

Two Wheels, Three Continents, Seventeen Countries

Muhanad Al-Sultan (ENG'93) circled the globe on his beloved motorcycle

MUHANAD AL-SULTAN SPENT much of his childhood in Kuwait riding around on ATVs and scooters. At 15, he straddled his first motorcycle. So when he decided he wanted to see the world, there was no question about how he would make the trip: on two wheels.

Al-Sultan first envisioned traveling the world by motorcycle in 2005, and over the next three years persuaded his friends Husain Ashkanani and Ali Al-Baraimi to join him. They planned a journey that would take them across 3 continents and 17 countries in 105 days—making them, Al-Sultan says, the first Kuwaitis to circle the globe.

But first, they needed financial backing, and Al-Sultan and Al-Baraimi, who both work for the Kuwait Oil Company, would need the time off. They would also need to break some cultural barriers. The group received little help from Kuwait's private companies, not only because of the poor economic climate, but also because of the stigma surrounding their mode of travel. "Motorcycles are unfortunately still considered as being for misfits and hooligans," says Al-Sultan (ENG'93), "and most didn't want to associate their company name with that image."

Finally, with the help of a friend in the Kuwait Bikers Group, they were sponsored by the country's Public Authority for Youth and Sports.

Armed with only light gear and cheered on by a crowd of supporters, Al-Sultan and his friends sped off from the Kuwait Towers in Kuwait City on May 15, 2009. Their destinations: Dubai, Pakistan, India, Bhutan, Nepal, China, the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Switzerland, Italy, Tunisia, Egypt, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia. When they reached the Pacific and the Atlantic, they sent their bikes overseas by air freight and flew across to meet them.

All the while, Al-Sultan kept friends and family abreast of their travels, uploading photos, videos, and posts on his blog, Our Shared Planet Motorcycle Adventure (<http://ospkw.blogspot.com/>). Of course, not everything went according to plan. After one particularly tiring stretch in Tibet—a day of high altitudes, a hailstorm, and muddy roads—the three reached a small village at sundown looking for lodging. They ended up spending the night and eating breakfast the next morning with the Chinese Army.

And when they arrived in the United States, Al-Sultan and his friends assumed that booking a hotel room would be easy. But they reached Rapid City, S.D., three days before the annual Sturgis Motorcycle Rally, which draws hundreds of thousands of people. All the motels in the area were full. "We managed to book a campsite and sleep under the stars in the one place we thought we wouldn't have to," Al-Sultan says.

What was the highlight of the trip? "Bhutan," says

Al-Sultan. "Even though it was a bit out of our way and the road to the cities was scary—with landslides that could have easily washed one of us from the mountainside—it was well worth it." He and his friends were spellbound, he says, by the country's rich culture and picturesque landscape.

Next, Al-Sultan has three routes in mind that he wants to explore by motorcycle: Kuwait to South Africa; Central and South America; and Iran, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. He has only two requirements for the next destination: "plenty of scenery and plenty of adventure."

And he insists that there is no better way of traveling

Muhanad Al-Sultan, pictured here in China, says he and his friends became the first Kuwaitis to motorcycle around the world.



COURTESY OF MUHANAD AL-SULTAN

around the world than on a motorcycle. "When a fuel attendant in Saudi Arabia asked me where I was headed and why I was traveling by motorcycle instead of car, I replied by asking him if he had had a conversation with the last car he fueled up," Al-Sultan says. "He said, 'No,' so I said, 'That is why I travel by motorcycle. To interact with other people.'" **SAMANTHA DUBOIS (COM'12)**