



By **Robbie Kerr**

Kootenay Motorcycle Art flew three client's bikes and owner Robbie Kerr's Glasgow Kiss (RMM no. 17 cover bike) to Europe in August 2012. Why? A two-month tour of southern Europe where they would meet up with the boys from No Nonsense Choppers of Scotland to do some hard riding. A great trip but Robbie decided that this would be the last trip away from the Kootenays during the summer. Besides it made more sense to leave when it is buried in snow for five months. So for the following winter retreat Robbie and his son Stephen set about restoring a tired old Shovel that had been in the family for over a decade. After riding the bike in the south-east British-Columbian Kootenays all summer, it was time to prepare the bike for the tropics. Thailand was the chosen destination.

Dale at Worldwide Cargo in Vancouver arranged the month-long shipping trek from YVR to BKK (Bangkok International Airport) in Thailand for \$1200. Nithipat at Fair & Easy Co. Ltd in Bangkok would take care of things at the other end for around \$600. So the bike set off from Vancouver on November 1st and arrived in Bangkok on December 7 (one week late).



Mae Hong Son loop



Mae Hong Son loop



Mae Hong Son loop

I spent the whole day at customs with Nithipat and his two assistants working flat out to finally get the bike cleared by 5 p.m. That was a \$600 well spent!

My good friend and riding buddy Cole was living in Bangkok so the first couple of weeks were spent riding around the city. Bikes are not allowed on the main highways so my riding was restricted to the busy Bangkok streets, elbow to elbow with the millions of scooter riders and lane splitters. I was ready for a set of narrow handlebars but we soon decided to base ourselves outside the city. We moved to the Sattahip region, two hours south of Bangkok where we would have some open space to ride. It takes a bit of adjusting when riding in Thailand. It seems like there are no rules and consequently after a while nothing surprises you. But gradually you get used to the way people drive and ride over there and once that happens you begin to have fun. Because about half of the region of Sattahip is by the sea there are naval bases along the coast and many of the attractions are under the responsibility of the Thai Navy. Attractions include the beautiful beaches.

My friends Stew and Abra flew over from Canada. They rented a bike so we could all ride out to Koh Chang (also called Elephant Island) where the roads are like riding a roller coaster. Koh Chang is part of the Mu Ko Chang National Park. This National Park encompasses an archipelago of 52 islands, Koh Chang being the largest with 429 square kilometres. Rich in lush flora, wildlife and marine creatures the island has beautiful beaches with the most impressive being located on the west coast while the south is known for its lively party scene. A good time was had by all.

There is a big biker scene in Thailand and it seems to be getting bigger all the time with lots of cool events. 808 Cafe in Bangkok holds a custom/vintage night the first Sunday of every month but one of the biggest events is Burapa Bike Week that takes place just outside Pattaya. About 10,000 visitors join the event yearly which is designed to be a display of motorcycle riding skills with participants coming from all over the world. There are many custom bikes (Thai style of course) from old school Bobbers to long front end choppers. There are also many Hot Rods, cool music, a big stage and the usual vendor booths. One included "the cowboys" who



Burapa Bike Week



had erected a small piece of the Wild West on the site (I have no idea why Thais have such an affinity for this genre). Thailand has hundreds of M/C clubs and the event ended with the stage filled with members locked arm in arm singing "Auld Lang Syne" in Thai. A great event and highly recommended!

Next it was off to Northern Thailand for a road trip with my buddy Cole. This is where you'll find the best roads; lots of twistys with hardly anyone on them. We did the Mae Hong Son loop which is a circular route approximately 600-kilometre long that needs a few days to complete (excluding time for sightseeing and activities along the way). The "loop" bears the name of the city that is found at the half-way mark. We headed to Pai which is set in a beautiful valley. The scenery is breathtaking along the way. The road is crossed by incredible viewpoints and a diverse panorama of hillside tribal villages, small and large towns, waterfalls and caves. The road climbs up, heads down but most importantly, it's full of curves! Between Pai and Chiang Mai for example, you can count no less than 762 turns. Sensational!

Then down into Chiang Mai we went – where I had to change my tires. The MK11 Avon's weren't cutting it on these roads. Chiang Mai is the main city in Northern Thailand and the province's capital. Known as the Northern Rose it's situated on the Ping River and enriched by the ornamentation of its temples and by the diversity of its art. The fertile Ping River Valley gives you amazing views: tree covered mountains, in fact the highest summits in Thailand, jungles and more rivers.

Then we rode up to Chiang Rai along the Mae Kong River. In Chiang Rai we stopped and visited Wat Rong Khun which is better known among foreigners as the White Temple. It is an unconventional Buddhist temple. This magnificent temple is a bizarre blend of traditional Thai architecture and the surreal. The main building is painted white to symbolize Buddha's purity and is covered in mosaics of mirrors sparkling in the sun. All around the complex are intricate sculptures of demons, skulls, severed heads hanging from trees and other bizarre objects. To reach the temple you have to walk over a bridge that spans a moat filled with innumerable sculptures of out-reaching arms apparently symbolizing desire. Once inside you are greeted not by



Wat Rong Khun • The White Temple



Maekong River



The Golden Triangle

traditional Buddhist scenarios but by contemporary scenes and icons of popular culture. Then we went down to Nan. Some awesome riding there – some of the best in the world – and I've ridden all over! Most days we would set off in the morning, stop around midday when it got real hot to find a swimming hole then ride to a four-star hotel where they would send a masseuse to the room for a well-earned rub down... this is what winters should be like for all bikers!

A little further north we went through the region of the Golden Triangle. Why this name? Well because this is where three borders meet; that of Thailand of course, that of Myanmar (formerly Burma) and that of Laos. This region consists of villages surrounded by dense woods and riches. In Sop Ruak you can photograph the meeting point of the three countries. But the Golden Triangle is better known for being the kingdom of gold... "white gold" that is! About half of the illicit opium consumed in the world comes from this region.

Finally, Thailand is really reasonable budget wise. A good 4-star hotel will cost you \$20. You can add an "in-room" hour massage for another \$12. It's called the land of smiles and with good reason. The best reason was getting my bike detailed for four bucks. I still got a couple of months left here and I plan on heading south to hit up some of the islands.

Later –

