



► HIGHLIGHT: A ROUND OF THE SELLA MASSIF

I remember the first time I set eyes on the circular Sella Massif in 1987 as I approached from the Val Gardena in an old transit van. The immense, vertical limestone walls looked unscalable, and yet I was there to climb five via ferrata routes to the summit plateau, solo.

To familiarise myself with the tasks at hand I thought it best to drive the fabled Sella Ronda, a circular route around the mountain that roughly follows a popular ski touring route and takes in four separate passes; Passo Campolongo, Passo Gardena, Passo Sella and Passo Pordoi.

Back in 1987 I owned a yellow and blue Yamaha XT 600 Ténéré and, as the old transit spluttered and groaned around the switchbacks and passes to reveal views more stunning around every turn, I just knew I'd be back to ride these fabled passes on two wheels.

I never did make it to the Sella on the 600

Yam but have done so on a 1990 Kawasaki ZX10 and later on a Triumph Tiger 885 Steamer, a Honda Africa Twin, Tiger 955, Yamaha Tracer, Ducati Multistrada and eventually a Ténéré only this model was a 2008 XT660Z.

The Dolomites are a biker's paradise, and in truth it's difficult to point to just the one favourite road. At last count I had about 30 favourites, but for the purpose of this guide I had to settle on just one and the circular route around the Sella Massif taking in the afore mention passes would be it.

The roads are simply superb in the line they take, the condition of the tarmac and the riding demands placed on the rider. There is not one yard of this 32-mile route that does not delight or inspire or clarify the sheer joy of riding a motorcycle in spectacular scenery.

There are too many switchbacks to count, too many highlights to recall and plenty of cafes and restaurants along the way to stop, chill and take in the magnificence of the place.

You've probably guessed by now that I'm

smitten by both this route and the natural surroundings. And you'd be right. If there's a downside, it's that so many other people think and feel similar, which means in the high summer season the roads are going to be busy.

If you have the opportunity to ride the Dolomites in the shoulder seasons then do so, on a Tuesday afternoon in the first week of October we had beautiful blue skies, pleasant temperatures and the roads were as quiet as I've ever seen them.

Do not hang up your riding boots until you've ridden the Sella Ronda.

► THE SELLA RONDA ROUTE

The roads that make up the route: SS48 - SS242 - SS243 - SS244 - SR48

The Four Sella Passes:

Passo Campolongo, Passo Gardena, Passo Sella and Passo Pordoi.

► ADVENTURE RIDING IN THE DOLOMITES

There are tracks and trails all over the place around here, but only a few are legal to ride. Here are our top three (for a more detailed description of these passes, along with easy-to-follow directions, head to www.bit.ly/dolomitesoffroad).

The Lusia Pass - Just outside of Moena on the SS346 you'll find the ski area Alpe Lusia and, just across the road, the start of a gravel trail that heads up through the woods and eventually to the Rifugio Lusia, where you can enjoy the fantastic views with a coffee or snack. The trail carries on past the refuge down very steep slopes (on our last visit this was the site of a new chair lift for the winter season) into a valley where you can pick up the SS50 to the Passo Rolle. The trail is an exciting mix of dirt and gravel but non-technical.

Forcella Lavardet (SS465) - Forcella Lavardet is a fantastic and little-known mountain road in the Italian Dolomites that offers a real sense of adventure. It's an epic ride along a part tarmacked, part gravel track that features a remarkable staircase of switchbacks that seemingly come out of nowhere. Out of the small village of Campolongo you'll want to head south along the SS465, though at this stage it looks like nothing more than a gravel access track. The deeper you go, the more it feels like you're heading into the wilderness and the track looks more disused. Big adventure bikes will have no trouble on this route, providing it's dry, and the reward is a special, adventurous ride through stunning Alpine scenery.

Passo della Forcella - For a real sense of isolation, remoteness and awe-inspiring views, Passo della Forcella is one of the Dolomites' best motorable passes. Dirt track on its southern flanks, tarmac to the north, the lonely road links the two small villages of Lateis, near the shores of Lago di Sauris, and Mione. It appears that this incredible road is now used mostly as an access track to an isolated farm that sits near the pass's summit, but while it might be some farmer's daily route to the shops, for the adventure bike rider it promises epic riding. For the most part it's beginner-friendly, though there are some deep water channels cut into the road that you'll need to negotiate. Any struggles are well worth the effort, as the views for the duration of the ride are special and offer a view of the Dolomites that many will never see, particularly the panorama from the summit. Make sure your brakes are in full working order, as the descent into Mione has a gradient of 28% for a few miles.



MARVELLOUS VIEWS FROM THE LUSIA PASS



THE HECTIC HAIRPINS OF FORCELLA LAVARDET



ALPINE BLISS ALONG PASSO DELLA FORCELLA