

DVD REVIEW

One Crazy Ride

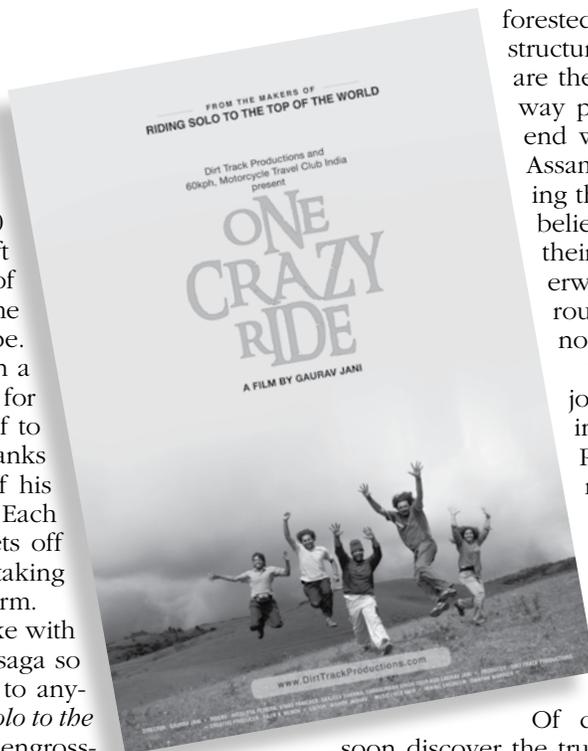
by Kate Edwards

THERE IS A SCENE in *One Crazy Ride* where rider/filmmaker Guarav Jani is faced with the task of getting his over-loaded Enfield motorcycle across a terribly dicey bridge. Over 600 feet long and built high above a swift Himalayan river, the span is constructed of nothing more than wooden planks, some bamboo, and a lot of handmade rope. Since this bridge is not much wider than a footbridge, Jani stops two or three times for a brief moment as he rides across—as if to gather himself before continuing on. Thanks to the camera mounted on the front of his bike, we make the crossing with him. Each time he stops, we breathe. When he sets off again, we don't. It is an utterly breathtaking scene, in the most literal sense of the term.

That Jani manages to put us on the bike with him and pull his viewers into his latest saga so completely should come as no surprise to anyone who has seen his first film, *Riding Solo to the Top of the World* (2006). In that equally engrossing adventure, Jani piled 660 pounds of traveling and filmmaking gear on his Enfield motorcycle and traveled from his home in Mumbai up into the Himalayan plateau. He did it solo and took the trouble to film both his surroundings and himself riding through those surroundings—an exercise that involved a lot of riding back and forth over terrible roads.

Perhaps because of the time and effort it took to shoot that earlier undertaking, Jani decided not to make the journey that became *One Crazy Ride* another solo event. Instead, he joined four other members of the India-based 60 KPH Motorcycle Travel Club for the trip: the mechanical Vinod; shy Sanjeev; boisterous Soddy; and the lone female in the bunch, adventurous Nicky. With five riders to ferry the camera back and forth, things should be a lot easier, right? Well, don't forget that old adage: if you want to make the gods laugh, tell them your plans.

At the film's outset, these five adventurers (all on overloaded Enfields of varying road-worthiness) embark upon an exploration of Arunachal Pradesh—India's most northeastern state and the subject of a long-running territorial claim from neighboring China. Remote, tribal, and largely undeveloped, this area seems to be thoroughly ignored by the rest of India. (The sign at the state border refers to it as 'A Paradise Yet Unexplored.')



forested, there is very little transportation infrastructure—which is partly why Jani and crew are there. They have been told that there is no way possible to traverse the state from end to end without dropping south into neighboring Assam for a spell. But these riders are not buying the existence of 'the Arunachal Gap.' They believe that there is a way through, even if their maps (and everyone else) tells them otherwise. As Jani states, their goal is "to chart a route which, according to most people, does not exist."

These explorers do not undertake this journey in a lighthearted manner. Due in part to its disputed status, Arunachal Pradesh has long been subject to separatist insurgencies, tribal tensions, and outright terrorism. There is nervousness among the riders as they set out into the unknown, especially since they have been warned of the dangers hidden in the forests—not the least of which are roads that have not been in use for over a decade.

Of course, like travelers everywhere, they soon discover the truth for themselves via their own personal interactions with the locals. And in typical Jani fashion, these interludes are shot and recorded both with great respect and arresting visuals. Whether he is recording a rather drunken birthday celebration or a morning walk through a crowded village (which includes an outhouse that employs an interesting, erm, *recycling* system), Jani always seems to draw the viewer in with spare dialogue and evocative pictures. Unlike many other films from this genre, Jani knows that, in the villages at least, he and his compatriots are not the story.

Out on the road it is a different situation altogether—particularly on *these* roads, some of which are very nearly laugh-out-loud bad. Some have not been used in years and show their wear in ways that force the team to double up in order to help everyone get through: one rides, one pushes. The resulting footage shows off not only the lush forest and incomparable sunrises and sunsets, but also the determination and fortitude of both the riders and their hardly-ever-say-die bikes. (Those Enfields are surprisingly tough.)

Eventually, the roads take their toll on the rest of the team, who run out of time and have to return home to jobs and families. Jani is left to soldier on alone, and it is at this point that *One Crazy Ride* really starts to shine. With no distractions from team members, the journey becomes more personal as Jani turns his focus

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both inwards *and* outwards. He simultaneously takes in more of his surroundings and becomes more reflective. The result is a moving—in every sense of the word—testament to the benefits of solo travel, as well as to Jani's talents as a filmmaker. Even with the restrictions of shooting and riding (or perhaps because of them—every exhausting camera set-up needs to be worth the effort), he always manages to get that shot which beautifully illustrates the scene.

In the end, *One Crazy Ride* is yet another lovely film from a fellow who is rapidly making a name for himself as the best filmmaker currently operating in the genre. With his gorgeous pho-

tography and spare narrative, he excels at the main rule of visual story-telling—show, don't tell. Through his eyes, we see both the benefits and the drawbacks of traveling out of our comfort zone. We also see why doing so is important—as he notes at the end of the film when he reflects that, sometimes, crazy ideas that involve things no one has ever done before are important in life. As he puts it, "I think it is good to be crazy once in awhile [because] in return you get the novelty of looking at life from a very different perspective." And a worthwhile one at that. **FZ**

The One Crazy Ride DVD (\$21.99) is available from www.dirt-track-productions.com or can be downloaded from iTunes (\$9.99).