

HIMANK  
KHARDUNGLA  
TOP  
NORTH PULLU-14KM  
KHALSAR - 56KM  
NUBRASANDDUNES-86 KM  
CHEN BASE CAMP-164.77  
TF 54 RCC

T-18380FT

KHARDUNGLA TIGERS

# TOP OF THE WORLD

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PHOTOGRAPHY: ADITYA DHIWAR

Every rider worth his/her salt has ridden to or aspires to ride to Khardung La, but seldom does one think of taking a scooter as one's chosen steed. After all, a scooter's home is the city. Hardly something you'd want to take to Ladakh, right? Breaking from established convention *Bike India* rode with champion stuntwoman Anam Hashim to the top of the world on a TVS Scooty Zest 110

FOR ANY BIKER, TWO IS greater than four (who said we are good at maths?), and so it has been for me for a few years now. Stunt-riding is my passion since the time I would practise, on the sly, on the scooters and motorcycles at home and when I wowed a group of boys practising stunts on the road.

Riding is something I really enjoy. So when the chance came to ride to Ladakh and to Khardung La (the highest motorable road in the world), I jumped at it without a second thought.

Apache? Draken? TVS-BMW? I was rubbing my hands in glee thinking about what I would be riding, but surprise, surprise – it was a TVS Scooty Zest 110. Really? It matched my frame, but how and why would you take a Scooty to Ladakh? I love challenges, though, and after two weeks of intense gym and running exercises, I was in Jammu to begin my ride. Accompanying me was a support team from the *Bike India* magazine.

This was my first visit to Jammu but, contrary to my expectations, it was hot. Soaked in sweat in no

time, I rode out of Jammu quickly and confidently, thanks to the good roads and the nimble nature of the TVS Scooty Zest 110 itself. Dodging the scary bus drivers soon became second nature, as well as motocross-style stances on the rough patches, and more than a few heads turned at the sight of a girl in full riding gear on a TVS Scooty Zest 110, rarer than the proverbial blue moon. In a few hours, we reached Patnitop, our halt for the night.

The next morning, we did a quick photo shoot in the tree-lined pathways around our resort before setting off towards Srinagar. There were multiple interruptions on account of traffic jams, plus there were tons of photo-ops that I just could not resist. The valleys were beautiful and slightly scary too, as they were quite deep. We reached Srinagar after dusk and stayed in a lovely houseboat on the Dal Lake, and I dined on the finest mutton *biryani* I have had for years.

The morning began particularly beautifully for me, as I offered *namaaz* right there on our houseboat overlooking the calming lake waters – what a spiritual experience. Our destination was Kargil, which I knew as the centrepiece of the 1999 Indo-Pak war. Rough patches were aplenty

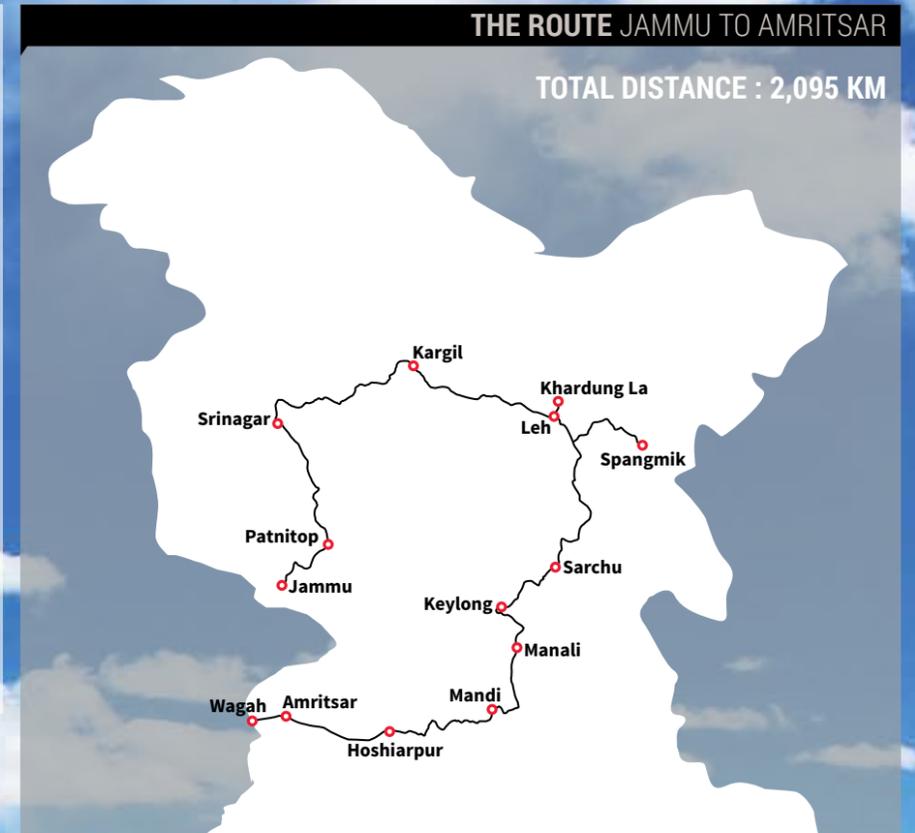
but the suspension of the TVS Scooty Zest 110 soaked it all. Jaywalkers who would not cross quickly even in spite of repeated honking too seemed to be out in crowd strength, and again we could not beat dusk in reaching Kargil. *En route*, I rode through Zoji La, the first mountain pass for both me and the TVS Scooty Zest 110. Zoji La isn't the highest of the passes that lay on my route but the rough roads and the steep climb served as an excellent first test of the surprisingly capable TVS Scooty Zest 110.

We had one rest day in Kargil, much welcome after the tough riding. We rode to the Suru river, and it was fun playing in the wet, squishy sand and splashing the Scooty too. I also got my first view of Pakistan when we went to village Hundurman, near the Line of Control. From there I could see village Brolmo (in Pakistan) in the distance. The Kargil market was a lively place, and I enjoyed hot *kahwa* at the quaint Roots Ladakh café and munched on local baked snacks.

We were now going towards Leh, literally the high point of the ride, but had to battle convoys of Army trucks that you just cannot get past. The roads were a mix of rough patches, straight

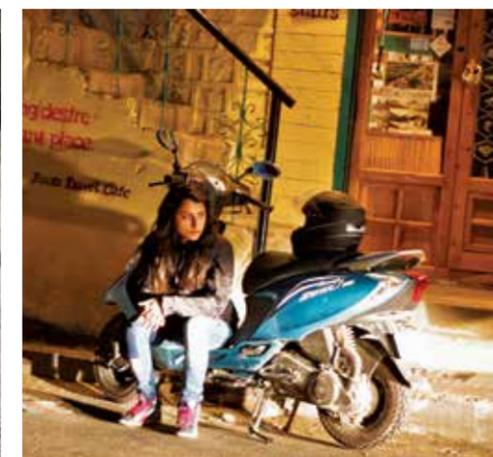
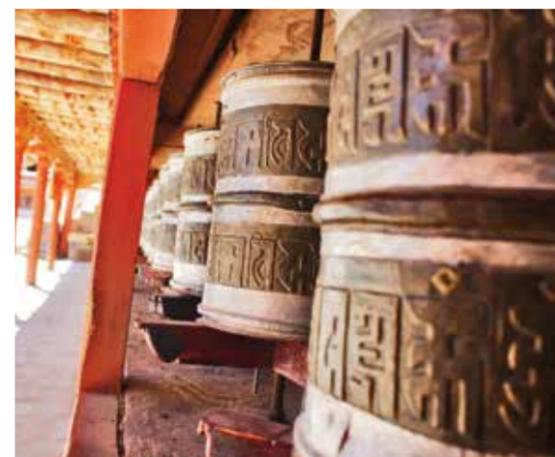
stretches, and sharp bends that were fun to attack on the peppy little scooter that no one thought would be suitable for these riding conditions. But guess what? The TVS Scooty Zest 110 is more than capable of sticking out its tongue at all the naysayers. We crossed two more passes: Namik La, which I could not find even on Google Maps, and Fotu La, where the rock formations were amazing. Finally, we rode into Leh and settled into a colourful little hotel in the market area. For dinner, we went to the popular Gesmo Restaurant in the Leh market where I had a yummy yak cheese chicken pizza, which was unique as I had never eaten cheese prepared from yak milk.

Finally came the day when I would be on top of the world! We rode towards Khardung La, which is claimed to be the highest motorable road in the world at 18,380 feet above mean sea level. This was like a long off-road track, as the roads were horrible. The TVS Scooty Zest 110 again proved itself quite able and performed unfazed, in spite of the oxygen-depleting altitude. Thankfully, the distance too was less than 50 kilometres, so it did not take too much time. And I kept thinking that this was what I had come for, so I rode on. ▶



▲ Anam receives a brand new TVS Scooty Zest 110 from the TVS dealership in Jammu

▼ Bad roads never mattered for Anam and the TVS Scooty Zest 110





TVS SCOOTY ZEST 110 A SUPER SCOOTER

Seat is comfy enough to be in for long hours

Brakes are capable of handling Himalayan descents

Ride quality and handling is top notch over all surfaces

Tyres have decent grip even on slippery icy surfaces

Engine doesn't run out of breath even beyond 10,000 ft

It was really cold at the top, but at least I knew I had finally made it...on a TVS Scooty Zest 110! I also played in the snow for a while, again a novel experience for me. And, as promised, I did a handstand right at the Khardung La board. We were advised not to spend much time there as the high altitude can make you uneasy, so I quickly hopped back on the scooter and rode down to the hotel.

Next day, we rode towards the famous Pangong Tso lake. The roads comprised steep climbs and really bad patches, particularly as we approached Chang La, the third highest motorable road in the world (17,586 feet) and the next pass on our route. This was the first time when I experienced some breathing trouble due to the high altitude. I rested for over an hour, did some deep breathing exercises and drank a lot of water, and finally I was ready to go. The proverbial feather appeared in my cap as well as the cap of the TVS Scooty Zest 110

when I overtook three Enfield Bullet riders. For all those who said with disdain that this was no place for a girl to ride on a scooter, I think the case was closed at this point. From here on there would be no doubts about what a girl on a TVS Scooty Zest 110 is capable of. We reached the lake by 5.00 pm, and it was really beautiful but also very cold, and I cannot tolerate severe cold climes. We stayed there for two days in nice log cabins, and rode around the lake in the daytime for some photography.

The ride back to Leh was uneventful, but quite tiring. The following day, I visited the famous Hemis and Thikse monasteries in Ladakh, and also the Druk White Lotus School, where some parts of the Hindi film '3 Idiots' were shot. This light day was welcome, as the ride the next morning towards Sarchu was to be 250 km, the longest leg of the ride thus far. I particularly remember riding through a sandstorm, which almost blew me off the road but the scooter braved

the storm and it was great fun. We crossed three passes on the way: Taglang La, which is the highest point on the Leh-Manali route and is the second-highest motorable road in the world, and very windy; Lachulung La, after which we went down through the 21-loop Gata Loops; and Nakee La, a small, quiet pass. Because of landslides and bad roads, we reached after dark, and quickly found a decent camp for the night.

It was really cold in Sarchu, so we decided to ride out the very next morning and went straight to Keylong. Baralacha La, which we passed on the way, is said to be one of the most dangerous passes and has very narrow approach roads and chances of landslides. We stayed the night at a hotel operated by Himachal Pradesh Tourism, and in the morning we rode towards Manali. There was a lot of traffic as we got closer to Manali, and we also rode through Rohtang La, whose name is supposed to mean "pile of corpses" – scary that!

We stayed for two nights in Manali, during which we visited the famous Hadimba Temple.

The ride was about to reach its culmination. On the way to our final stop, Amritsar, we stayed for a night each at Mandi and Hoshiarpur. A little before Amritsar, we diverted towards the Wagah Border (between India and Pakistan), and I really enjoyed watching the flag ceremony there. I also danced in the parade area with other ladies while patriotic songs were being played at full volume. The ride closed in a very auspicious manner, as we went to the Golden Temple (my first visit there in my life) and I wore a proper red turban too.

This has been a once-in-a-lifetime experience for me. I had only heard about Leh-Ladakh, but I actually went there, and conquered it on – of all bikes available – a TVS Scooty Zest 110 that proved itself super-reliable and able. I now know why bikers praise this area, and I cannot wait to go there again! **BIKE**

NEED TO KNOW
<b>TVS Scooty Zest 110</b> Rs 47,261 (ex-showroom, Pune)
<b>Engine:</b> Single-cylinder, four-stroke, air-cooled, CVTi
<b>Displacement:</b> 109.7 cc
<b>Max Power:</b> 8.02 PS (5.9 kW) @ 7,500 RPM
<b>Max Torque:</b> 8.80 Nm @ 5,500 RPM
<b>0 to 60 km/h:</b> 11.1 seconds
<b>Transmission:</b> Variomatic
<b>Brakes:</b> 110 mm drum (F), 130 mm drum (R)
<b>Tyres:</b> Tubeless 90/100-10 (F), 90/90-10 (R)



▼ Khardung La, 18,380 ft. On a TVS Scooty Zest 110

▼ The ride ended with a prayer at the Golden Temple in Amritsar

▼ No trip to Amritsar is complete without a visit to the Wagah border

