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97TH GEAR

Sit around a campfire for more than two minutes with a bunch of adventure riders and sooner rather than later the conversation turns to the “mystical black art” of gear selection. Who’s got what, how does it work, what will it burn, does it record automatically, will it self-inflate, and does “it” need triple-A, double-A or solar power?

After 11 years on the road we’ve seen an unprecedented level of technological advancement when it comes to riding gear, IT gadgets, and even camp gear. Accessories that were once just science fiction are now sitting on the shelves of your local outdoor store.

For us, the once black art of gear selection is less black and now more like 50 gentle shades of grey.

RIDING GEAR

Ah, the uniform! We hit the road back in 2003 in our new *Cordura Tuareg* suits, *Cordura* was a new material then, and was a welcome relief from traditional sweaty black leather. The *Tuareg* was the nearest you could get to a *Dakar Rally* suit without actually coughing up the entrance fee. After taking a beating through Africa, the *Tuaregs* were retired in favor of the *BMW Rally* and *Street Guard* suits. We wore the blue and white emblem on our shoulders for eight years until, in 2011, we donned our current and favorite riding suits, the *Touratech Compañero*. We could write reams about the advantages but the two biggest developments we’ve seen may surprise you.

First, the *Touratech Compañero* range offers a specific “female style” in its line-up, tailored to fit the curvier female shape. Most manufacturers don’t offer this option, so female ADV riders end up in poorly fitting men’s suits. Remember—happy wife, happy life! Next up was the implementation of an “over-suit” for cold/wet weather riding. This beats having to get undressed by the roadside to put on a *Gore-Tex* liner any day of the week. It also means you’re not wearing a water-logged sponge into your hotel room or tent at the end of a long, wet day.



EVOLUTION

by Simon Thomas | photos by Simon & Lisa Thomas

HELMETS

It seems every year there's a new must-have helmet design. We spent the first nine years of our journey wearing the *BMW* flip-front modular lids. Hey, when you're dealing with a dozen African military checkpoints every day, being able to show your face without taking off your helmet has a lot of merit. For us that thinking changed three years ago when we pushed our heads into the super lightweight *Airoh Aviator*.

At just 920 grams, these super-comfy enduro helmets felt like coming home. It took a little adjustment to get used to riding only in goggles, but the goggles-only option has had some surprising advantages. The ongoing dry and sore eye issues we had suffered for years suddenly stopped, too. For us goggles are definitely the way to go.

COMMUNICATION SYSTEMS

The best metaphor for the evolution of our comms is to think of the start of our journey as *The Flintstones* and this year as *Star Trek*. Lisa and I have always seen the benefits of bike-to-bike comm systems as much for safety as for the thrill of being able to share a unique moment, in the moment.

We set out with the *Autocom* systems which, in their day, were great. The downside was simply the amount of cabling that we had to deal with. There was the power lead from the bike to *Autocom* unit, the lead that ran from the unit to the walkie-talkies, and then finally another cord that had to be run from the unit to the helmet.

Today we have a couple of *SENA S20s* snapped to our lids. With *Bluetooth 4.0* they'll connect to almost anything and the voice activation is a huge gift when you've got your hands full off-road. What Lisa and I find mind boggling is the audio quality. At 80 mph with enduro helmets and goggles there is zero wind noise or static transmitted through the systems. The audio is so clean it's scary: Scary good.



WATER FILTERS

I'm not sure why, but we get asked all the time about which water filters we use. In all honesty we use them rarely and only in the harshest of environments. In the early years we used pump-style filters. During our Amazon ride using these turned out to be a fool's economy, as we were losing more fluid through perspiration while pumping than we were actually filtering. Filter efficiency has advanced by leaps and bounds and the pump filters we used in the early days have been replaced with super-efficient gravity-fed filters. Today we're using two *MSR AutoFlow™ Microfilters*. Per unit they'll filter almost two liters a minute. When you're desperate, that's a lot of life-saving fluid.



CAMP STOVES

There's a myriad of stove options on the market today, each one claiming to be hotter, more efficient or more versatile than the last. Our requirements have always been very clear:

- We need a multi-fuel stove that will burn anything. As long as our bikes have fuel we can cook.
- We need to be able to maintain and service the stove in the field. We're not regularly near a service center.
- Crucially, the stove needs to be adjustable. A stove that burns super-hot with no adjuster is either on or off. That may be great for climbing Everest, but most of us aren't. Without being able to adjust the flame you can only heat up food. With an adjustable stove you can boil or simmer to your heart's content and if you're cooking on it for more than a few months this is essential.

For 11 years now we've been using the exact same stove and swear by the *MSR Dragon Fly* —an awesome bit of kit.

LAPTOPS

Ah, the dreaded laptop. Trying to quantify how this technology has advanced is almost impossible. Once upon a time small was good, and we swore by our *Sony Vaio*. Small, fast (back in the day) and with a clear screen. Today with our video editing and photography making up such a large part of our days we resigned ourselves to our changing needs. My (Simon) "go to" machine is now a 17" *Mac Book Pro* running 2.2 GHz *Intel Core i7*, with 16GB of RAM.

Tech talk aside, considering the beating our IT gear takes whilst it rattles and vibrates inside a metal pannier, one of the most crucial advancements we've seen over the years is the emergence of solid-state drives. If you're looking to minimize the risk of data corruption to your precious drives, spend the extra cash and go for the solid-state drives. Lisa finally threatened to murder me in my sleep if we didn't purchase her own laptop. She now runs a *Mac Book Air*.





GPS

Does anyone remember the black and white screened *Garmin V*? GPS units today speak to you, connect to the internet, *Bluetooth* through your helmet, sing you a lullaby and will

almost brew your coffee in the morning.

We started out with a *Garmin V*, which did a great job. Today we've shunned the idea of the fancier GPS units. We even avoid the touch-screen version. For us the *Garmin 62s* works great as it'll accept memory cards, upon which I can load up to 32GB of data. Robust, easy to use and reliable.

Maybe we're old school but we've learned that the more moving parts there are to go wrong, the more likely it is that somewhere down the line you'll be fixing it. For Lisa and me what we need a GPS to do hasn't changed. The three most important features have been:

- A clear screen for easy legibility
- A strong antenna, remember your little box of GPS magic isn't anything more than a waterproof calculator if it can't connect to the satellites and give you a triangulated position
- An option to load and store a stack of data on the GPS unit or data card.



CAMERA GEAR

Our recording gear has seen more change than almost anything else we carry, and that's as much due to the leaps in technology as our increased desire to share more clearly and sharply our experiences.

Our first camera was bought by Lisa's parents just three days before we left the U.K. Our Little *Fuji S300* with its then-huge 3.2 mega pixels (stop laughing) did us proud for the first two years. Halfway through the South American leg of our journey we knew we needed to get more serious and with a little borrowed cash we bought our first DSLR, a *Nikon D70s*.

The learning curve was steep but then so were the rewards. In 2011 whilst in Asia, we were delighted when *Nikon* became the official camera supplier of the 2RTW project. Our first large-scale photographic exhibition kicked off at the main *Nikon* center in Kuala Lumpur and later in the Petronas Towers.

Today our cameras are scarily more sophisticated than our earlier compact unit. Lisa regularly produces world-class images using her *Nikon D90*, whilst I love my *Nikon D3*. We've got a selection of five lenses that we swap between us, with each lens being chosen to ensure we're carrying minimum gear for maximum flexibility.

RIDING BOOTS

For gear that gets an absolute beating you'd think we'd change our boots all the time. Let me tell you, if it ain't broke don't fix it! I set off 11 years ago in a pair of *Gaerne SG10 MX* boots and replaced those with a pair of *SG12s* just last year.

Lisa had ridden in the *Alpin-eStar Tech 6s* for a decade until moving to the *SG12s* as well. The boot offers a ton of protection and a hinged ankle, which makes walking and riding way easier.



TENT

Sometimes evolution just means constantly assessing your requirements and confirming, to yourself, that the kit you're using fits your needs perfectly.

I'd love to claim that we're NOT biased when it comes to our tent, but... we are. Our *Hilleberg Keron 4GT* has stood up to alpine blizzards, Saharan sand storms and biblical rain and has taken care of us. Super easy to erect, this tunnel tent just does it all.

That said, there's been some evolution here as well. We've been providing *Hilleberg* feedback and performance info for the last eight years and discovered that, based on feedback we provided from our Mongolian ride, they had re-engineered the tent and material to perform even better. Cool!



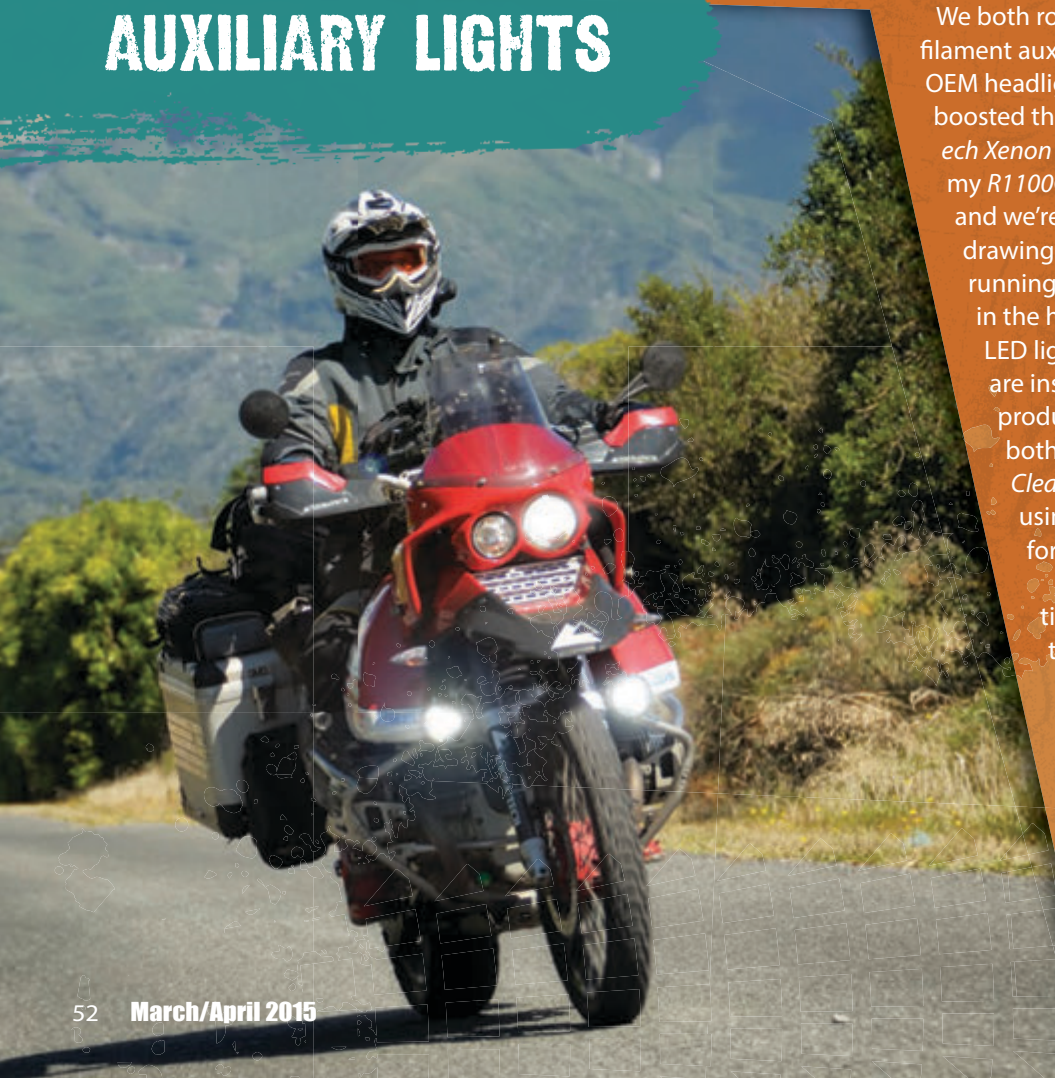
Like anyone who has ever been stuck in the dark, tired and dusty, our need for great bike lights has always been the same, but over the years the tech has become, well, techier.

We both rolled out the door with a set of regular filament auxiliary lights that ran along with the single OEM headlight of our bikes. Five years in and we'd boosted the lumens substantially with the *Touratech Xenon* auxiliary lights and a dual headlight on my *R1100GS*. Today things have come a long way and we're running four times as much light and drawing half the battery power. Both Lisa and I are running super bright *XenonOz* light kits installed in the headlights of the bikes and *Clearwater* LED lights as the auxiliary. The *Clearwater* lights are insane: The two *Ericas* (model name) I run produce an eye-searing 12,000 lumens when both are on full. The slick feature with all the *Clearwater* products is the ability to dim them using a simple dial, which makes them ideal for using as daytime running lights.

Here's looking forward to the next evolution and the next adventure. See you down the road. **ADV 2RideTheWorld.com**

Simon Thomas and Lisa Thomas have set an unofficial new world record for the longest continuous journey by a motorcycle team. Now over 516,000 km and over 11 years on the road, the couple are an inspiration to all who chase the dream.

AUXILIARY LIGHTS



"There are only two mistakes one can make along the road to truth;
not going all the way and not starting." –Gautama Buddha

Great rides start in Firstgear.

