

CUBA LIBRA

Freedom goes on the march when film director Drew Stone's Urban Streetbike Warriors tour makes history with the first-ever stunt show on communist soil, to entertain the U.S. troops stationed at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba

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Opposite Stars and stripes forever: Teach McNeil cuts a clean can-can circle at Guantanamo Bay's Lyceum.

1-3 How's this for first-class treatment? A Navy DC-9 chartered just for the Urban Streetbike Warriors crew flew from the Naval Air Station in Jacksonville to Gitmo. The bikes were strapped down and loaded into the "first class" bay while the lowly stunt riders were forced to ride in the back. The flight crew was unwilling to hand over the plane's controls to Thomas Evans, despite repeated requests and an attempt to bribe them with a Rice Krispies treat.

4 "Are you guys the stunt riders?" A few Warriors with personnel at Gitmo's Leeward Air Terminal. From left to right: Teach, Steve Bachand, Flo, a well-armed soldier, Vertical Joe, Pretty Boy and Tony D.

5 Teach (left) and Ray Ray hide from the 100-degree heat just before the show starts.



The Northeast Gate at the U.S. Naval Base at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, is pretty much a no-man's land. The only point of entry along the 17.4-mile fence that separates the American-operated base from Cuba proper, the gate is rarely used—the only people with reason to pass through are the occasional military diplomat or, less often, Cuban nationals who somehow manage to escape to the base and don't qualify for refugee status, then have to be returned to Cuba. Otherwise, there is no reason at all for anyone to cross between the two sides.

Everywhere you look around the Northeast Gate you see evidence of the animosity that exists between Fidel Castro's Communist Cuba and the American military. The fence is 10 feet tall and draped with razor wire. The ground on the Cuban side is littered with land mines and guarded by heavily armed soldiers stationed in towers. The sign over the Cuban side of the gate reads *Territorio Libre de America* ("Territory Free of America"). The small Marine barracks on the American side of the fence (shielded by a 40-foot-tall metal screen to stop Cuban soldiers from throwing rocks on the roof and keeping the Marines awake all night) is fronted by a huge Marine seal and an American flag, both lit around the clock. What an outrage it must be to the communist Cuban military to have to look at these emblems of American freedom every day, located on sovereign Cuban soil!

It's knowing this back story and realizing the high level of tension that exists between the Cuban and U.S. military forces (the U.S. military obtained a perpetual lease of the Guantanamo Bay site in 1903, long before Castro's takeover of Cuba in 1959) that makes it so incredible to watch Chris "Teach" McNeil blazing his way down the high-security road that leads to the Northeast Gate, the open exhaust on his Kawasaki 636 stuntbike roaring like a lion, his fairings painted in a garish stars-and-stripes flag motif, front wheel flying high in the air! If a red, white and blue sportbike wheeling full-on toward the Northeast Gate isn't the most perfect representation of American freedom, then I don't know what is. It goes without saying that it must have taken every bit of self-control those Cuban border guards could muster not to unload a full clip from their Kalashnikovs directly into the side of the Teacher's motorcycle. Surely this is what Dubya meant when he was talking about freedom on the march!

It was almost too good to be true: How did six of America's craziest stunters—Teach, Tony D Freestyle, Vertical Joe Dryden and three members of



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6-8 XFR's Stevie B ended the show with a bang, burning his GSX-R1000's back tire down to the rim and blowing up the engine. The crowd went wild. Bachand restarted the bike for the ride to the Northeast Gate the next morning, but the motor sounded like a coffee can full of wrenches, and by the end of the 14-mile ride the bike could barely maintain 20 mph.

9 Everyone knows bikes wheelie, but we're pretty sure the crowd never considered a stoppie given the way they roared when Vertical Joe opened the show with some long-ass stoppies on his Kawasaki ZX-6R.

10 When it came to acrobatics, the XFR boys had their A-game on. That's Bachand in the apehanger, with Pretty Boy Howlett in the watchtower position.

11-12 Pretty Boy ought to consider changing his name to Monkey Boy the way he moves around on the bike. His ass is literally never in the saddle.

Worcester, Massachusetts' Xclusive Freestyle Riderz (Jeff Howlett, Steve Bachand and Ray Ray Zalneraitis)—find themselves on one of the highest-security military installations in the world, riding their stuntbikes, no less? Contrary to what many of us thought at first, the Urban Streetbike Warriors crew wasn't at Gitmo to be detained as enemy combatants (though we have no doubt many in their hometowns wouldn't mind seeing these guys on lockdown). On the contrary, the guys were there at the specific invitation of the U.S. Navy, flown down on the taxpayers' dime for the express purpose of entertaining the roughly 4000 U.S. troops and civilian employees stationed or working at Gitmo—an honor that put the Urban Streetbike Warriors on par with megastars such as country singer Toby Keith and rock group Hootie and the Blowfish.

How did this all come about? The ball got rolling sometime last winter when *Super Streetbike* received an e-mail from Todd Jordan, a staffer at Gitmo's Morale, Welfare and Recreation (MWR) division, asking if we knew any stunters who would be willing to come to Guantanamo in the summer to entertain the troops. It turns out Jordan is an avid *SSB* reader, GSX-R rider, a huge stunt fan and the point man for a small army of sportbike riders who live (and ride) at Gitmo (read more about these crazies on page 6 of this issue), and he made it his personal mission to bring a stunt show to Cuba. Conveniently, we had just heard from filmmaker Drew Stone about his planned Urban Streetbike Warriors 2005 Tour that would take the star riders from his USW-series of DVDs and his MTV *True Life* special out on the road for a series of shows. We put Jordan in touch with Stone and it blew up from there. And when it came time for the trip and there was one open spot left on the roster, Stone invited *Super Streetbike* along to get the inside story. Of course, we jumped on it!

The jump-off point was the Naval Air Station in Jacksonville, Florida, where the group of nine—six riders, Stone, yours truly and all-star emcee Thomas Evans from outonparole.com, who would man the mike during the show—met on Memorial Day weekend for the two-hour flight to Gitmo. The mood was uncertain—and not helped by the stress of shuffling five bikes, one quad and



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13 Tony D was the point man for the slow stuff at Gitmo, wowing the base with all manner of circles, no-handers, and other technical show-offery.

14 One benefit to stunting a quad—extra tall knobs on the tires translate to extra staying power during burnouts, so the smoke show lasts twice as long.

15 Ray Ray Z buzzes the crowd on two wheels and tosses out a DVD at the same time. The stunters tossed out dozens of DVDs, T-shirts, stickers and other swag to the very receptive crowd—nearly every single piece of which was brought back afterward for the riders to autograph after the show.

16 The man with the plan: Drew Stone of stonefilmsnyc.com is the director of the Urban Streetbike Warriors DVD series and the guy who put the Urban Streetbike Warriors tour at Guantanamo Bay together. Of course, he was right there in the thick of it with his camera running, collecting footage for the upcoming Urban Streetbike Warriors *Worldwide Live* DVD, due out this fall.



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nine gear bags through the extra-strict security gauntlet necessary just to get on the base. You boys aren't hiding any contraband in those airboxes, are you?

Not to mention, well, let's just say that a by-the-book military base isn't exactly the most natural environment for a bunch of weird-haired, pierced and tattooed misfits like us. Talk about your Black Sheep Squadron... None of us were exactly sure what to expect and, to be honest, we expected nothing but attitude from the tuff guys in uniform who would be ushering us around for the next few days. It was with visible relief, then, that we arrived at the airport terminal on base to a reception that was anything but cold—on the contrary, many of the sportbike-loving soldiers working at the terminal had ridden bikes to work that day, and they stood waiting with helmets in hand to get the rider's autographs. "We knew you were coming," one of the loading attendants told us. "We've been waiting a long time for this day!" It was the rock star treatment all the way, and it set the tone for the rest of the trip.

Carrying on the rock star theme, the Navy chartered a DC-9 with a full flight crew of six just to serve the nine of us! You can't imagine how luxurious it is, after years of flying overcrowded, commercial flights, to have an entire airplane almost to yourself—even if we had to ride in the "back" of the plane while the bikes, strapped down to a steel pallet, rode up front in "first class." Touching down at the Leeward Air Terminal at Gitmo was another head trip. Walking up to the security checkpoint to have our bags inspected (again), it was all steely eyes and stone faces until one of the inspectors, a woman, spotted a helmet in one of the gear bags and put two and two together. "Are you guys the stunt-riders!?" she blurted out. From that moment on everything was cool, all big smiles and back-slapping before the cameras came out and the guys signed even more autographs. And we hadn't even arrived at the base proper yet!

The Leeward Air Terminal was also where we met MWR Director Craig Basel, our host for the trip and the guy who signed the orders that made this show possible. Basel, a career military man who has been stationed with his family at Gitmo for the past 12 years, gave us a rundown of our itinerary for the weekend, a thumbnail history of the Guantanamo base and, at the end of it all, an almost-apologetic request/plea that we "please do our best to abide by the rules of the base." You could tell that, after just one look at the motley USW crew, he was wondering just what the hell he had let Jordan talk him into. It's a testament to the professionalism of the group involved that we managed to leave the base three days later without invoking a single disciplinary violation (none that they found out about, at least!). We had a great time down there—and we think Basel did, too.

We arrived at Gitmo late Friday afternoon and spent most of Saturday getting the bikes ready and evaluating the show space in preparation for the Saturday afternoon show. Basel had arranged for the riders to have access to the base's "Skills Auto Service Center," a good thing, as McNeil had some big repairs to make resulting from a crash during the pre-trip practice session at Lakeland Drag Strip in Florida. The show itself took place at the "Downtown Lyceum," a large, wide-open chunk of pavement located at the center of the base beside the outdoor movie theater. The show didn't officially start until 5 P.M., but spectators had been slowly filling the two sections of portable bleachers all afternoon. When show time finally rolled around there were probably 1000 people in the stands and lining the outer perimeter of the Lyceum—pretty much everyone on base who wasn't working at the time turned out for the show. The majority of the fans were troops and many of the Jamaican and Filipino contract workers who keep the base running. Oh yeah, and lots and lots of kids.

The show started with military precision at 5 P.M. when DSOG Evans fired up the mic and introed the riders one-by-one. Dryden was the first rider out, and he got the crowd going with some old favorites, spreader and high-chair wheelies and some long-ass stoppies that really wowed the largely non-riding audience. Teach was next up: With the back half of his exhaust system removed he roared around the Lyceum sounding like a P-51 Mustang fighter plane. He got the crowd frothing with some truly manic, high-speed rolling burnouts, ripping across the lot this way and that, back end hung way out and rear wheel spinning, looking at every moment like he was going to wad but never falling off—and the crowd went nuts. McNeil's chaos was followed by a typically clean, typically technical Tony D session full of slow-speed stuff and the first circle and no-handed wheelies of the day on his immaculately turned-out street-fighter. Then things really got wild when the XFR crew hit the tarmac, with Ray Ray Z buzzing the fans on two wheels on his quad while Pretty Boy Howlett and Bachand showed the first acrobatics of the day, Bachand ripping some picture-perfect apehangers and Howlett right next to him in a cliffhanger.



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17 In your face! Teach gets interactive, rolling a stoppie right up to the barricades.

18 Evans attempts to engage a local Rock Island Iguana in a round of paper, rock, scissors without success. These miniature dinosaurs are all over on base, and despite their ubiquitous presence they are actually an endangered species. On the Cuban side of the fence they're considered a delicacy, so seemingly every last one of them is hiding out on the military base to escape becoming someone's dinner.



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19–21 The lovely Kimberly from South Carolina was the lucky lady (victim?) who ended up on the back of Tony D's bike during the interactive portion of the show. Kimberly had never been on the back of a bike before, but that didn't stop her from helmeting up and holding on through all manner of madness, including some rolling burnouts (20) and near-vertical wheelies (21).



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22 Look mom—no hands! Our host's daughter, Katie Basel, jumped on for a few two-wheel passes on the back of Ray Ray's quad. We're not sure how Mom and Dad felt about it, but it sure looks like Katie was having fun.

The USW crew did individual sessions for an hour and then took a short break to rehydrate—it was almost 100 degrees that afternoon in the Caribbean sun. When the riders returned to their bikes Evans shifted into overdrive and worked the crowd to keep them on the edge of the bleachers for the next hour. First he called the guys out for a long stoppie contest Dryden dominated (though Howlett and Teach put in some good marks). Then Evans started talking shit between Teach and Tony D, building this into a circle wheelie showdown that the Teacher (just barely) won. The crowd was going wild, and this is when things started to get a little bit crazy, even for the stunters. Off-hand, Evans asked if anyone from the crowd wanted to get on the back of Tony D's bike. Plenty of jarheads had their hands in the air, but once Tony D spotted a pretty girl he met earlier that morning at the McDonalds in the crowd, it was all over. Before you could say boo she was in a helmet and on the back of his bike, the two of them ripping all manner of two-up wheelies, stoppies and burnouts. No waiver, no gear, no experience on the back of a bike, no problems! Then, before anyone could say otherwise, Ray Ray Z burst out in a huge wheelie on his quad, also with a passenger on back—Katie Basel, our host's 14-year-old daughter, holding on for dear life! Did you get Mom's permission for that one, Ray Ray?

At this point it was anything goes. The riders were having a blast, and the crowd was eating it up. Just when they thought the show couldn't get any better, XFR busted out some jaw-dropping team stunts: Picture Bachand doing an apehanger with Howlett upstairs in a watchtower position, then Howlett doing a forward flip off the headlight and landing on the back of Ray Ray Z's quad. In classic grand finale style, the last trick was a guaranteed crowd-pleaser. Those of us in the know might appreciate the finer points of a no-handed circle wheelie, but nothing thrills non-riders like a long, smoky, down-to-the-cords standing burnout—and the XFR boys didn't disappoint. First Ray Ray burned the knobs off his quad tires, followed by Stevie B burning his down until it exploded with a loud pop (and lunched his GSX-R1000 motor in the process). We thought the crowd would never stop cheering after that.

Even though the show was over, the high point of the night was yet to come. Immediately following the show the commander of the Naval Base, Captain Les McCoy, gathered the Urban Streetbike Warriors crew in front of the crowd and presented Drew Stone with a plaque and an American flag that had been flown



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23 All the street riders at Gitmo, plus the USW crew, pause at a security checkpoint.

24 The autograph session stretched on until sunset—seemingly everyone who attended stopped by to have something signed.

25 Captain Les McCoy (center, green shirt), Commander of the Naval Base at Guantanamo Bay, congratulates the show.

26 The Urban Streetbike Warriors at Gitmo's Northeast Gate—the only point of entry between the base and Cuba proper.

27 A group shot with the plaque and flag Captain McCoy presented to the team. Front row, left to right: Steve Bachand, Jeff Howlett, Drew Stone, Ray Ray Zalneraitis; middle row, left to right: Teach McNeil, Aaron Frank, Joe Dryden, Thomas Evans and Tony D.



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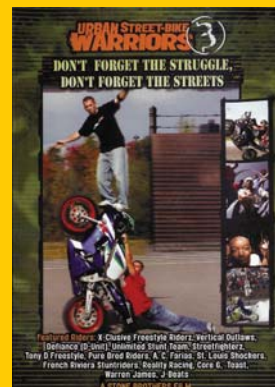
over the base. Then the riders sat down at a long table for an autograph session, and damn if every last person there didn't come through to have something—a magazine, flyer, helmet, T-shirt, hat or even a motorcycle—signed.

It would be lie to say things didn't get emotional after the show. It's one thing to say you support our troops or stick a magnetic ribbon on the back of your car—it's another thing entirely to actually get out there on the ground and do something directly for the benefit of the troops. Don't underestimate the power of these MWR events in boosting morale—most of the troops stationed at Gitmo are stuck on the same 40 square miles with the same 4000 people for 18 months at a time. The benefit of breaking that routine with something new and different like a stunt show cannot be overestimated, and to hear the troops so sincerely thank the riders for taking the time to travel all the way to Cuba to perform for them was powerful stuff. These riders are just blue-collar kids from working-class homes in places like Worcester or Jersey or Portsmouth, Maine, who grew up with military friends and family and who are the same age as most of the troops stationed at Gitmo. Guys from East Coast cities who were deeply affected by the events of 9-11, and who, like so many of us, felt powerless to do anything to stop the terror. Powerless until now, that is, when they were given the amazing opportunity to travel to Cuba to do something very real that would clearly improve the troops' morale in an effective way. It was a powerful, emotional experience, one none of us were prepared for.

The day following the show we rode together with some of the other bikers from the base to the Northeast Gate, a rare opportunity to travel to a restricted area that many people—including the majority of the troops stationed at Guantanamo Bay—will never see. It was an odd sight, six stunters and the dozen-odd Gitmo residents barreling through the desert-scape on a narrow road to nowhere that dead-ends at the gate to one of the world's few remaining communist countries. Sure, it was fun to goof off around the gate and pose the bikes on end for pictures in front of the Cuban guard post, but the novelty and uniqueness of the situation was nothing compared to the sheer energy and emotion of the previous night's show. As emblematic as it was, even Teach bum-rushing the gate on his patriotic stuntbike wouldn't top that.

Urban Streetbike Warriors: 3

Wanna check out Teach, Tony D, Vertical Joe and the XFR crew in real-time action? Pick up a copy of the third installment of Drew Stone's *Urban Streetbike Warriors* series, "Don't Forget the Struggle, Don't Forget the Streets," which features all of the above riders plus Streetfighterz, Pure Bred Riders, St. Louis Shockers and more of the world's top stunt teams in action. Stone is an experienced filmmaker—not just another backyard video producer—and as a result his films have a focus and unity that no one else working in the stunt DVD



industry can match. A return the grittier, street-bred aesthetic of the original *Urban Streetbike Warriors* release, *USW3* is chockablock with street-crushing action from around the country, mixed in with some sick footage from Stone's recent world travels, including the history-making trip to Burns Day France with Tony D and a segment from Guyana with Pure Bred Riders. Required viewing for any extreme streetbike enthusiast, you can hook up with your own copy at www.stonefilmsnyc.com