

THE BUCKET LIST ✓
MOTORCYCLING MUST-DOS

Ride the 'Spectre' road

Licensed to thrill in search of 007 on Austria's highest road

'Bond is in a light aircraft chasing the assassins'

The 24th James Bond film - *Spectre* - got its annual TV airing last New Year's Eve. Despite the fact that it's always on the box, it's a brilliant movie and one of its standout scenes sees 007 pay a visit to the Hoffer Klinik, a dramatic glass-fronted building atop a snowy peak, before jumping into a light aircraft and giving chase through a glacial landscape. It's edge-of-the-seat stuff.

The sequence was shot, at great expense and effort, in the Austrian ski resort of Sölden, which now provides Bond-loving bikers with a brilliant base to go in search of

Spectre - and also ride the country's highest road. Which is exactly what my wife and I did, back in September last year.

The Ötztal Glacier road is easily reached by heading south on the 186 from Sölden and turning right onto Hochsöldenstrasse just before you leave the outskirts of the town. As we were late in the day, the toll gate operators had gone home so we slid past the row of empty booths, feeling a bit like trespassers, stealing a free passage to the top.



BY GEOFF TOMPKINSON
AKA the 'Honorary Austrian' is an award-winning photojournalist who tours all over Europe and further afield with his wife Liz.

The verdant lower reaches of the Ötztal valley stretched out before us and in the distance we could already see the glacier. We were riding directly into the sun and the low light was a warm glow backlighting and enhancing the pink colour of roadside alpine flowers. It seemed to turn the grass either side of the road into a velvet green carpet which gradually turned to golden brown up the gently sloping sides of the valley. To our right a small stream glistened with reflected sunlight as it meandered past glacially deposited rocks.

After another few kilometres we reached a long section of road winding along the side of the mountain to our right and falling away steeply to the valley floor on our left. It was this section that was used for one of the most spectacular shots in the movie, where Bond is flying a light aircraft and chasing the vehicles of the assassin 'Hinx' as they race down the road in the snow. He drops low to fly alongside them in the valley and exchanges a few pistol shots before turning away to chase them through the

woods in the next scene. It all looked quite different to us however, as the snow-covered scenery of the film was now the barren scree typical of high valleys. The only snow visible was up ahead on the glacier itself.

A short series of steeply climbing hairpins soon took us away from the cinematic location. The sun was dropping ever lower casting wonderful, elongated shadows of our bikes that would repeatedly stretch, overtake us and switch sides as we changed directions navigating the hairpins. We emerged much higher and much closer to the glacier. Only a

meandering and gently climbing stretch of winter-weathered broken road lay between us and the top. The scenery here is typical of glaciers when not shrouded in a seasonal coating of snow. They are not so pretty; it's a bit like riding through an industrial scale gravel pit or open cast mine. Coming straight after the hairpins the broken road surface meant this ride was definitely both shaken AND stirred.

A quick spin around the deserted carpark in front of the cable car station and we continued on to the very foot of the Rettenbach Glacier as it climbed steeply behind

a small lake of aquamarine melt water. The road curves around the lake and disappears into the Rosi Mittermeier Tunnel, which also features in the movie chase. We rode slowly through the darkness for 1.7km and emerged at 2830m - the highest point on a paved road in Austria and at the foot of the Tiefenbach Glacier.

The sun was almost gone and it was getting colder. Most of the ride back down the valley was in shade, but the mountains were still picking up the red of the disappearing sun, providing some unforgettable scenes. We had timed the experience to perfection.

The next day we would find ourselves stepping out of the cable car at the top of the Gaislachkogel Peak (3048m) to visit both the amazing Ice Q restaurant (or the Hoffer Klinik in *Spectre*) as well as the Bond Museum built into the mountain. My favourite display was an explanation (complete with scale model) of how they pulled off the plane chase through the forest culminating in the fuselage sliding down the mountain and crashing through a mountain hut.

Post-ride it only remained to sample Bond's favourite vodka martini in the bar. Shaken, not stirred, naturally. **MCR**

HOW TO DO IT NEXT STEPS

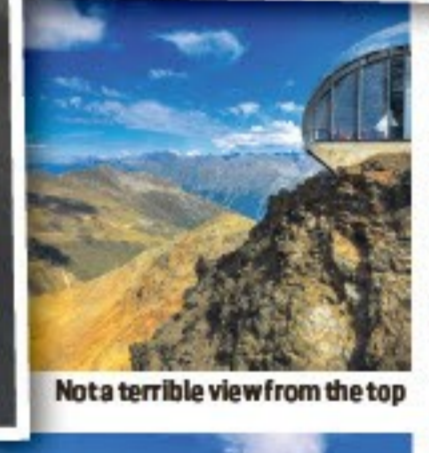
The Ötztal Gletscherstrasse (glacier road) starts in Sölden, just after the village centre on the right when heading south. The signpost says 'Tiefenbach Gletscher' and 'Rettenbach Gletscher'. It's a high alpine road with several switchbacks and hairpin bends. It goes from Sölden (1368m) to the Rettenbach Glacier and then through the highest road tunnel in Europe to the Tiefenbach Glacier (2830m). Beware of ice in the tunnel. The Ötztal Gletscherstrasse is the highest panoramic road in the Eastern Alps and the highest paved road in Austria. The road is normally open for motorcycles from June to September, check opening hours for the road on www.soelden.com. This is a toll road and the fee is €10.50 per motorcycle.



The name's Tompkinson, Geoff Tompkinson...



Steep hairpins make for a thrilling ride



Not a terrible view from the top



The late sun delivers dramatic light



James Bond takes well-aimed potshots as he flies down the valley in Spectre



Get refreshed at the IceQ restaurant



If you see Bond - it's time to leave...

I DID IT TOO

'A must for any Bond fan'



Nathan Udall
"The first time I did the Ötztal glacier road was on my Suzuki V-Strom 1000 in September 2015. The weather was fine, warm and sunny but there was still some snow at the top. Up there the road splits into two - bear right and it takes you to a parking area with a sign stating 'the highest road in Austria'. The left-hand road takes you the bottom of one glacier then up through a long tunnel to the other side of the mountains even higher where there is another glacier and a lake. The views were simply spectacular."

"The second time around was in September 2019 and this time there was a fair bit more snow. Riding my Yamaha Tracer 900 this time, I explored the area then also stopped in for a visit of the 007 Elements experience at Sölden - a must for any James Bond fan."



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