

Were on a ROLL

David, **Jill**, Achille, **Otis**
and Atlas *Houncheringer*
are on a mission to cross
the *PANAMERICAN* in a 1989
Unimog truck and enjoy
life to the fullest.

*Texte Isabelle Vander Heyde
Photography David Houncheringer*





"Please adopt me!" Judging from the many comments on their Instagram page, you wouldn't be the first follower, adult or not, to want to join the Houcheringer family. Their pictures portray games of hide-and-seek, colouring books, band-aids being ripped off, petting kittens and dancing in the grass: your regular hazy childhood recollection if it weren't for the stunning scenery of endless plains and abundant forests.

Swiss David and Jill – a photographer and kindergarten teacher – grew tired of the daily grind before it could even take hold. Alarm clocks in the morning, goals, eat-sleep-work-repeat: it didn't work for them. Thus, they decided to home school their children and travel six months a year. A customised Unimog truck - lovingly dubbed *Le Mogi* - has transported them for about 20,000 kilometres in just under four years. "Some people have a second residence; we have the truck. Consider it our South American home away from home, one that leaves us free to roam around to our heart's desire. We're both quite fond of vehicles and customising the truck back in 2019 was a wonderful project. It's easy to score a tented jeep for two or even three people or a van that can accommodate a family of four but finding something suitable for five travellers proved quite the challenge. Our twins were barely two at that stage, so we wanted some comfort – a good bathroom and kitchen. Once finished, the truck went to Montevideo by boat, and we followed suit. We were off for six months that first time, but then Covid hit. We flew back to Switzerland and the truck stayed behind in Peru. After two years, we picked up where we left off and spent six months wandering from





“We grew tired of the daily grind before it could even take HOLD of us.”

Peru to Panama. And now we're back in our Swiss hometown for a while as it was never the plan to travel full-time. We like the variation and spending some time with our friends and family back home. There's no rush to go back, no big goal to consider: simply knowing that we'll go back sometime in the next year is enough. The truck will always be there, which is a very liberating feeling. We live in the smallest of Swiss towns surrounded by nature and enjoy outdoor adventures. With no schedule or high expectations, the kids spend all of their time outside the house. One of the nice aspects of intermittent travelling is seeing the way in which the children evolve. Our youngest were 2.5 years old on their first trip and six on the most recent one. They were babes in our arms then and can ride their motorbikes now. It's touching to see how they change and how they experience the journey differently each time. What's funny to me is that I started out as a photographer travelling across Europe alongside my skating and snowboarding pals, documenting their every move. Today, I wander around with my kids, and it takes me back those days: just a kid and his buddies having fun and creating content along the way.”

Life on the road consists of a never-ending succession of outdoor adventures, swimming, building cabins, petting animals, singing songs, finding, and preparing food, and solving riddles. The Pan-American countries are ideal for big trucks like the Unimog because there are little to no obstacles like low bridges and narrow tunnels. Nature is wild and wide. Cruising through Chili, the family drove for weeks without coming across any fellow travellers. They don't go fast, limiting driving time to two or three hours a day. Sometimes they camp for a day or two, on other occasions they stay put for a few weeks – like that time they got stuck in Guánico, Panama, surfing away the days. “Everybody is more easy going out there. Once we find a camping spot, the kids run outside and explore their new backyard whilst we set up camp, gather and prepare food, map our next move, or unwind. There are no rules, no to-do lists to check off, and yet there's not a minute of boredom. Relaxed parents make for relaxed kids. As is to be expected there is some hassle every

now and then: they want food right here right now but there's not much to find in the immediate vicinity, or the road gets more complicated than expected. And it's quite tiring at times too, but that's just part of life and we go along with it.” As a heavy, bulky truck isn't ideal for range of motion, David and Jill found the perfect solution: motorbikes! It is quite the passion in this family, replacing regular bicycles and even the traditional stroller. “Traveling with very young children can prove to be a big mess. We should know as we were out here with twin babies and a toddler at some point. The trick is to turn those nuisances into strengths: the thought alone of a twin stroller scared us, so initially we used electric motorcycles to get around with the kids. They've learned to drive by themselves by now. The bikes enable us to go out and explore even more, racing over desolate beaches and off-road paths. One of our ultimate memories will always be the sight of Achille speeding across the Uyuni salt flat in Bolivia - the sky mirrored in the water, no idea where land stopped and clouds took over, salt all over his flowing hair, water splattering around and the world's biggest grin gracing his little face... It's a very emotional experience when your child looks up at you exhilarated and shouts out that his wildest dream has just come true! Time is a precious commodity, and we want to spend as much of it as possible with Achille, Otis, and Atlas.”

“The children amaze us daily and take us out of our comfort zones without even trying. They'll want to jump off a cliff or climb some tree, and we'll instinctively think no, don't it's too scary, but it turns out to be fine. We occasionally get backlash about taking too many risks, but that is not how we see it. We'll never be those parents who holds their kids' hands, but we'll always be there to catch them if they fall. We trust them and they have developed great self-confidence, knowing their capabilities and limits like no others. Their intuition is powerful. To some it may seem like we're just letting them run wild, but that is not what's at play here. It's a question of mutual trust, gradually growing with every new mile we cover together.”

*“To some, we just let them
run around doing wild stuff.
That’s wrong: it’s a question
of mutual trust, growing
gradually with every new mile
we cover TOGETHER.”*









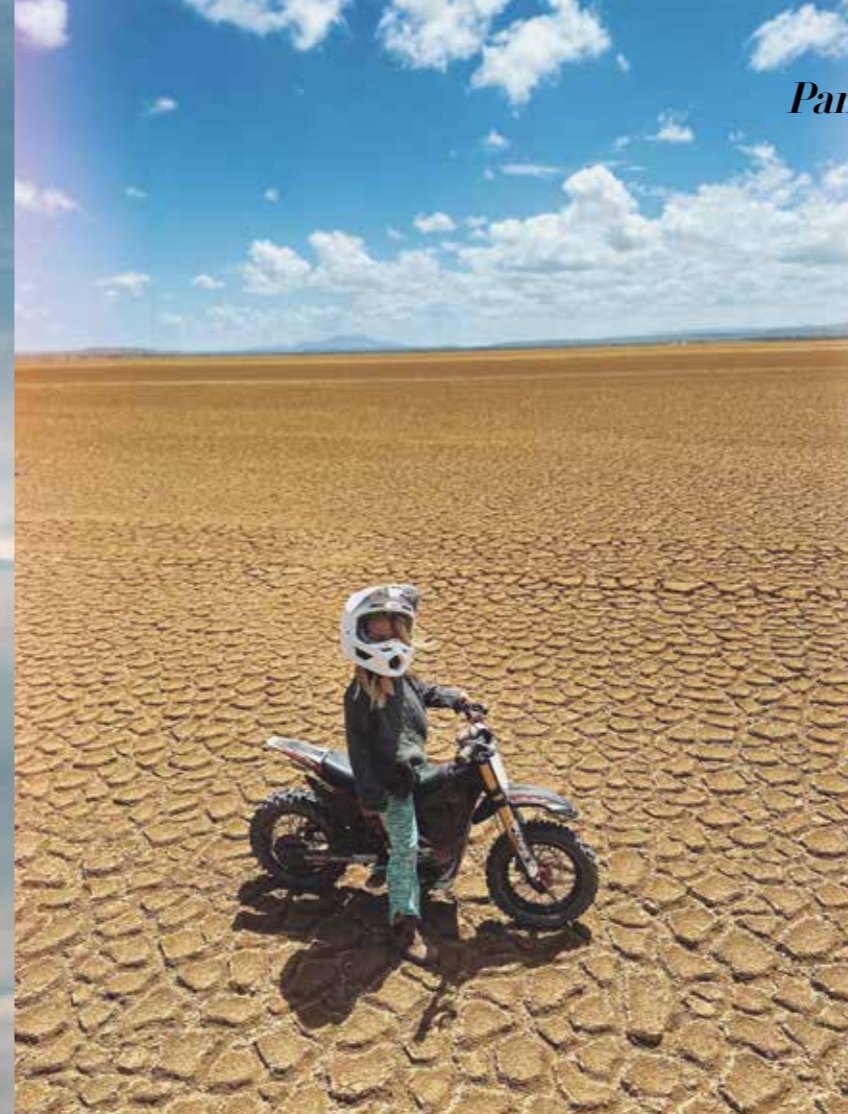
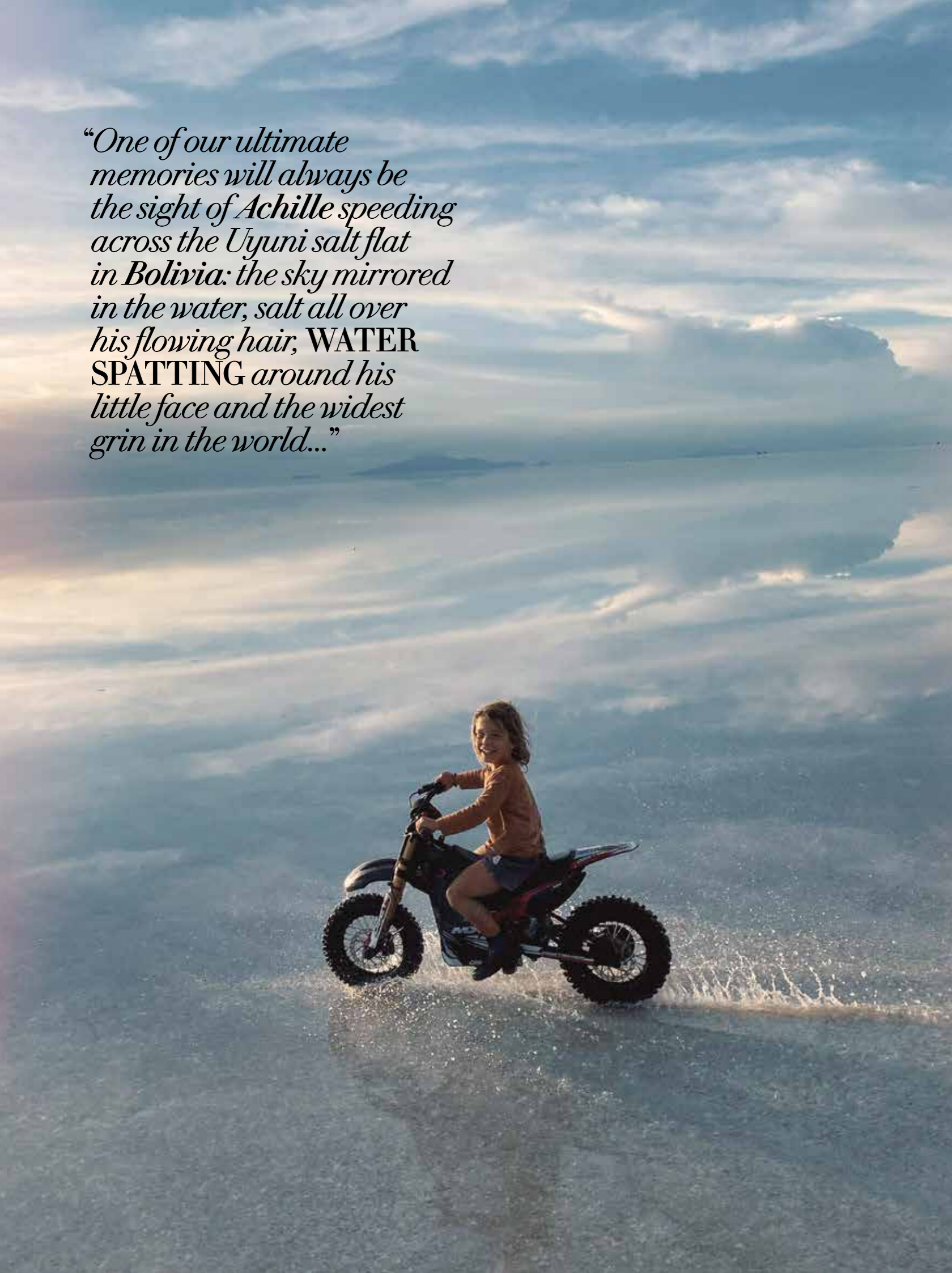
“Some people have a second residence; we have the truck, our South American home away from home, one that leaves us FRÉE to roam around to our satisfaction.”







“One of our ultimate memories will always be the sight of Achille speeding across the Uyuni salt flat in Bolivia: the sky mirrored in the water, salt all over his flowing hair, WATER SPATTING around his little face and the widest grin in the world...”



Some thoughts

The family typically spends two to three days in the same spot, but there's no set rule. They could stay longer if they feel like it, freshwater reserves permitting.
“We came across a family that travelled the same distance as we did in two years in less than three weeks. We like to take our time, no strings attached...”

Jill's favourite country so far is **Ecuador** because of the magnificent variety of landscapes, from the **Galapagos archipelago** to the rain forest and volcanoes. **Panama's** verdant landscape and amiable people were also a hit, and the same goes for **Colombia** which in addition has super exciting cities.

To David, the most lasting memories will always be the family moments *“Just the five of us, seemingly alone in the world, totally autonomous... it's a unique experience that makes you feel more alive than ever.”*

This is how we roll

Small children on motorbikes? It's not a problem in the Houcheringer book. David and Jill share their advice for a safe and responsible experience.

Riding a motorbike comes naturally to the kids because they have been doing so from a young age. Even in Switzerland they were cruising on two wheels before even riding a bicycle: *“It's a great way to find your balance. You could compare it to riding a balance bike.”*

*“In order for them to practice, we got them to follow us on their motorbikes when we went out for a run. We would set the maximum speed to **7 kilometres** an hour for instance and easily jog alongside them.”*

During their travels the truck is equipped with two **Kuberg freerider bikes** for the parents and one little **electric Kuberg Cross Hero** for the children: *“a great one to learn on!”*