

ONE FOR ALL

FIRST RIDES DON'T GET MUCH MORE FULL ON, OR STORIES MORE POIGNANT, THAN OUR ADVENTURES ON THE LATEST IN THE KINESIS TRIPSTER SERIES, THE AT(ALL) TERRAIN. BUT JUST WHERE DOES THIS NEW BIKE SIT IN THE INCREASINGLY POPULAR, GRAVELLY AREA BETWEEN ROAD AND OFF-ROAD?

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There's a lot of wisdom in the warning never to try out a new and unproven component on an important ride. Then again, following words of wisdom has never been my strong point. That's seldom been more obviously illustrated than now as I wander to local Kinesis stockist, Prologue Performance Cycling in Harrogate, to pick up a new Kinesis Tripster AT on the day of its release.

Not only is the AT a brand-new frame, my bike is running my own experimental single-ring electric shift transmission using a mix of Shimano Di2 road and mountain bike components. It's also running tyres I've never used before, which might not seem a big deal, but I'm possibly the most hysterical pea-sensing princess when it comes to pneumatics. Plus, I've only got three hours to get it packed up with a selection of new Apidura bags and meet Rory Hitchens from Kinesis distributor, Upgrade.

To complete the idiocy of this adventure I don't know exactly how far we're going. I do know that getting from North Yorkshire to the Welsh mountains near Aberystwyth is far longer than I've ridden before, especially on a largely non-tarmac route, but we're relying on a mix of app-created GPS routes and friends' local knowledge to join the dots.

As a pioneering adventurer who put ultra-distance racing and record breaking on the map, I'm hoping Mike Hall would approve. Two months after he was killed in a road accident in Australia, we're taking his ashes from his Harrogate birthplace to his Welsh home at Abbeycwmhir for a memorial ride on his birthday weekend. Fighting for the lead 5000km into the coast-to-coast Indian Pacific Wheel Race, with only 500km to go, it was a death that devastated anyone who knew this incredibly humble, deeply thoughtful and



Mike's mate Bruce Dalton tests how waterproof his kit is

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truly inspirational individual. It's an emotional start as we head out into a summer evening up a road Mike and I had duelled up many times in the previous 20 years.

Bike collaboration

The Tripster AT bikes Rory and I are riding are the first results of a planned long-term design collaboration between Mike – a passionate engineer who worked at JCB and Rolls Royce – and Upgrade, whose Kinesis UK and Pivot bikes Mike was already riding. In keeping with Mike's passion to make ultra-distance riding accessible, the AT uses an alloy frame, while the £1849.99 Tripster ATR frames are titanium with a carbon fork.

The design already had three bottle cage mounts and thru-axle fork and frame, with clearance for 700x45mm or 650x52mm (27.5x2in) tyres between the stout A-frame rear stays and chunky, full carbon fork. Guard and rear rack mounts for three- or four-point fixings are kept well away from the direct-mount rear disc brake, and switchable internal routing ports allow any analogue or electric shifting arrangement. Mike's late-in-the-day input was a second frame bag-friendly lower bottle position on the down-tube and a flattened section for stable top-tube bag placement. He also worked on the graphics so they complemented rather than clashed with luggage





straps. The high visibility Seeon Yellow colourway was added alongside a subtler Arran Blue.

As we turn off tarmac onto forest track the 40mm Vee Rail tyres are a welcome cushion under the tough, stiff frame that's powered us off to a flying start in our honour guard peloton. At the Stainburn trailhead car park we're joined by Paul and Talulah Miles on an ancient Nishiki and trailer bike combo, while 10-year-old Jude joins the charge on his Islabike, another generation learning that time on a bike is very well spent.

As we rattle down an overgrown bridleway, the proven geometry of the Tripster adds welcome stability, while the Ultegra disc brakes aren't phased by our loaded weight. Those big tubeless tyres thump off grass-hidden cobbles unscathed.

Our motley crew of cyclo-cross and mountain bikes cracks on around the reservoirs and up onto the next moor at pace, meeting John Pitchers, long-term friend of Mike from his 24-hour racing days. We overlook the descent to Ilkley where Mike rode so much with his fellow adventurer and best friend Mark Richmond.

#bemoremike

Mike's ashes, carefully wrapped in a backpack, are passed from rider to rider so they can all say their final farewells before peeling off into the darkening evening. Everyone who shoulders the



responsibility seems compelled to dig deep off the front just as Mike always did. That means I'm as equally glad of the extra control of the Tripster's flared 50cm bar on the moorland singletrack descent as I am of the 40x42 bottom gear of the Di2 transmission, as I keep John company on his singlespeed up the gravel grind over Ilkley Moor.

As we pull on coats and fix lights, a dynamo blinks into view over the crest behind us. A dynamo belonging to Terrence and his Spa Cycles steel tourer. It's a chance meeting but our new ride companion knows all about Mike, and was an avid follower of his 'dot' on live tracker maps

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during his events. He's clearly passionate about his bikes, quizzing Rory about the AT, delighted to have found a live specimen within a day of its launch.

"Get lost, then get unstuck" was a typically simple yet wonderful Mike-ism, and that's exactly what we manage to do around the backs of warehouses,

sketchy alleys and towpaths in downtown Keighley, while designated navigator and long-distance hauler Ben 'Bengine' Wolveridge tries to follow the twisting dance of our Ridewithgps.com app's 'minimal traffic' route. As we gain serious altitude out through Haworth and Oxenhope, Terrence is still with us. He should be back home by now, so when he declares he's joining us for the twisting descent into Hebden Bridge, he is given the honour of carrying Mike's ashes.

As we reach the valley bottom we meet two riders who've been watching the dot from the GPS beacon in Mike's bag wobble towards them on →



The core team of riders were joined by fans of Mike along the way

the online map. Hannah from *Singletrack* mag had interviewed and ridden with Mike after his record-breaking Great Divide ride, while Ash Sharp has raced the Transcontinental, self-supported-across-Europe race that Mike set up and organised. His palmarès of punishing distances at unholy speeds mean we're glad to hand our weighty, yet precious, cargo over to him for the steady tempo climb up England's longest continuous hill – Crag Vale – where fellow Kinesis ambassador and adventurer Emma Osenton has promised us tea and butties.

Route canal

After a slap-up feed, Ash, Hannah and Terrence head back down Crag Vale as Emma joins us to guide us off the moors and into the ring of old mill towns around eastern Manchester. As the sky begins to lighten, around 3am, the towpaths become flanked by trees and rolling hills not towering mills, and by 4am we arrive at Jon Doran and Alison Johnson's to grab some porridge and a couple of hours sleep. It's something Mike often did with them before heading to Manchester Airport to begin his next adventure.

Mike's Peak District pal, Julie Greengrass, joins us at 8am as we head south, making good progress over the highest point of the day on the Midshires Way. Again, I'm very glad of the off-road capability of the Tripster as a rough lane turns into a proper rocky descent above Buxton. We loop around a quarry to avoid a main road, then form an express train south down the reclaimed railway of the Tissington Trail.

We refuel – as Mike often did – at a McDonald's in Uttoxeter before pushing on into darkening

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weather. Ben folds a chainring on his 'cross bike but we're guided into Henry Burton's bike shop by a dot-watching guardian angel who meets us just outside Stafford. We set off for Ludlow through torrential, track-softening storms that threaten to rinse the resolve out of us, until we're saved by

Asda sandwiches in Telford. It's the area my mum first took me cycle touring 35 years ago, and with its disc brakes and digital gears the Tripster is a very different beast to my old Raleigh Ace Jnr. The only similarities are that they both share a single chainring but, more importantly, I'm getting the same thrill of a big achievement behind me.

Fittingly the figure dancing on the pedals towards us as the evening turns golden is the queen of kids' bikes, Isla Rowntree. A regular riding companion of Mike and a multi-national champion and passionate cycling heroine.

Redirection

Thankfully Isla has altered her original 'Rough stuff' route over the Welsh border after realising that riding at least seven hours of challenging off-road routes and still getting to Abbeycwmhir church hall for 10am might be asking a bit much of her bedraggled guests.

We climb out of Ludlow as dawn breaks behind us and soon a lane Isla has always wanted to ride, but never has, climbs steadily away from us and the weight of Mike's ashes on my back pushes down encouragingly through the pedals. A solitary hare hops out onto the trail and leads us west →





**KINESIS TRIPSTER AT £699.99
(FRAME & FORK)**

SPECIFICATION

Weight 9.66kg (54cm)
Frame Kinesium alloy, 12x142mm rear thru-axle
Fork Kinesis Tripster full carbon, 12mm thru-axle disc
Gears Praxis Zayante 172.5mm 40 chainset, Shimano Ultegra Di2 shifters, XT Di2 rear mech, 11-42, 11-speed cassette
Brakes Shimano Ultegra hydraulic disc, TRP two-piece 160mm rotors
Wheels Reynolds ATR disc carbon
Finishing kit Ritchey WCS

50cm bar, 70mm stem, FSA headset, Kinesis 27.2mm seatpost, Ritchey WCS Skyline saddle, 40mm Vee Rail DCC tubeless tyres

HIGHS

Bombproof, full feature, dual wheel size, all terrain all-rounder

LOWS

Stiff frame can be punishing over rougher terrain

BUY IF

You want a totally trustworthy adventure partner



THE MAN HIMSELF

I met Mike Hall as a bike-mad teenage engineer, who worked for me as an intern on a mountain bike magazine I edited at the time. For most people, it was his incredible and inspiring epic self-supported ride palmarès that put him on the map. Starting with wins in 24-hour mountain bike racing, he won the 18,000-mile circumnavigation of the World Cycle Race in 91 days and 18 hours. He won the off-road Canada to Mexico Tour Divide race in 2013 and reset the official record with his 2016 win. He won the TransAm Bicycle Race in 2014 and, with fellow racer Juliana Buhring, was the focus for the film, *Inspired to Ride*.

Mike set up the Transcontinental Race Across Europe in 2013, from London, through various iconic cultural and cycling checkpoints, to Istanbul. The race continues this year thanks to his family and friends. Mike supported the Newborns Vietnam charity for several years until his death on March 31, 2017, aged just 35, but his legacy lives on.

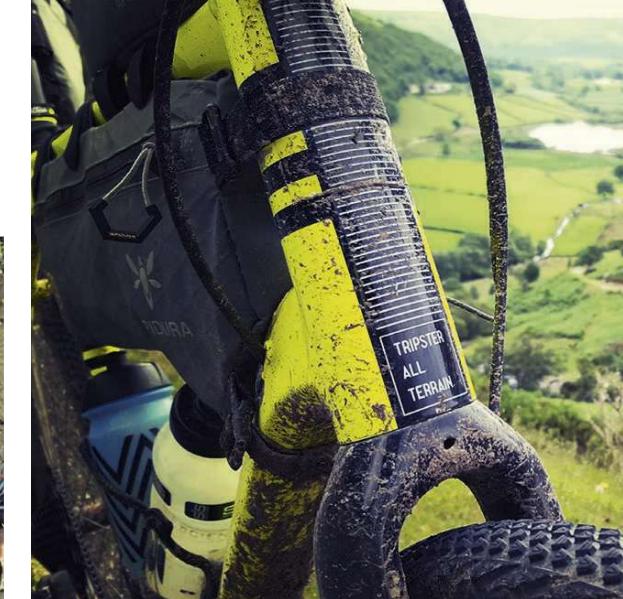
for several hundred metres, occasionally turning and stopping, seeming to beckon us on before vanishing off into long grass.

A couple more mountain bike-grade descents, a grassed lane, a field climb after a ford and a couple of miles of single lane road get us to Abbeycwmhir village hall with 15 minutes to spare. We hand Mike's ashes over to Anna, his Transcontinental race and life partner, who's organised the final memorial ride through the Elan Valley.

It's an eclectic bunch of riders, with elite endurance athletes rubbing shoulders with rounded, bearded velocipede bon viveurs, kids alongside weathered legends with legs like mahogany banister posts. The bikes they're riding range from electric hybrids to retro mountain bikes, fat bikes, custom audax touring bikes and full-on road race machines. Again, they're great reflections of the DNA that's led to bikes like the Tripster AT. It's a multi-mission, multi-tasking all-rounder that can tackle any distance or terrain while embracing the latest technology. Most importantly, though, it's a passport to adventure without borders, an invitation to meet new friends or catch up with old comrades too long missed.

The AT isn't the lightest, smoothest or most affordable bike in its category. It's not quite as good off-road as a mountain bike or as fast on-road as a 'proper' road bike. However, in 36 hours of riding from moorland singletrack, to rocky gully, ring road, towpath and reclaimed railway, in an ebb and flow of elation, exhaustion and emotion, it's been a totally surefooted, confident all-terrain ally, whose only puncture was quickly cured with a tubeless plug. As we head out of Rhayader it's still keen enough to do a remarkable

We hand Mike's ashes over to Anna, his Transcontinental race and life partner



job of hiding its 1800g mountain bike safety standard frame weight, 40mm tyres, bike pack luggage and the 400-plus kilometres in my legs and indulge in idiotic charges up the final two mountain passes – the second in a biblical hail storm.

The following two months further illustrate the Tripster AT's "All Terrain, All Year, All Fun" intent. I fit 27.5in wheels and 2in tyres and take it mountain biking with my kids. I show Mike's mate, Bruce Dalton, our local techy riverside singletrack for a video shoot. I add new rough links to regular road loops. I haunt the moors alone at night planning my next adventures, and sometimes I just ride it to the shops. Bikes are brilliant for all sorts of things, and perhaps bikes like the AT that let you do whatever you want to when you wake up each day are the best of all. **PLUS**