



for 20 km that they were following a guy who apparently had no GPS or sense of direction.

The going soon got a lot tougher as we hit the dune ridges that march across the Ad Dhana area and progress slowed considerably. We were soon crawling along trying to find a way through the dunes, with Jarkko in an unequal struggle with a heavy trail bike on worn tyres and Chris with a new bike and only his second time out on the sand.

We halted every few minutes to pull a bike out of the sand, or to kick over a stalled bike. This takes a lot of effort when the heat is in the mid 40's.

After half an hour of getting nowhere slowly, Jarkko decided that he had better try to get back to the camp as he was starting to feel pretty ill with the effort of fighting a 180 kg bike. The rest of us weren't feeling too good either. We have a tradition that nobody gets left behind or on their own so we set our GPS for camp and set off directly east.

In hindsight we would have been wiser to try to retrace our steps. The dunes that we tried to push through were as difficult as those we turned away from. Our progress dropped to a near standstill. Chris's bike kept stalling. Trying to kick start a recalcitrant 450 cc single cylinder bike quickly fatigues a rider in the heat. Jarkko struggled to find a route that he could follow without getting buried up to the axles every hundred meters.

After a while I couldn't get off the bike anymore to help Chris or Jarkko. The effort was just too great. The water had gone a long while back. I didn't know much about heat stroke but I was convinced I was coming down with a case. Chills, nausea, cramps and a blinding headache, and my balance was going. Imagine a big night out in Manchester but then getting stuck in an oven for three hours and you are half way there.

The next five kilometers took around two hours.

I was somewhat concerned by this time. I had noticed with some detachment (probably due to my stewed

head) that the petrol in my tank was boiling and bubbling out of the tank breather pipe. My radiator fan was running non stop, even when I killed the engine, and slowly draining the battery. I knew it would refuse to start at some point soon. I sat by the side of my bike to try to find some shade. I managed to stop short of crying, wailing or praying though.

Jarkkos bike eventually got buried so deep he couldn't get it out. We discussed the situation and decided that the best plan was for Sam and I to try to get back to the camp to get help. We had lightweight bikes and Sam had a lot of experience of riding in the dunes. We recorded the GPS coordinates of our location and set off. My forearms were cramping to such a degree that I had trouble riding. I felt constantly sick and dizzy. I ticked off every kilometer on the GPS unit as we charted a sinuous route back through the dunes.

We made it back to camp in 20 minutes, gave the Sweepers the coordinates for recovery and I flaked out in the shade. Luckily my wife is an ex ICU Nurse so she was all prepared to pull off boots, body armor, administer fluids, salts and cooling things.

And so, somewhat ignominiously, I ended my first Riyadh Rally. Everybody made it back OK, some broke down, some got stuck, some got boiled, some ran out of petrol, two guys got stuck going back to get a quad, but by around 9 pm we had everybody back in one piece.

The sand storm hit later that evening, blasting out of the west and lasting all night, flattening tents, generally being malicious, forcing its way into the sandwiches and refreshments and breaking up the camp fire circle.

We took this as an omen (the deserts way of saying 'don't take me for granted') and decided to cancel the next days run. We declared David the Swede the winner (he's from Sweden you know). He did two laps in just over 1 hour per lap. Even more remarkable was the fact that he had never done this sort of thing before.

In hindsight we were lucky not to lose anybody. We did everything wrong, the conditions were appalling, many entrants ignored the basic requirements, communications broke down between riders, sweepers and camp, but it was a great experience and enjoyed by all who entered.

The next one is in late October. We learned a lot from the first one, including never to attempt a Rally in 45 + C heat ever again.

P.S. In case you're thinking about joining in...You enter entirely at your own risk and in full understanding of the risks and dangers. You are solely responsible for your own well being.