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Te Taratihu Manaaki Tuanui

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## A drug called dirt

I WAS only eight when I first went pighunting with my father. I remember it well, not because of the pigs we didn't catch, but because we got the landrover stuck about five miles off the road and spent about four hours digging it out of the mud! It was a reoccurring theme to most of our hunting trips and we would usually return home covered in more mud than blood. It struck me with some irony that there was a sense of satisfaction in spending hours digging oneself out of a hopeless bog that didn't extend itself to helping mum dig the vege garden.

Digging - I could take or leave but getting filthy dirty was to me a real pleasure. It was to me a part of society that didn't conform to a dress or personal hygiene code, it also gave me a purely physical connection to the land, being covered in mud was my spiritual thing.



Dirt however was the farthest thing from my mind when I first saw the small offroad gokart Phil Melrose was offering me, but half an hour later I was shaking his hand, deal done. I had mixed dirt and speed before with a series of offroad vehicles and was well aware that I couldn't justify the purchase of this particular vehicle as transport, it would provide movement in real time and only for the pure physical enjoyment of it all.

The Melrose Offroader is a small ATV but that makes it ideal for narrow tracks or tight manoeuvring and if you get stuck its light weight makes it easy to free from the mud.

I joined others for training runs on the Waimak river bed and surrounding tracks, however getting soaking wet in riverbed crossings soon removed the enjoyment factor from that particular place and we started looking further afield. First a motorcycle TT race meeting where we had enough people to race in our own class and then some organised trail bike rides on high

country farming land throughout Canterbury. We were plugging through muddy bogs and tearing down narrow gravel roads "playing Colin McRae", going sideways more often than straight ahead, and buried just an inch beneath the mud there was always that crossover between fun and terror, a steep drop off over the side of a farm track to certain death and a river hundreds of feet below would be disguised by the magnificent views it gave.

The direct inputs into the controls of the offroader and the immediate physical response of the vehicle was a big drawback for me. Turning this way in the dirt would have mud and stones skipping up from the front wheels peppering my face, turning that way on tar seal and I would be on two wheels catching my breath wondering how many times I might roll, either way the adrenaline shot would have me yelling in pure excitement. On a steep bumpy hill being chased down by others, barely in control, barely on the ground, and barely taking breath found me completely hoarse by the bottom, my screaming lost to me by the tortured metal rottweiler sucking in air and petrol millimetres from the back of my head and blood pumping drum staccato in my eardrums all provided by the sheer thrill of life at speed.

And leading to that one time when I will be completely and utterly out of control, the thrill of that moment when time does slow, not enough to make a difference to the outcome but enough to be aware of the event. That can have me shaking in anticipation before a race or just a ride.

Yes *dirt* can be very addictive.

RUA PARI T4, STILL ALIVE

