

Simpson Desert Bike Challenge Newsletter

Oct 2007

Race dates for 2008: 30th Sep – 4th October

Hi everyone,

Well, the 20th anniversary race has been & gone, and this year Mother Nature reminded us once more just who is in charge out there.

Only two hardy souls were able to add their names to the list of those who have successfully completed a 100% finish. Congratulations Bruce and Koopie on a mighty effort.

Figures from the early years are sketchy but over the past twenty years around 700 people have taken on the Desert - with the score currently standing at:

Cyclists: over 200 with a 100% finish
Sweep: around 500 riders swept

On a year-by-year basis:
(* = shortened course)

*1988:	23 starters	unknown
1989:	30+ starters	15 completed 100%
1990:	24+ starters	12 completed 100%
1991:	32+ starters	10 completed 100%
1992:	51 starters	21 completed 100%
*1993:	49+ starters	21 completed 100%
1994:	31 starters	4 completed 100%
1995:	51 starters	15 completed 100%
1996:	43 starters	22 completed 100%
1997:	44 starters	2 completed 100%
1998:	37 starters	6 completed 100%
1999:	41 starters	2 completed 100%
2000:	54 starters	4 completed 100%
2001:	32 starters	21 completed 100%
2002:	22 starters	3 completed 100%
*2003:	15 starters	13 completed 100%
*2004:	30 starters	18 completed 100%
2005:	24 starters	6 completed 100%
2006:	11 starters	5 completed 100%
2007:	17 starters	2 completed 100%

2007 Race Report:

Purni Bore, Monday lunchtime - many crews have sensibly arrived early and are busily unpacking and getting organised ready for race start. Others arrive late and in disarray, one rider doesn't arrive at all. The Race Officials didn't fare much better, with Medical Co-ordinator Louise's vehicle last seen being towed back out to Coober Pedy.

The carnage, both vehicular and cycle related, started early this year. The race was yet to begin but

already clusters of bodies could be found peering into engines and crawling under vehicles while riders struggled to bend derailleurs back into shape and agonised over tyre choice.

Then it was off into the fast rising sun on Day One. Jack set the standard early when one of the back wheels fell off his vehicle. The mechanic at Mount Dare roadhouse has since been advised to flee for his life after repairing that particular tyre the previous day.

Searing heat and a challenging sandy track surface saw many of the riders getting to meet the dreaded 'Grim' far earlier than they would have liked, with just five riders hanging on to successfully complete the first stage. All looked more than a little shell shocked as they crossed the finish line - a brutal introduction to the joys of the Desert.

Most riders did front back up for the afternoon stage though. Having waved them off from the start line, the rear convoy group settled back for final refreshments prior to a leisurely start. Then Kathy was spotted walking her bike back along the track. While Grim watched with malevolent joy, others sprang into action to get her broken chain repaired. Despite initially expecting to have to sit out the stage, Kathy decided to 'go as far as she could' before being swept and then she fought back to deny Grim his last victim for the day - just squeaking across the finish line with the sweep vehicle right up her tail.

Day Two lived up to its reputation as the 'make or break' section of the race, with a nice coating of sand, a decent wind and relentless corrugations making it difficult to ride even the hardpack sections at speed. Bikes continued to fall apart with Mick losing his second place overall after a catastrophic bike failure involving gear cable, derailleur and rear wheel in an unusual reconfiguration. A dust storm in the afternoon added to the Armageddon-like atmosphere, with a surreal orange haze blanketing the landscape.

Many woke on Day Three thinking that they'd survived the worst that the Desert could offer. The morning stage saw half the 4WD front convoy 'swept' - first overtaken by the riders and then caught by the Sweep as they struggled to dig vehicles out of the enormous soft dunes. The 'piece de resistance' was the mighty dune at Water Stop Three - here Timekeeper Su and Track Marker Murf finally chucked in the towel,

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fearing the lead riders would soon appear on the horizon and deliver the ultimate indignity - beating the Timekeeper to the finish line. An appropriate 'chicken run' detour around the dune was quickly marked out for following vehicles before Su and Murf made a dash for the lunch stop. Getting airborne over the dunes was not really an option this year with many a 4WD ingloriously beached on top of a sandy crest. Shovels and snatch straps got frequent use to haul even the most seasoned Desert driving veterans out of trouble. Dr Greg's super deluxe camper trailer (the use of which was justified by claiming it as a mobile ICU), posed a small problem, resolved with a spectacular double snatch strap rescue involving 'V8 Dougie', Tim with the V8 Landcruiser, the roaring of engines, flying sand and fevered prayer by Dr Greg.

For the riders the huge dunes posed little problem, perhaps even a flicker of joy as they launched themselves off the peaks at previously unknown speeds. But the salt lakes, which traditionally offer some respite from the sand and corrugation, were this year a relentless slog through thick sand drifts with a howling headwind.

Day Four started with the expectation of better conditions, although the Race Directors were at risk of being lynched by the mob having made such promises before. By this time it was becoming apparent that there were difficulties being experienced with the back ends of the field. Grown men were found fighting over the only spare bike seat available - a super cushy girlie type saddle. Donna was hastily promoted from her position as Medic 0.5 to the revered 'Bum Queen', and is currently receiving intensive counseling and therapy after her traumatic experiences over the last couple of days of the race. The support crew role also seemed to be reaching a new level this year - with Bruce's crew seen decimating their pillow supply and spending some time trying to insert extra cushion on to Bruce's tender tush.

Day Five - the race drew closer to Birdsville and the smooth freshly graded Inside Track provided balm for battered bums. A few took advantage of waterholes along the Diamantina River for a much needed wash, including Grim, who was later fined for trying to drown the long suffering 'Goose'. Team Axxis members Mick and Dicko took the final stage win in crowd-pleasing double mono style - we all felt the pain as Mick landed on his thankfully well cushioned butt.

Meanwhile Bruce gritted his teeth, rode off the saddle and gave his all to hang on to his 100% finish and first place overall - an impressive effort which makes him the oldest competitor in race history to win the event.

Ed and I would like to thank all the volunteers and officials for their tireless efforts in the Desert this year - Timekeeper Su and Route Marker Murf, Medical Co-ordinator Louise (and Steve), Medics Dr Gerald (and his assistants Kai and Maree), Dr Greg (with co-driver Helen), Donna, Water Stop Co-ordinator Ray, Noel and Margaret, Water Stop One Gill and Keith, Water Stop Two Chris and Kym, Water Stop Three Jack and Wendy, Sweep Andy 'Grim' Griffiths (and 'Sweep Bitch' Kate) and 'Tail End Charlies' Mark and Dennis.

General Update:

If you did not pre-order in Birdsville and wish to order a 2007 race photo CD from Vivid Adventures please contact Ed or Gaye on edgaye@fasteddy.com.au or phone (03) 5263 2142. Cost is \$50 for approx 200 pics. Andrew is happy to produce these CDS for a minimal cost, with the bulk of the funds raised being donated to 4Wheels4Sean. Thanks to Andrew and his photography team for their continuing support and enthusiasm of the race.

For those for whom the elusive 100% remained out of reach in 2007, and those who raced in earlier years who still dream of what might have been Race dates for the 2008 event are Sep 30th - Oct 4th. Entries open 1st January 2008.

See the website for a full race report with photos.

See you out there ...

Gaye (Flipper)