



ADVENTURE ISLAND

How product launches should be done



Text Neil Kerr

Photos Damian Breach

My eyes scanned the email again. An 'adventure experience' in Tasmania? Tasmania? Sure, why not? Sign me up. As strange as an 'adventure' trip sounded, it was instantly more appealing than the standard brand/product launch, usually mundane affairs consisting of endless PowerPoint presentations, drinks, nibbles and baffling engineers' reports, followed by an obligatory test ride, beer and back home by bedtime. So a four-day riding sojourn in north-eastern Tasmania sounded too good to be true.

Curious thing was that Shimano, the purveyors of said adventure, didn't really have a new product to launch. So why were they taking a few media guys, three athletes and a photographer on an adventure across the Bass Strait and into the wilds of Tassie? In campervans? Pushed for an answer, brand manager Toby Shingleton replied profoundly: "To ride our products in the places they were designed to be enjoyed. As simple as that."

But why? Surely there was a goal for the trip? I delved deeper into Toby's mindset. A bike industry veteran, he too had been on many product launches and wanted to move away from the traditional way of thinking about them. "I realised that one of the biggest challenges for media is that everyone gets fed the same product and the same lines. Modern media guys are smarter than that; they want their own unique stories. So we decided to give everyone some product, take them to a destination and let them share their experiences amongst the group. At the end of the day our company is full of

people who just love riding, so why not do something we enjoy for a week!"

As I sat on the hour-long flight from Melbourne to Launceston, I gazed out the window and drifted into a daydream, one of adventure and intrigue, riding new places with new people and a new, different kind of product propaganda.

Tasmania had been on my radar for a while, having had a lot of Kiwi friends wax lyrically about its virtues as the most Kiwi-like part of Australia. I'd also heard through the grapevine that money was being poured into an amazing network of custom-built bike tracks. So as we left Launceston the next morning in fully laden campers, I was fizzing at the prospect of riding in Van Diemen's Land.

The Hollybank Bike Park is only half an hour out of Launceston, and where we got our first taste of Taswegian-built trails, which didn't disappoint. The unique scenery and smells of the native forest were distracting me, and the concentration required to ride

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new trails in a pack of skilled riders made the sensory overload pretty surreal. The afternoon was spent on the upper reaches of the Hollybank trail network, and in particular Juggernaut, a 10km behemoth of red dirt, jagged rock and bermed goodness. This top zone can be reached by self-shuttle, pedalling (for those that way inclined) or by utilising the services of Buck from Vertigo Shuttles, as thankfully we did. The first day of product-launching Shimano-style done, beers were cracked and we settled in for the short drive to our humble abode for the night, a campground by the ocean. I was certainly starting to enjoy my adventure trip.

Next stop was Derby, an area I'd heard a lot about. Steeped in tin mining folklore, this hodgepodge of a town has been through a lot in its colourful history, from mining booms to floods that washed out half the town. Recently though, local government has decided to invest in mountain biking as a

viable source of tourism for the area and got the guys from World Trail to put together a network of trails to rival anything in Australia. Our main objective was to ride the freshly finished Atlas trail, an 11 km singletrack extravaganza which winds, rolls and drops its way through lush bush to link with the lower trail network at Derby. Again the ever-jovial Buck shuttled us to the trailhead and we set off to explore a trail that very few had yet ridden before us. Minds were blown, high fives dished out and as we settled in around the campfire that night, all banter was firmly based around Atlas.

Our plans to check out the still unfinished Blue Tier trails were scuppered by relentless heavy rain. Knowing this was our last chance to ride these tracks, four of us grabbed the spirit of adventure by the scruff and headed back to Atlas. The next 90 minutes were the highlight of the trip; four guys pinned on their bikes in the pissing rain on an incredible, slick,

muddy trail in a remote corner of a tiny island at the bottom of the world. Standing drenched, black with muck and despite having put our bodies, bikes and gear through the wringer, our four faces wore the biggest smiles of the trip. The bikes and Shimano gear had dealt to the conditions a lot better than did our tired and sore but very happy bodies.

Reminiscing on my adventure as I flew home, I couldn't help but be impressed with Toby and Shimano's forward thinking, how they'd grabbed the hearts and minds of the journalists and athletes involved in the trip. It was a risk to try something like this, by taking us out of our comfort zone and matching us against the elements. Things could have easily gone awry but it worked perfectly. Perhaps the eclectic mix of bike-loving characters had helped bond the group together and make the whole thing work. Or maybe this is just how all product trips should be. An adventure.

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