

GAMBALUNGA



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Two trips, One passion

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*From Alaska to Patagonia and
from Italy to Mongolia and back*

For many years, my wife Gisella and I have been involved in different trips around the world.

I had a dream to cross the American continent from Alaska in the North to Patagonia in the South. During the winter of 2009 and 2010, I was looking a big map that we have on the wall in my house, when my dream changed to reality. I remember that night of the last day of the year, I said to Gisella "We will do this trip!"

The next day, the preparation started, but what is necessary to prepare for a trip like this? What kinds of documents are needed? How do we organise the shipping of the bike? How many days will be necessary? Many, many questions, many, many uncertainties, but thanks to the our strong conviction, all the preparation was done without stress and in time before "D Day", 11th August 2010.

Yes, this was the date when, Gisella, our bike and I would set off from Alaska in Anchorage. The only question in our minds, was "which kind of bike?" Moto Guzzi Stelvio, of course!

Fortunately, as part of my job, I have frequent contact with the Piaggio group in Pontedera, and as you know, Moto Guzzi is part of this group. Some months before to the departure date, a representative from the R&D department of Moto Guzzi said to me "Gianni, will you go to Alaska with our bike? It is important for us to analyse the durability of some components, and if you agree, you could use our Stelvio." Sounded good to me!

As it turned out, the starting point was not Anchorage, as it was not important enough for me. Instead, the first day of our trip was used to reach the Arctic Circle in Alaska, and only when this exciting point was reached by me, Gisella and Dina (this was the name of the Stelvio) was the front wheel turned in a southerly direc-

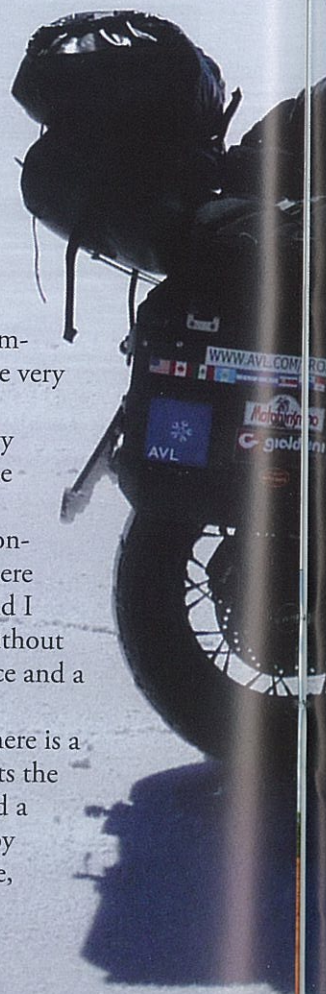
tion. OK, now the trip can start!

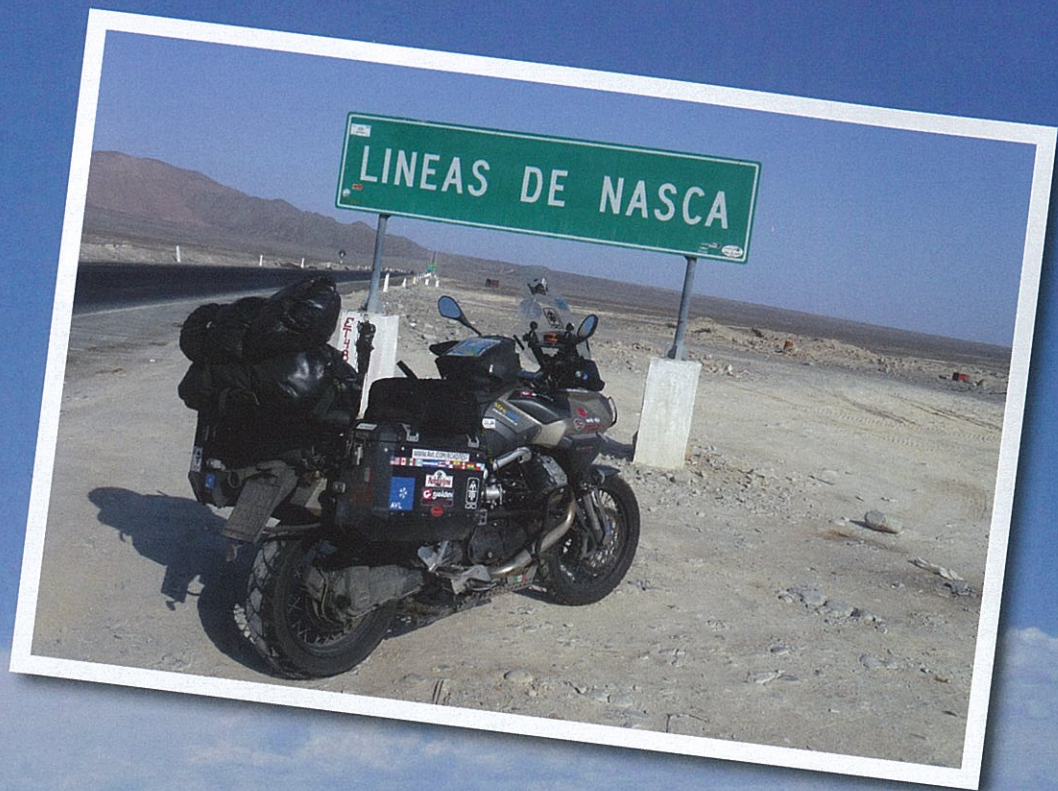
The target was to cross the American Continent via the Pan American Highway, but we didn't have much time in which to do this. Day by day, many kilometers were covered and In just six days, we had crossed Alaska, Canada and the USA. The entry into Mexico was shocking. One wall divided the USA from Mexico, and behind the wall the world changed dramatically. Many people were armed, the social situation, the faces, the feeling, everything was completely different. Now Gisella and I were very alone.

Central and South America were very dangerous. Mexico was crossed using the western route; we then passed through Guatemala, EL Salvador, Nicaragua, Honduras, Costa Rica and then Panama. There were many days where, Gisella, Dina and I were exposed to dangerous situations without any support, but with a big internal force and a fundamental conviction to go on.

In Panama, the road disappeared. There is a big forest called the Darien Gap that cuts the continent into two parts. We had to find a way to cross. There are only two ways, by private boat which was risky, or by plane, safer but also more expensive. We chose the second solution and in five days we were able to reach Quito in Ecuador.

In Ecuador, the trip started again, but not exactly from the city. We had to back-track for some kilometers up to the Equator, another





very important geographic point for Gisella and me. From here, we again headed south.

Through Ecuador and finally Peru, there were fantastic views close to the Pacific Ocean; we traveled on an incredible road for many kilometers close to the sea.

Chile was now close, and when we crossed the border between Peru to Chile a sign said "2,091 kms to Santiago"...

Chile is a very long country, more than 5,000 kms divided in three parts. The first one, like a Peruvian country, the second part is desert, where the Atacama Desert is king. More than 400km without seeing anything, just Gisella, Dina and me. The last part,

close to Argentina, is more similar to a European country. Close to Bariloche we entered Argentina, where it was still winter, with the temperature dropping down to minus 6 degrees, snowing and a very strong wind forcing us to ride the bike in very dangerous conditions. Around 800 kms to Ushuaia and the trip finished.

Unfortunately, 40 cm of snow covered the roads and the Garibaldi pass that permits entry into Ushuaia is closed. Bye bye Tierra del Fuego, see you soon.

The return to Buenos Aires was done in just three days, and after thirteen countries, 24,500km in only 35 days,

On Bonneville Salt Flats, Utah



A Mongolian main road

this fantastic and exciting trip ended.

On the plane returning from Buenos Aires, I said to Gisella "Next year I want to start from my house and travel only on the bike ... no plane, and no shipping of the bike. So, during the winter, in front of my big map, I decided that the next expedition must be ... Mongolia.

For this trip, Piaggio suggested that I use a Moto Guzzi Stelvio 2011. The colour is black, 32 liters of fuel in the tank, a fantastic bike! We decided to start at the end of July in order

to stay in Mongolia for the middle of August when the weather conditions should be good. I live in Turin, in northern Italy, and on the morning of Saturday 23th of July we started.

Italy, Switzerland, Germany, Poland, Byelorussia and a very long and tough Russia. Here the roads are destroyed, with many holes in the asphalt, like the craters of Vulcan, constraining us to a reduced speed and the traffic jams are just crazy!

After twelve days, we arrived at the Mongolian border. We know that in Mongolia there is nothing, and this is the reason we are here, we want to live with nothing, immersed in nothing, requiring nothing! We have a camping tool, one tent, two sleeping bags, a little camping gas stove and nothing else. We are ready to leave, for eight days heading completely into the wild. But for people like us, who are not accustomed to sleeping with two wolves close to the tent, it could be a critical situation.

We are alone as usual, and we know that in front of us there are more than 2,000 km of off road. Every day starts at 7.00am and ends at 8.00pm and we faced a very difficult challenge. Our bike, with luggage and us was more than 560 kilos. The roads, or I should say dirt tracks, are very difficult in particular when it rains. But an incredible and unstoppable Stelvio was able to support us during the crossing of Mongolia. More than 2,000km in eight days, without problems!



An Ovoo, a Mongolian shrine

At the end of Mongolia, close to the border with Russia, the distance covered was 14,000km but in front of us, again, Russia is waiting. With the off road wheels installed on bike, we cross the border and start again. Russia, Ukraine, Hungary, Slovenia and finally Italy.

More than 20,500 km, 30 days, nine countries, two people and one Moto Guzzi!

What will be next? Follow us, the dream must continue!



Pacific coast, Peru



Above and below: Mongolia



I met Gianni at the Milan bike show and asked him to tell his amazing story. It just goes to show that you don't need a BMW GS to cross continents! Gianni has a book and DVD available from the website however they are only available in Italian: www.livetheworld.it

Chris Horton, East Yorks Branch