

# Ride Richard, ride!

When you travel on two wheels you see things differently.

**Milton Schorr** packed up his life in Cape Town and rode a 900cc Honda motorbike to Joburg. Maybe for good.

ILLUSTRATION  
NICOLENE LOUW

It's 9 am and I've strapped a rucksack to Richard's back and one to my own. Richard's my bike, a Honda CB900F 1983 model. I named him Richard Parker after the tiger in *Life of Pi*, because he's golden and he roars.

I turn the key, start the motor and say goodbye to Cape Town. Everything we need is with us; everything we don't need has been left behind. We're going to Joburg.

I listen to music through headphones as the city flits past and disappears. The load strapped to Richard is huge and I can't shake the thought that it will fall off, so we stop at a hardware shop in Parow to buy a ratchet strap. Then we're off again: Paarl, the Huguenot Tunnel, out into the mountains.

I first saw Richard at dusk, crouching sleekly in the garden of a man named Quinton who lived in Thornton. I knew immediately that he would be my bike and I couldn't believe I only had to pay R14 000 for him. That night, Richard took me for a spin up and down the streets of Tamboerskloof. We varied our route so that we didn't attract the attention of the neighbourhood watch. All the while, he patiently taught me how to handle a machine as big as him.

A week later he delivered his next lesson. As we traced the coastal road to Hout Bay at midnight, Richard showed me the click and pull of the gears and he demonstrated the roar of the 900cc engine. Sea spray swirled and settled and headlights of cars swept through the dark. Push as fast as you dare, but be careful on the corners, he said. That night I had to leave Richard outside in the street, because he was just too big to take into my room with me.

**It's been three weeks since that evening** and now we're out here in the mountains, flying through space. Richard's cylinders are pumping and the peaks of the Cape are scrolling past. The day stretches out.

We arrive in Beaufort West at 6 pm after an entire day on the road. We're a real pair now, rider and machine. We've experienced the battering of the wind and we've napped on the roadside after we fell asleep for a split second and woke to a jolt of adrenaline. We've ridden the curves of the mountains and the long straights, and we've seen faraway jet planes soaring above.

Cruising through the streets of this Karoo town, my feet are bare in slops and Richard's gear lever

is snug above my left big toe. We weave between the big, slow trucks, looking for a place to eat in the cool of the evening. At Hotel Oasis it's R90 for a three-course meal. I tuck into an old-world pile of food while I watch *The Lord of the Rings* on my laptop in the Ladies Bar where a gentleman as old as the building refills my drink. I'm told they haven't changed the mattresses here since the 1970s. It looks like they haven't emptied the ashtrays either.

Later that evening I leave Richard in a safe parking area, looking supreme in his own parking bay, and sleep at the Karoo Backpackers until the morning comes pushing through the curtains. It's a new day and we strap everything back up. Then we ride. What have we left behind? We don't know. The earth is round so it's not behind, it's ahead of us. We're moving forward.

"You must use some Valve Ease," says a guy in Richmond. He stopped to have a look at Richard and to chat about bikes as I sat down for breakfast after three hours on the road.

"What's that?"

He swipes a workman's thumb along the inside of Richard's exhaust and shows it to me.

"It should burn grey,"

he says, waving his pitch-black finger.

After he's gone, I wonder if I should phone my mechanic Eddie in Cape Town and ask him about Valve Ease, but then I think that Eddie would have suggested it if it was important.

I ask Richard what *he* thinks. "What's Valve Ease?" Richard growls. "Let's ride."

**It's different out here.** It's hot, but I'm wrapped in leather and my special grey riding pants. We're moving out of the Karoo; our goal tonight is Bloemfontein. The country is long, flat, brown and covered with stocky plants. We ride. We learn to corner like a streak and weave at high speeds. We have no fear of the slow, lumbering lorries – we simply pass them with the throttle pulled back. Richard's four cylinders power us forward and my throttle hand becomes a numb claw.

We sleep at the Naval Hill Backpackers in Bloemfontein. Chris the owner gives me a huge slice of watermelon to say hello. I gobble it down, seeds and all. I wax Richard's chain, as Eddie the

mechanic told me to, but then I lose my balance and drop Richard while trying to put his central stand in the gravel. He lies quietly on his side. Richard weighs 230 kg and putting him upright is an effort, but he humours me, because he knows I'm learning to do better.

The dorm room is covered in graffiti. Steven and Sarah got engaged here, Fokopolisiekar played here and someone wrote Jack Parow lyrics on the wall. It's a place of in-between, of adventure. A place to reflect.

Tomorrow Richard and I will hit Joburg where we'll start a whole new chapter. The buildings will appear: the sprawling townships, the crawling suburbs, the pounding mines, the centre of money. Richard and I will go into it. Our three-day journey, our time to learn to ride and taste every kilometre of the big move, will be over.

Outside, Richard crouches: a blue and gold tiger in the moonlight. He knows it too, but he sees it differently. For him, tomorrow is just another day to ride.

What have we left behind? We don't know. The earth is round so it's not behind, it's ahead of us. We're moving forward.

