

Ice cool in 'The North'

A Canadian husband and wife adventure team have conquered some of the toughest roads in the world on their BMW F 800 GS motorcycles and turned the journey into a thrilling TV series. Producer Joe Lloyd and director wife Flora, of Curbsyde Productions, travelled 10,000km through the frozen tundra of Canada's Northwest Territories, from Victoria to Tuktoyaktuk.



The result is the documentary series *Reconnecting with Canada: The North*. The pair and their support team braved temperatures as low as almost -50°C , ice roads with cracks capable of swallowing a bike wheel, and some of the toughest riding conditions imaginable to make the series. But even a serious head-on collision which shattered the front of Joe's motorcycle failed to stop man or machine.

"On the Fort Chip ice road, I came around a corner and hit a dump truck stopped on the road – bear in mind you can't use brakes on the ice! The whole front end of my motorcycle shattered in the cold. We weren't far from our destination and I managed to limp in, but that night was the low point of the whole trip. I wasn't sure if I'd be able to ride, my bike was in pieces, and I was extremely sore. The next morning, I was in pain, but we got the bike fixed up with a lot of duct tape and ended up riding it another 4,000 kilometres to our destination!"

It is testament to both Joe and his bike that they did carry on – particularly as riding conditions were some of the toughest imaginable. "The coldest we saw was on the Tuktoyaktuk ice road and it was -47°C . The cold really varied, we had some days that were -20°C which actually felt colder than days at -35°C , a lot had to do with the humidity levels," says Joe. Despite the cold, the BMW F 800 GS went mostly unmodified and the team did without heated clothing. "We did put on Hippo Hands, which are giant muffs that cover the grips and capture some of the heat. They also cut down on the wind, which at the lower temperatures really isn't pleasant!"

Throughout the trip, the group were guided by Paul 'The Iceman' Mondor. A veteran of navigating Canada's frigid north, Paul holds the World Record for being the first person to ride coast to coast in the country during the winter. The ice roads which were part of the journey are, as the name suggests, literally roads formed from incredibly thick ice on a lake or sea. Riding or driving on them is an art, and strict rules over speed must be adhered to, says Joe:



“The ice roads were exceptionally challenging. The one at Tuktoyaktuk has extremely large cracks all over the surface – far wider than the tyres – and deep enough to stop you instantly. We constantly scanned the surface ahead, avoiding cracks, and snow drifts – all with almost no traction to speak of. I dropped the bike twice on the Fort Chip ice road and once on the Tuktoyaktuk ice road which, as a rider, was the toughest part of the journey. It had no traction, cracks were everywhere and it was our coldest day. Riding on the ice is really about weighting the pegs as much as possible, using the pegs to steer the bike, and not touching the brakes. Ever!”

While this was the first time the Curbsyde team had ventured into extreme icy conditions, they are veterans of endurance trips, having travelled Australia, New Zealand and Canada. For Joe, BMWs are the only bikes worth using. “For the past three projects we have chosen BMW motorcycles exclusively. The brand offers an excellent blend of durability, comfort, and power that we tend to require. As we test any motorcycle to its limits, we also like the support BMW offers with their product. It doesn't matter if we're in the middle of downtown Vancouver, or the Dempster Highway, if we have a problem, BMW roadside assistance is available.

“On this trip, the bikes were absolutely amazing! They would start without any coaxing down to the -30C mark – after that they would require a jump start from the X5. The X5 is another BMW product that should really get a mention in all of this. It was flawless the entire way as well,” Joe adds. The camera equipment suffered more in the cold – shutdowns and malfunctions were common, particularly when temperatures fell below -30°C.

While the riding was undoubtedly tough, it was also the experience of a lifetime. From stunning scenery to rare wildlife, the team were treated to a world of new experiences.

“There were so many highlights of the ride, though as a team the number one was reaching Tuktoyaktuk (the final destination),” says Joe. “The moment I saw Tuk in the distance really was something I’ll never forget. After weeks of the cold, slips, falls, and almost an entire day of our hardest riding yet on the Beaufort Sea, seeing Tuk really meant we accomplished something truly amazing. Scenery-wise the Dempster Highway to Inuvik really was our crown jewel. I also really enjoyed riding up the Alaskan Highway right next to the buffalo herd. It was amazing to just sit on the bike in the snow next to them. The other truly amazing sighting we had was a lynx on the Dempster Highway wandering in front of us.”



As BMW adventurers often find, the reception from people along the route was universally positive. “Any town we entered, any gas station, any café and we had people coming up to us. After all it's -25°C outside and two motorcycles pull up! Everyone was amazingly supportive of what we were doing. We had a lot of helpful advice, from locals about road conditions and everyone was really looking out for us. It was the same on the road, as the majority of traffic was big trucks carrying their load, they did their best to get right over, or slow down going by.

“Funnily enough we even saw another group of bikers in Fort Chipewyan, right after I had my accident. They were doing a 400km charity run on the ice road – their mandate was to bring toys to kids at the local school. One of them had the same bike as me, and offered me any parts from it to complete my journey. We ended up using duct tape, but what an amazing offer!”

To watch episodes of Reconnecting with Canada: the North and for photos and news from the expedition, visit www.curbsyde.com .