

Changing the world on the back of a Buell

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For The Calgary Herald

Friday, May 09, 2008

Some journeys by motorcycle are a 20-minute commute to the office. Some are a weekend excursion out of town for a cup of coffee and a cinnamon bun.

And some are ambitious, exotic and life-changing adventures.

Take the Here To Here World Tour, for example (www.heretohere.com). Organized by Calgary brothers C.J. and Dylan Wilkins, the pair plan to trek the globe aboard 2007 Buell Ulysses XB12X motorcycles in support of Street Kids International.

Leaving Sunday, and heading east, the brothers will travel eight hours a day for 124 days. They expect to cover close to 32,000 kilometres in total, and visit more than 20 countries.

"About two and a half years ago, Dylan turned to me and asked if I'd like to ride a motorcycle around the world," says C.J. Wilkins, 29.

A tough question, really, seeing that Wilkins had had zero experience with motorcycles.

But because brother Dylan, 33, was so passionate about biking -- he's been riding for close to a decade -- C.J. figured he'd investigate what the sport was all about.

Wilkins splashed out cash on safety gear, including an armoured jacket and full-face helmet, and then attended the Calgary Safety Council motorcycle program. He got his Class 6 motorcycle permit on Easter Sunday in 2006.

"Motorcycling was a passion for Dylan," Wilkins says. "But I hadn't had much exposure to bikes -- I was on the back of Dylan's once and hated it. I thought it would be different if I was in control, though, and now I'm as passionate as Dylan."

Preparations for the world tour began in January 2006; right after Dylan floated the idea. The pair spent four or five months coming up with a viable route and working through the logistics.

Essentially, the pair will head east until they come back home. After leaving Calgary, they ride to Winnipeg, and then down to East Troy, Wisc., where they meet Erik Buell himself, and tour the Buell motorcycle factory. They ride to Halifax from there, where the bikes are crated and shipped via air cargo to London. In Britain, the pair will spend two days on the Isle of Man watching the TT races, and also tour Ireland and Scotland.



CREDIT: Lorraine Hjalte, Calgary Herald
Brothers C.J., left, and Dylan Wilkins are embarking on a four-month, around-the-world tour aboard 2007 Buell motorcycles in support of Street Kids International.

"We then head back down to the continent and zigzag our way across Europe," C.J. Wilkins says, taking in France, Belgium, Germany, Switzerland, Italy, Austria, the Czech Republic, Poland, Slovakia and Hungary. Riding further north, they move through the Ukraine, Belarus, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia and Russia. Perhaps saving the hardest part for last, the brothers and their Buell motorcycles will be put to the test crossing Kazakhstan and Mongolia before crossing back into Russia -- where in Vladivostok, the bikes will be crated and shipped to Vancouver for the ride home.

There are a few reasons they chose the Buell motorcycles.

"They've got great suspension, lots of torque, and they look cool," says Wilkins.

They also considered the Kawasaki KLR 650 and Suzuki V-Strom machines, but it was the compact strength of the Buell Ulysses that won out.

"There's actually very little to the bike," Wilkins says. "Dylan took one apart to see where we could save weight or add strength, and couldn't really find anything."

The bikes have been modified with high-intensity discharge headlights and a custom luggage rack system. Any extra fuel required will be carried in a gas can strapped to the bike with a bungee cord.

"We were looking at other (fuel carrying systems) but sometimes simple is best," Wilkins says.

They will use traditional paper maps, in conjunction with GPS systems, to navigate their journey. They will also carry a digital camera, video camera, laptop computer, digital storage devices and a satellite phone for both data and voice communication.

Their website will be updated regularly, and Wilkins says he'll be providing compelling content that will make people want to support Street Kids International.

It's not surprising that the motorcycle adventures of actors Ewan MacGregor and Charley Boorman -- caught on film in the series Long Way Round -- proved inspirational for both Wilkins boys.

"Dylan had just watched the series, and thought it would be something he'd like to do," Wilkins says. "And then I watched it, and thought it was outstanding as well."

Because the brothers bring an interesting set of skills to the mix, Here To Here will likely be a success. C.J. is the communications and community team leader for AltaGas, and has spent plenty of time fundraising and working for various charities. Dylan is a pilot and a licensed aircraft maintenance engineer.

"My fundraising (and communication) skills combined with Dylan's mechanical genius mean together, we have an unstoppable skill set," Wilkins says. "I couldn't do this without Dylan, and I don't think he could do this without me."

Wilkins continues: "I'd been looking for the next 'big thing' to do. This trip combines my skills to raise money and help others, plus (be able to) go on the adventure of a lifetime. I don't know how you can top that."

This tour is not just the whim of some wealthy riders. The Wilkins brothers didn't have the easiest start in life. They were raised in a single-parent household in low-income housing in northwest Calgary.

"We always had the basics covered," Wilkins says. "But any opportunities we had are ones we created for ourselves. Dylan and I have worked hard to be as successful as possible to overcome our start in life."

The partnership with Street Kids International is personal.

"It is our first-hand knowledge of what it is like to face such challenges growing up that drives us to assist other kids in similar and worse circumstances," he says.

Street Kids International (www.streetkids.org) is a Canadian-based and non-profit organization.

Its mandate is to teach kids in countries around the world entrepreneurial skills that will help get them off the streets.

"It's a hand up, not a hand out," Wilkins says.

The fundraising goal of the world tour is \$100,000, with 100 per cent of all donations going directly to the charity. On the Here to Here website people can donate as much or as little as they'd like. There is also a Penny Per Kilometre club -- a \$320 donation payable in a lump sum, or in payments spread over a year.

Calgary Harley-Davidson hosts a public send-off party tomorrow from 11:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m., when the Wilkins brothers get a police escort to the city limits. From there, it's the brothers, their motorcycles, and the adventure of a lifetime.

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