



## THE GREAT ESCAPE 2 – Press Release

The basis of this ride is the historical fact behind the film classic “THE GREAT ESCAPE”. Although the characters portrayed in the film were fictional, they are based on real men, who gave their lives during World War II. It was their belief that their actions behind enemy lines, to both harass and necessitate the maximum use of manpower to discover them, was their duty.

One of these men, played by Lord Richard Attenborough in the film, was Squadron Leader Roger Bartlett, who, in real life, was based on Squadron Leader Roger Bushell. Roger was a South African national who loved life; an international skier, who rose to become a Squadron Leader of 92 Squadron, based at RAF HORNCHURCH, ESSEX. On 23<sup>rd</sup> MAY 1940 he flew across the Channel to assist with the evacuation of Dunkirk. After downing two Messerschmitt 110’s, he was in turn shot down and landed on a beach in France. Taken prisoner, by the Luftwaffe, he was to become one of their major problems. After various escape attempts, which so nearly succeeded, he was sent to Stalag Luft III, in Zagen, Silesia, now Sagen, Poland. Now under the threat of death if he attempted to escape again, which did not stop him.

He became Big X and was one of the masterminds of The GREAT ESCAPE which took place on the night of 24<sup>th</sup> March 1944.

A team of seven motorcycle riders intend to follow his route, from a starting point of former RAF BIGGIN HILL, where his Squadron was later based, via Dover to the beaches of Dunkirk. Then through Belgium, following the road over Arnhem Bridge (“A Bridge Too Far”), into Germany. There we will visit the former camp, Stalag Luft I, at Barthe on the North coast. Then via Berlin to the former Stalag Luft III camp in Poland. We will stay for two nights at Stalag Luft III and visit all the nearby tracks and stations used by the escapees. We will travel back into Germany via Dresden, where we will pay our respects of reconciliation. We will lay flowers and show what happened is history but now we live together and what happened will never happen again. We will then be staying at the former high security prison camp at Colditz Castle, for the night and a trip around the former camp.



Then off to the South, to Hitler's Obersalzberg, Berghoff in the mountains. This is where the execution order was signed, by Hitler himself, to murder 50 of the escapees. We will visit a nearby valley where the most famous bike jump **ever** in the history of filmmaking was made. The great jump of Steve McQueen over the border wire to reach Switzerland (in fact a stunt rider), through into Switzerland where most of the escapees intended to reach. Back through Germany and into Belgium, where we will visit Bastogne, a town made famous during the battle of the Bulge in 1944, then return to Dunkirk and home.

We will be riding on Triumph Bonneville motorcycles supplied by LAGUNA MOTORCYCLES of MAIDSTONE, KENT. As a tribute to Steve McQueen and his famous bike jump, Laguna's have also made a replica of Steve McQueen's bike from



the film and Smudge will be the main rider of it. We have also obtained the number plate: **WW11PW** – how cool is that!

All of our riding equipment will be supplied by Triumph Motorcycles, so we will look smart and professional.

We have invited a very special person to accompany us. Colin Kirby-Green whose father Thomas, was the head of camp security for the escape but was murdered upon capture in the Czech Republic. Colin's step father was also involved in the Great Escape, but survived. Colin is in his 70's and has never been able to visit his father's grave. We aim to transport him there, so he can do so.

Following our stay at Stalag Luft III, the main riders head for Colditz Castle, whilst I join Dutch in taking Colin Kirby-Green to Hrabuvka in the Czech Republic where he will be guest of honour at a huge celebration. The towns folk have been commemorating Thomas Kirby-Green and Gordon Kidder, who was killed with him, since the war, having built a memorial in their honour. We will be joined by Gordon Kidders great nephew who is flying in from Canada for this event. We will then re-join the main party at Freidrichshafen.

We aim to raise **£10,000**, to be divided between the charity **Help for Heroes** and **The Royal British Legion**, to assist in the care for our injured troops.

**The trip is planned for the 4-18<sup>th</sup> June 2011, commencing with a ride down the runway at Biggin Hill airfield. We aim to cover 3500 miles in the two weeks.**

END

### **Note to Editors**

The team are from various walks of life, and most unknown to each other before being put together for this ride, much like the men in the Great Escape.

Attached is a Quicktime interview by “Bike Torque TV” with two team members which can be used as we have their permission, and which explains our event.

The team members are:

**Peter Spowage “Spud”** – Police Officer with The Metropolitan Police Service **Team Leader**

**David Spowage “Smudge”** – he will only be 26 years old, the closest age to that of the original escapees

**Flt Lt Kevin Donaghue RauxAF “Dog”** – Serving at 19 Squadron RAF Valley, Anglesey, North Wales

**John Cooke “Cookie”** – Retired Avon & Somerset Constabulary

**Richard Waters “Muddy”** – Retired Ministry of Defence Police

**Steve Smith “Steamer”** – Retired West Midlands Police. **Steamers son, Clive, served in Afghanistan and has unfortunately returned with very serious life changing injuries.**

**Pete Lambourn “Gramps”** – Retired Ministry of Defence Police

**Sqdn Ldr Bob Ankersen “Kriegie”** – Retired RAF and was a **Prisoner of War in Gulf War One. Kriegie counts surviving Great Escapers amongst his friends.**

**Dave Muckle “Pud Pud”** – retired Royal Engineer NCO and now involves himself with motorcycle tours.

**Dave Veldhoven “Dutch”** – Self Employed Electrician and amateur historian

Photo’s of the team members are attached.

The Steve McQueen replica bike with its WW11POW registration plate will be auctioned after the event with profits going to GE2.

Event website: **[www.greatescape2.net](http://www.greatescape2.net)**

Interviews can be conducted with Peter Spowage, “Spud”. His contact details are:

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