'

Broxholme at a secret location at the end of the Manukau Peninsula, I couldn't help but ask myself why we didn't come here more often. Stunning scenery, incredible roads and barely a soul in sight, makes it a bike test nirvana, and with Pete's access to a local farm promising Dakar-style riding, it was already looking like a good day.

The one major flaw of big adventure bikes is the suspension, with the heavier weight and road-biased settings letting the potential of the bikes down when you want to do anything a bit more adventurous. Steven sent his shock and forks down to Scotty Brooker at MotoSR in Taupo and the transformation is truly amazing. Simply lifting the Honda off the sidestand demonstrates the difference, with Steven's bike standing proud while the regular bike sinks down under its own weight. Settling into the saddle and it's like the Africa Twin is already

more nimble and lighter, and that's before I've even turned the key.

With the first part of the test on the road, we continued north looking for some more twisties and a bit of a photo location, although with the Africa Twin sounding more like a V8 on song than a parallel-twin, I was getting a bit carried away and not keen to stop.

The combination of the modifications Steven has made to the bike have transformed the Africa Twin into a far more focussed and enjoyable machine, with the usual soggy gone from both the handling and the power delivery. With the MotoSR-modified suspension now sitting in the optimum position in its stroke, the usual pitching fore and aft that is a bugbear of adventure bikes and their long travel suspension, is all but gone, which is especially impressive with the stronger braking afforded from the replacement front pads. ➤







The new Renthal handlebars add height to the standard set-up, making the Africa Twin more comfortable when standing up on the pegs. They're also pretty comfortable when sitting down, with the narrower width again adding to the feeling of a quicker steering machine. I was still slightly surprised to feel that the Honda needed a decent handful of revs for it to pull away cleanly. Unlike a V-twin where you can usually pull a machine away almost without bothering the throttle, I needed to be mindful of the revs I'd set on the 1000cc parallel-twin when doing U-turns and other slow manoeuvres as the CRF had a tendency to lurch and stall. For a bike that is likely to find itself picking a line through fields of rocks in a South Island wilderness, I think I would have preferred more instant power from the bottom instead of such a strong top-end, although I imagine this might be a characteristic of the Yoshimura full system, which could be dialled out with some ECU work.

The CRF looked seriously off-roady and I was conscious with the corners on the road that the Michelin Anakee Wild tyres were not only brand new, but also seriously knobbly. With Steven heading south

he needed something that was going to keep him and the Africa Twin moving when the going got tough and the Anakees look like they're up to the job.

On the road, I was a little more hesitant although after the first couple of passes, I was surprised that there didn't feel to be any movement from either the front or rear. Finding a tyre to suit all the environments an adventure bike is likely to go is always a difficult task, but the Anakees seemed fine on the road and excellent when heading into the dirt, especially once Pete was on board and heading into the sand.

#### ADVENTURE EXTREME

There probably aren't that many people around who are likely to ride an Africa Twin (or any other big adventure bike for that matter!) like Peter Broxholme. He's ridden Honda motocross bikes for years and is currently doing a series of videos for NZ importer Blue Wing Honda showing what Africa Twins are capable of, but he was extremely keen to get a go on this 'sorted' CRF1000L and put it through its paces in an area where he'd recently been riding the standard machine. ➤

## PARTS LIST

DRC WIDE FOOTPEGS	
AFRICA TWIN	\$119.00
ZETA PIVOT BRAKE LEVER AFRICA	\$89.95
ZETA PIVOT CLUTCH LEVER CP 4FIN	\$89.95
ZETA FRAME GUARD CRF1000L	\$129.00
ZETA REVOLVER LEVER CRF1000	\$129.00
ZETA TRIGGER BRAKE CRF1000	\$149.00
HYPERPRO SPRING KIT HON AFRICA	\$649.00
MRA SHORT SCREEN	\$199.00
RENTHAL REAR SPROCKET	\$99.95
RENTHAL FFRONT SPROCKET	\$39.95
RENTHAL FAT BAR RC/OEM BLK HIGH	\$199.00
RENTHAL RC-1 SPORTS BRAKE PADS	\$59.95
RENTHAL R4 525-130L ROAD CHAIN	\$269.00
RENTHAL GRIP MX H/WAF DUAL RED	\$29.95
YOSHI SO CRF1000L AFRICA SS/CF	\$999.00
HEADER PIPE SYSTEM	\$899.00
TWIN AIR FOAM FILTERS	\$129.00
MICHELIN ANAKEE WILD TYRES	From \$279.00



Watching him skip and jump across the paddocks on the way to our photo location, it was immediately evident he was comfortable on the bike and the confidence he derived from the firmer suspension, knobby tyres and Renthal and Zeta additions showed in his style. Looking more like he was riding one of Honda's 450cc off-road machines, it didn't take long before Pete was tackling much more intense obstacles that I would have trouble walking up, let alone riding a 200+kilo road bike over.

Stand-up slides, big wheelies, bouncing over rocks, logs and anything else that got in the way looked like child's play on the modified Africa Twin, with all the added parts and modifications working together to make this a pukka adventure bike that hadn't lost any of its

fantastic road manners.

And that's the real trick with adventure bikes – everything is a compromise. And it's how you manage that compromise that determines where the bike sits. Making a good off-road adventure bike or a comfortable road adventure bike is easy, but making one that can do both disciplines well is much harder.

What Steven has done with his Africa Twin is about as close as you can get to making a perfect, big adventure bike. Okay, you still need to have the skill to punt one of these machines well off-road, as when it goes wrong you can really get into trouble in the dirt on a big bike. But for riders with Pete and Steven's ability, this Africa Twin is the business, and

Pete has already made the call to MotoSR for the suspension mods and started the conversation with Steven to try and get some of the same parts.

With new, mid-capacity adventure bikes looking to be coming from many of the mainstream manufacturers before the turn of the century, it could well spell the end of these big off-roaders. That is, as long as the smaller bikes aren't focussed too far one way or the other. And as my father always said, 'there's no substitute for ccs' and there really is nothing quite like opening the throttle of a litre machine off-road and lighting up the back tyre. With the way Steven has got his Africa Twin sorted, it makes having fun on and off the beaten track a very enjoyable pastime indeed.

A big toy for the boy



## BROXY'S BIT

I almost wish I hadn't ridden Croady's bike now. They say that ignorance is bliss, and I was plenty happy with the standard Africa Twin until I rode his.

As Paul says, the benefits of firmer suspension were obvious the moment I took the bike off its stand. That feeling of lightness was even more noticeable once we got going.

On the road it really holds its line when you hit a hole or bump when halfway through a corner, rather than

wandering off to make like more difficult. That lack of "wallow" is also a welcome improvement on the gravel and of course it really comes into its own on the dirt.

The word to describe this firmer suspension off-road is "positive". You can use the bumps and holes to put the bike where you want to because it now responds so well. It also seems to handle sharp hits like rocks better, no doubt making the tyres less susceptible to punctures on those rocky Dusty Butt trails.

It pays to be prepared, and Steven has added a lift stand to its underside in the case of a puncture, as he does ride them pretty hard. It is easy to use, lifting the 240kg of bike with mostly well-balanced technique rather than pure grunt.

As for the other accessories, I immediately ordered many of them for my own ride. The wider footpegs will take the fatigue out of my feet on those ten hour-plus days, requiring the adjustable gear and brake levers as

they will force my feet backwards on the pegs. Proper hand guards make a big improvement on the stock handguards that break quite easily, with handlebars and levers to suit.

The last main thing were those tyres. I had no hope of keeping up with Steven when I tried to follow him down to Palmerston North in atrocious conditions a few months ago, and he put much of it down to his Anakee tyres. Being a softer compound, the

rear might not last too long under power sliding conditions on gravel, but being so much better in wet conditions than the other tyres I had tried, they would be worth it. I found them very capable on the dirt as well.

As much as I wish I hadn't ridden it because I won't have time to get my suspension set up like his for the Dusty, the other additions will no doubt make my ride much more enjoyable. And safer, which is kind of important. ■■■