

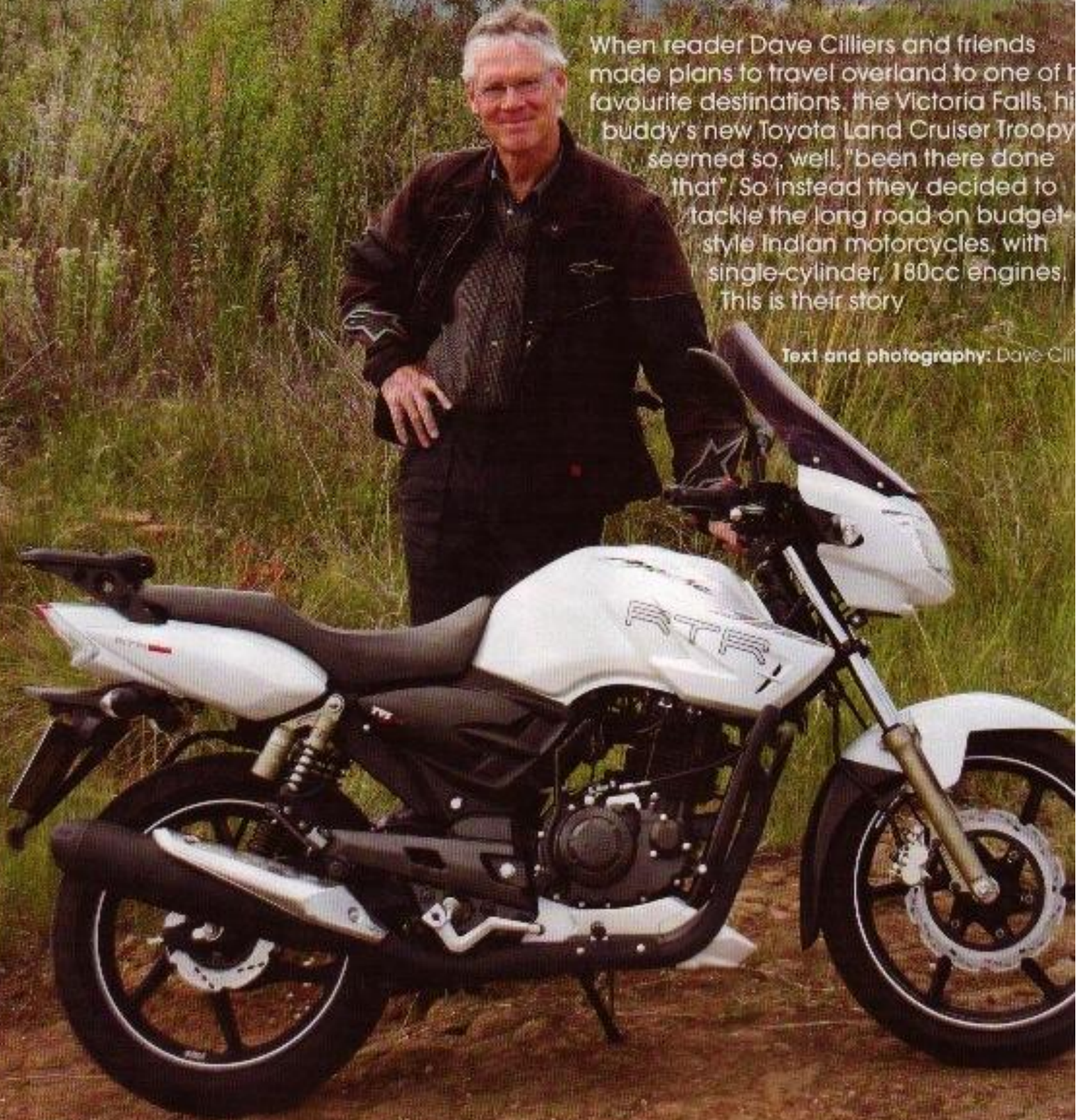
APACHE 180 BIKES TAKE ON AFRICA

The Indian invasion of

Vic Falls

When reader Dave Cilliers and friends made plans to travel overland to one of his favourite destinations, the Victoria Falls, his buddy's new Toyota Land Cruiser Troopy seemed so well, "been there done that". So instead they decided to tackle the long road on budget-style Indian motorcycles, with single-cylinder, 180cc engines. This is their story

Text and photography: Dave Cilliers



Folklore has it that the North American Apache Indian people were incredibly tough, survived in the wilderness on just about nothing, and were once led by an infamous chief called Geronimo.

My little TVS Apache 180 RTR commuter bike hails from India, but admittedly has very little in common with the likes of Geronimo and his fearsome warriors. Instead, I think a comparison with cricketing legend Sachin Tendulkar is more appropriate. Just like little Sachin, the Apache 180 RTR has a surprising amount of skill and value. It may be small in stature but inside that body beats the heart of a lion!

The trip to the Victoria Falls and the Indian Apaches started a while ago when my buddy, Cobus, found that his tall Toyota Land Cruiser Troopy did not fit into the reserved parking bay at his office. I recommended he acquire a TVS Apache for commuting, and sweetened the deal with a promise of a road trip on our TVS bikes.

Cobus bought one, and I had to make good on the promise of a road trip. As news spread about our plan, two more TVS riders stuck up their hands to join us. And so, at 6:30 on a Friday morning, four TVS Apache RTR 180cc bikes and a Honda 650 Trans Alp, all laden with camping gear and other equipment, departed Gauteng for Victoria Falls.

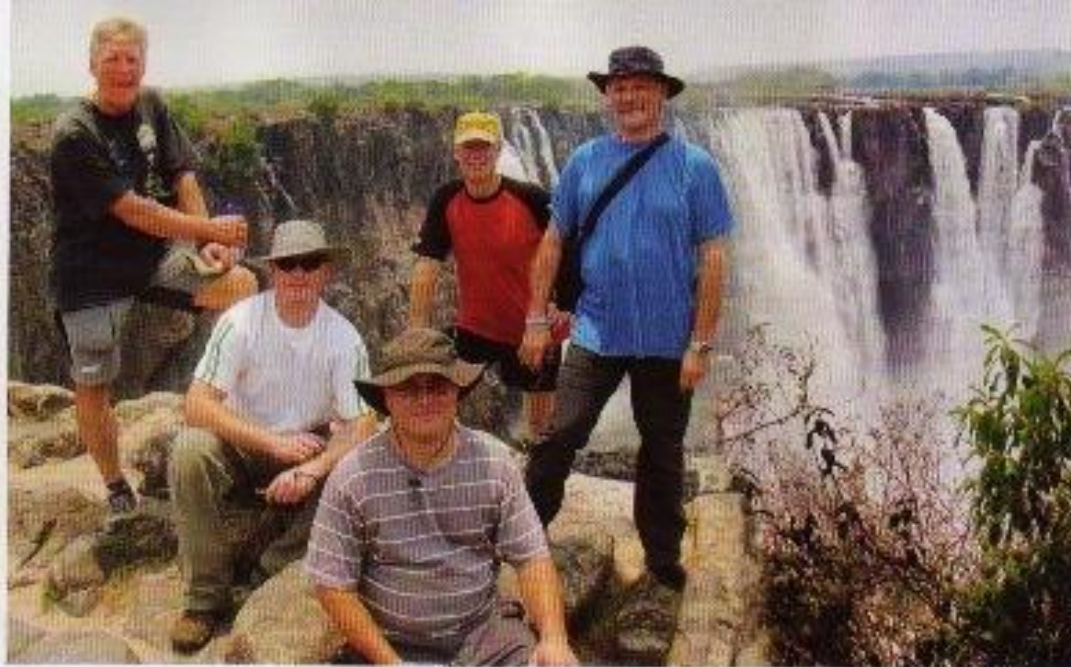
After a quick Wimpy brekfi in Bela Bela it was back in the saddles, and with the day getting ever hotter, we hung a left in Modimolle and then a right at Vaalwater. All was well with the world as we spotted game through the beautiful bushveld. Marken, Baltimore and Tom Burke were all reeled in and dispatched as we approached Botswana.

As is always the case at this border post, in my experience, we were back on the road in no time, cruising along at an average speed of 95km/h.

In the late afternoon the four Apaches, - with the shepherding Trans Alp, pulled into Itumela Camp in Palapye. After sipping ice cold St Louis beers and gorging ourselves at the buffet, we retired to our comfy dorm for a well-earned doze. With new-found respect and confidence in our plucky Indian steeds, we looked forward to the days ahead. Hot stuff, baby! And the rise of the sandmaster!

Day two dawned drizzly and cool. After refuelling, we rode north to Francistown, and breakfast. With our hunger stilled, we set Nata in our sights and gave the foursome of Apaches free rein.

The drizzle had been replaced by the



Main photo: Dave Gilliers with his trusty TVS Apache 180 RTR. The little bike really impressed him during his trip. Not only did it handle the long, open roads well, but it needed only 2.5-litres of fuel per 100km! Above: Dave and his friends at their destination – the Victoria Falls.

furnace that is our African sun, so it was some hot and bothered riders that pulled in to Nata Lodge for a well-earned breather – especially after a long cruise at 95km/h.

The smouldering aftermath of a veld fire that had raged in the night turned the dry bush into an even hotter and more tortured landscape. The thermometer registered 40C for the first time on our trip.

Our destination was Elephant Sands, 54km out of Nata on the Kasane road. The deep sand track that leads to Elephant Sands Lodge was somewhat intimidating. So yours truly, with a bit more sand-riding experience than the others, volunteered to ride the Indian bikes through the sand.

I was promptly given the nickname The Sandmaster by travelling companion Steve, who imports TVS bikes to SA. My newly acquired nick-name may not have sounded as intimidating as Geronimo, Superman or Travis Pastrana, but I reckon there was certainly a degree of Valentino Rossi-ness about me that day.

Well, for a very short while, anyway. Guess who planted his face in the sand first? Yep, "The Sandmaster", along with his Rossi-esque demeanour!

Oh well, at least my fellow Apache bikers were highly supportive of my efforts – they attempted to compact the sandy surface

for me by rolling on it, like a CAT bulldozer compactor – while laughing hysterically at the same time.

We, or more precisely, I felt a bit better when the Elephant Sands manager later told us that we had made light work of the sand compared to some bikers on their heavy BMW GS machines.

Our (my) hardships were soon forgotten as the St Louis gates opened and we adopted the serene vibe of this oasis in the bush. Special mention must be made of the tasty ribs, pap and gravy, salads, veggies and pudding that topped up our tanks and increased the gravitational pull on our eyelids!

However, Elephant Sands had a few more tricks up its sleeve that evening. In our three-man bungalow Willem, the man of the Trans Alp, shook out his bedcover – and a large scorpion was duly delivered upon his naked left foot. What followed next could best be described as an award-winning rendition of the "Getting jiggy with a scorpion" dance!

When we finally settled down, with the temperature hovering around the 38C mark at 9pm, the score was as follows:

Willem's takkie = 3 points; scorpion = 0 points; spider = 0 points; and cockroach = 0 points!



Far left: The travellers take a well-deserved break.

Left: A part of the old Rhodesian tweespoor road.



The pack of Indian Apaches – not your average overland convoy!

The scorpion... captain?

We were up early next morning in an effort to tick off as many kilometres as we could in the cooler hours.

Sometime during the night Cobus had gone strolling outside, unable to sleep. That's when he came across an elephant family, grazing near our dwelling. So first he had to show us the elephant tracks – and they were certainly not a figment of his imagination!

My Apache now also sported the exoskeleton of Willem's "getting jiggy" dance partner, strapped down with a cable tie. It seemed wrong to leave a man – or a scorpion – behind.

After a breakfast stop at Pandamatenga, where it should be noted petrol is no longer available, we cruised on to Kasane. We did stop a couple of times to photograph an elephant family sheltering in the shade.

How awesome it is to ride in this unspoilt wilderness where elephants and other wildlife come and go as they please!

After pitching our tents in the campsite at Chobe River Lodge, we shopped for our first self-cooked meal. We enjoyed amazing fillet steak (R55 a kilo in Botswana), mealies and rolls, washed down with the adventurer's quintessential travel mate, commonly referred to as Captain Morgan and Coke.

We also made a few calculations around the campfire, regarding fuel consumption. Cruising at around 95km/h, the Apaches were drinking an average of 2,5 litres/100km! Unbelievable!

Finally, a stunning sunset over the Chobe River bade farewell to another special day.

Howzit, Vic!

The next morning we crossed into Zimbabwe – and thank goodness the Apaches use as little fuel as they do! This helped ease the pain of the ridiculous US\$46 (about R370) road and carbon tax levied by the powers that be in Zim. It's a real nice way of rewarding tourists who come all this way to your country to spend big money here.

Anyway, an hour after the border crossing we purred into Victoria Falls – one of my favourite destinations.

The municipal campsite has been upgraded with a restaurant and swimming pool and is immaculately maintained. In no time our tents were pitched on "shady lawns" and we strolled to the elegant and stately Victoria Falls Hotel for a drink.

Thick walls and high ceilings with fans keep the finely furnished, colonial style lounges cool. The view of the railway bridge to Zambia, with its famous bungee jump, is spectacular from the terraced lawns in front of the hotel.

After an afternoon swim, we rode up to the

lodge adjacent to the Boma restaurant and witnessed a herd of elephant at the waterhole.

All this as the sun – a huge red orb – set in the background. It was picture perfect, and it was magnificent.

Back we went for dinner next to the pool, and then to bed.

The Vic falls... admiral?

Bright and sunny skies heralded a new day.

A visit to the actual falls was on the agenda.

At R160 a pop, it is relatively cheap, too! We meandered along the lip of the magnificent gorge over which the Zambezi River boils and tumbles in all its glory.

Magnificent red spiky flowers grow in the rainforest, thriving in the constant spray from the falls. Vervet monkeys gambol about, chattering and seemingly forever on the lookout for mischief. One simply must experience the falls first hand. Words cannot convey their splendour!

We took the scenic route back from the falls, stopping to photograph our bikes with the backdrop of the Big Tree – a 1500-year-old baobab.

Having really enjoyed chatting to Captain Morgan at Chobe, Steve – who has since earned the nickname "Corporal Coleman", and "The Sandmaster" went to replenish our stocks.

We discovered that in Zimbabwe only "Admiral" rum is sold. So the logical deduction we made was that "The Captain" had clearly been promoted to "The Admiral", and as such would have even more wisdom to share!

Warm rum is not really recommended unless spiced with gunpowder, lit and then downed as a flaming brew on the bow of your ship – according to the methods professed by an infamous pirate called Blackbeard.

So, an empty TVS Apache motorcycle top box, filled with ice, covering a duo of two-litre Coke bottles guarding "The Admiral", made a pretty picture, and "The Admiral" chilled in this fashion while we witnessed another sunset at our now favourite watering hole.

Back at camp... well, suffice to say that the good ship of "TVS" engaged the Admiral and marvelled at his nautical tales! Much later, with several of HMS TVS crew suffering post-traumatic effects of this, er, situation, we decided mutiny was in order, and made "The Admiral" walk the proverbial plank.

Thankfully, it was the end of him. And of a few of us, too!

The long way home – Part 1

We departed Victoria Falls under overcast skies and in cool weather – a welcome respite from the heat we'd endured earlier.

We rode to Bulawayo where we encountered

the only rain on our journey. From there we headed to Gwanda and a refuel stop, and finally, after 638km in the saddle, we arrived at Tod's Guest Lodge. With rain in the air we didn't feel like camping, so we booked in.

It was our longest day in the saddle on this trip – and all had gone swimmingly.

We gathered in the lodge's historic pub, complete with pictures of a youthful Ian Smith with Diane, the iconic Tod's resident giraffe.

Sadly, both have since passed away.

Tired from our lengthy ride, we enjoyed a scrumptious meal, had a nightcap and retired early.

The long way home – Part 2

Our trip was nearly over, and our hearts were growing heavier. We made an early start for Beit Bridge border post. We had been worried about this post, but crossing back into SA was a breeze and we soon pulled into the Musina Spur for a much-needed breakfast.

Willem and Simon left to ride home to Pretoria, while Cobus, Steve and I planned a final night at Nylsvlei Game Reserve near Nylstroom.

The gate at Nylsvlei was already closed when we arrived, after we had negotiated 8km of good dirt road to get there. Normal motorcycles are not allowed at Nylsvlei, but considering we were the only campers, the staff agreed that we could stay overnight.

And what a night! After pitching tents, Cobus got a fire going while we prepared a beef stew.

Sitting around the fire, sipping our preferred tipple, and listening to the jacks and calls of the prolific night birds, we chatted and toasted an amazing adventure.

We had covered 2665 trouble-free kilometres, at an average of 2,5 litres of petrol every 100km. The bikes had not used a single drop of oil. What's the moral of the story, then? Dream it, plan it... and do it! We are blessed to live on the most exciting and amazing continent, with the most diverse landscapes and fauna and flora.

We decided that we would soon set off on another adventure, again on our Indian Apaches. It's just one of those "we gotta do what we gotta do" kinda things! ☺

TVS Apache 180 RTR - Specifications

Engine: 177cc, single cylinder, four-stroke

Power: 12,5 kW @ 8500r/min

Torque: 15,5 Nm @ 6500r/min

Maximum speed [claimed]: 124 km/h

Suspension front: Telescopic forks, 105mm travel

Suspension rear: Mono tube inverted, gas-filled shocks with spring aid

Ground clearance: 180mm

Saddle height: 790mm

Brakes front: 270mm petal disc

Brakes rear: 200mm petal disc

Kerb weight: 137kg

Maximum payload: 130kg

Fuel tank: 16 litres

Average consumption on trip: 2,5 litres/100km

Range: 640km

Price: