



Look how short the Indian-spec pipe is compared to the ADR version in the main pic

Several years ago a young fella by the name of Mike Ferris was touring the world, just poking around backpacking. In India, a German doing a similar thing wanted to fly out. Did Mike want to buy his motorbike? At this stage our hero had never even ridden a bike, but it seemed like a good way to get around so Mike handed over \$700 and the other bloke tossed him the keys. Isn't it funny where such things can lead. Within days he was hooked, exploring strange places with a new-found freedom. The bike really made things easy, and created a lot more contact with the locals. This, he decided, was the way to go.

Mike is now ever so slightly older, but he still feels the same way and shares his enthusiasm for exploring foreign places on motorcycles with the customers who have been flocking to his tour company, Ferris Wheels – what else would you call it! Mike uses a range of bikes for adventures through the Himalayas and Turkey, but his favourite by far is the amazingly old/new Enfield Bullet. He has brought two back to Australia, and we can understand why – to ride one is to be transported to another place, another time.

### Nostalgia

Those few readers with grey hair may well remember this type of bike from their youth. Team Sidetrack can remember spot-lighting rabbits in paddocks on a 650 Triumph, or the night our mate put the push rods in wrong in his Norton, and with one thing leading to another nearly burnt the shed down. The roar of a British twin, the clunk of a pre-unit gearbox, the tell-tale spot of oil on the pathway leading to a young girl's door. Those were the days ...

And you can have it all again, or experience it for the first time if you're a young 'un, thanks to Indian perseverance. What happened was that when Enfield bit the bullet financially, the Indians stepped in and bought up big. To this day there are factories filled with happy workers, pumping out Bullets by the wagon-load, and thousands of Indians only too happy to ride them.

Mike says that all his customers have the same initial reaction.

"They're all really wary at first, and there's a lot of joking at the bike's expense, but by the end of the tour you'd be surprised how many want to buy them and take them home."

The appeal doesn't come from amazing technology, impressive performance or brilliant suspension, because the Bullet doesn't have any of that. The appeal is that unfathomable factor, character, which the bike has by the drip-tray full. The chrome tank, the hand-painted pin-striping, the old-world speedo – this isn't a replica retro bike, this is the real thing.

### Ride Anyone?

Surprisingly enough it is also not a bad thing to ride. Starting is generally pretty easy and the big 500 single is remarkably free of vibration. Even the clutch doesn't feel too bad, with a surprisingly light action. The gearbox requires a big throw, and there is a bit of a knack to getting back to neutral, but we're in a slower, more relaxed world here so nothing is really a problem.

The Bullet gets along at a good pace too. You're not going to annoy the Police very often, but you will cover ground and enjoy the journey. The brakes are so-so but it only takes a few minutes to adapt and either brake earlier or slow down sooner. Handling too is pretty good, and the suspension set firmer than we expected.

But it's the grin factor that gets you in. Buzz down the road on one of these and you can't help breaking into a huge smile. It doesn't matter where the bike is headed, while you're on it you're transported to an exotic place where the pressure is off, and life is relaxed yet full of promise and adventure. Don't ask us how this happens, but that's just the way it is. It may be an old design, but the Enfield still has a heap of magic.

If it can make hardened bike cynics like us feel that way in Sydney, imagine the bundle of fun they would be as you tackled the highest road in the world on one of Mike's tours. Come to think of it, we may have to try it ourselves in the not too distant future.