





WHERE TO RIDE

THESSALONIKI, GREECE

Not your typical weekend trip

By the staff of *Dirt Wheels*

Photos by Chris Valavanis

□ Recently, we found ourselves on the other side of the pond in Milan, Italy, which was celebrating its 68th International Bicycle and Motorcycle Exhibition (turn to page 56 for a look at the Milan Exhibition). While there, we were fortunate to have met a new friend, Tasos Dorokidis. Tasos played host to us, talking about his life in the motorsports industry and how the Greek ATV market is on the rise. He threw out an invitation to go riding, and mere hours later, we were in the mountains of Thessaloniki, Greece.

Not knowing what to expect in

Greece, our minds wandered off to lying on beautiful beaches and sipping beverages with our riding boots buried deep in the sand. Upon landing, the stormy skies replaced our tropical images as the sandy beaches were being pelted by rain. Most would be concerned, but our eager host had a huge smile from ear to ear. "Our mountain trails will be dust-free and perfect for today's riding!" Turns out, Thessaloniki is located in the heart of Macedonia, in Northern Greece which is blessed with some of the best mountain trails in Greece.

Tasos Dorokidis, Pashalis and Dimitris Kartzias, and Chris Valavanis showed associate editor Brad Howe around their trails in northern Greece.

Matched with the wet weather, we were all but assured the perfect taste of riding ATVs in Greece.

FROM STREETS TO MOUNTAINS

The day of our ride, we met up with Tasos at his shop, Tat-2 Racing, in western Thessaloniki. We were set up with a Yamaha Grizzly 660. It was modified to a 800cc with a bore and stroke job by CT Racing and had Works shocks, Maxxis Big Horn treads and a 3000-pound Superwinch. Tasos rode a similar Grizzly 660, but modified to 720cc. With us, we had two of his brothers and very good friends Pashalis and Dimitris Kartzias, one with a strange Yamaha prototype and the other riding a Suzuki KingQuad 750 with a crazy green paint job. Chris Valavanis, editor-in-chief of Greece's *Moto Xtreme* magazine, came along to shoot photos and video of our day's ride as well.

Geared up and ready to go, we pulled out of the doors of Tat-2 Racing and onto the streets of Thessaloniki. We took these roads for 10 miles to the local trailhead. ATV riding on the streets of Thessaloniki is legal...sort of. ATVs are allowed access through the streets as long as you're heading to/from local riding trails. You must ride the speed limit and always stay in a tight line. Fair enough?

GREECE



The famous Balkan Rally starts from Bulgaria and crosses Skopje, Albania, and heads into these Macedonian trails.



The 4000-foot Mt. Hortiatis offered great riding and amazing views!



Our new Greek friends turned a single-track dirt bike trail into a more quad-friendly terrain.

The trailhead took us through Hilia Dentra, which means 1000 trees, and onward to Mount Hortiatis, which means "the mountain with a lot of grass." At 4000 feet, Mount Hortiatis is the largest mountain in Thessaloniki. Nearby Mount Olympus is the largest

in Greece at nearly 10,000 feet, and about 60 miles away. There is no riding on Olympus, but if you know your ancient Greek mythology, it's where the 12 ancient Greek gods resided. How cool is that?

We blasted Mount Hortiatis' high-



The trails in Thessaloniki offer good variety. We were flying down high-speed fire roads, cruising through beautiful creek trails and even walking down gnarly descents.

speed roads covered with glowing red and yellow leaves, then we climbed gnarly rutted and rocky uphill that would test the best of riders. The creek beds were filled with amazing blue water, and the altitude changes were from 2000 to 4000 feet!

GREECE



Could you imagine commuting on your ATV? In Greece, we rode the streets so we could ride the trails!

A month or so before our trek through these Greek trails, there were hundreds of 4x4 ATVs and sport quads here for the annual National Scramble Championship. ▶



The trail system in Thessaloniki had a combination feel of the trails from back home. The open trails felt like we were traversing Utah. When we headed into the woods, we were reminded of Kentucky and West Virginia.

The mountainous, tree-lined trails seemed strangely familiar. They were close to trails on the eastern side of the U.S., but the history of Greece was everywhere. When we approached the village of Hortiatis (a historical place from 315 B.C.), we saw a Water Mill from the Roman era! A few miles down the

trail, at the bottom of a hill before a steep climb, we noticed a huge hole in the earth. "I have ridden these trails for 20 years, and around five years ago a bike fell into this sink hole, which at the end, was discovered to be an underground hall filled with tombs and weapons from the ancient Greek years," said Tasos.



We saw many different types of ATVs out on the trails. There were many 4x4s challenging the technical sections and sport guys railing the high-speed trails.

These trails are also home to an annual National Scramble Championship that brings in hundreds of 4x4 ATVs and sport quads. The Balkan Rally starts from Bulgaria and crosses into Skopje, Albania, and into these Macedonian trails as well. □