

LEMINGZ 2009

24 HOURS OF SCOOTER HELL

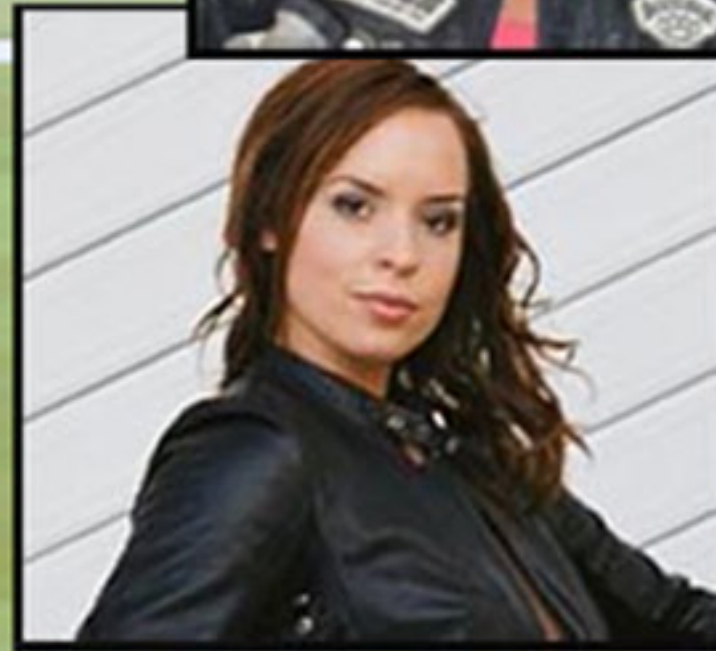


> Each year, the organisers of the Australian Motorcycle Expo host a gruelling 24 hour Scooterthon event.

An extreme test of endurance of both man and machine, each team of three riders lap non-stop for 24 hours, the winner being the iron men who make the most laps.

... So, to sort the men from the boys, Motoaus entered a team of three girls in the 2009 event ...

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It was obvious before we even started that a 24 hour scooter-thon was going to be harder than one might first think. I started getting really tired about 3 am. The relentless rain had taken its toll too.

And the start of the 2009 Le Minz scooter-thon was still 9 hours away. Water was starting to trickle under the shed door, and I still had to load the scooter in the van, so I could pack in all the other associated junk required to live at the show grounds for 30 odd hours. In the timeless tradition of serial procrastinators, the entry to the event was only decided a few days earlier, with the idea that a 3 girl team would be the best choice. Tim from Select Scootas had come to the party by supplying one of their awesome PGO PMX Naked 50cc beasts, all we had to do was...well as it turned out....lots.

Motoaus.com had been represented at last years Le Minz, an event held in conjunction with the Australian Motorcycle Expos, with Rebecca teaming up with two other ex 250 proddie racers, and managing 9th place outright. This year however, the idea of three girls seemed the best option, the premise being to see how many men could be humiliated. The problem of course was to find 2 other girls, hopefully with race experience. Using a scientific selection process, we asked a few people if they knew of anyone, and rang the first 2 suggestions.

First up to foolishly show interest was Beau, whom we knew from the Superbike Shootout drag racing events Motoaus supports. Beau's main focus is stunting these days, so we figured if she didn't mind falling from the top of the tank on her 600, she wouldn't mind falling off a scooter. Suzuki mechanic Lee suggested a friend of his, and after a quick phone call to Cath, it was discovered that not only did Beau and Cath know each other, all three of the girls were ex-Tasmanians. It was a sign too humorous to resist, and the team was complete. Cath's experience was in road riding and track days, but she came highly recommended by several people who'd spent some time following the tail light of her bike at Queensland Raceway.

All that was left now was to wait until the day before the event to prepare the scooter. Which was why I was still fumbling around at 3am Saturday morning fitting the wheels, now sporting new "Rushed Express Delivered" Michelin Pilot City tyres from Gas Imports. Other favours had been called in, with Jason at Supercheap Tyres fitting them at 5pm, and Craig at Gold Coast Suzuki lending me a spark plug, and some extra oil.

And my simple "I'll just check a few things" ended with the scooter resembling an exploded microfishe view of every component. At least I now know how a scooter works. Did you know the engine is part of the swingarm? By 4am I was done, the scooter was test ridden and then tied into the back of the Motoaus Race Transporter and heaped with multiple tarps, eskies and bags of riding gear and clothes.

In fact, almost everything we owned, except things we actually needed. A few short hours of sleep, a bit more panicking, and we were off to the Parklands circuit, an old go-kart track in the Gold Coast Showgrounds.

We joined a row of other wet and sheepish looking people sloshing around in the heavy rain, and got set up with some shelter, had the bike scrutineered - the Ohlins sticker on the standard shock fooled em for a minute too- and waited for the allocated hour of practice.

By this time Beau and Cath had seen the scooter for the first time, and their admission that neither of them had ridden one before didn't inspire any great confidence.

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Then Beau went out for her 15 minute share of the practice time and although she got a fairly fast pace happening, face-planted herself in the muddy grass when called in. This didn't help. Beau's note to self: Wet grass is slipperier than wet bitumen.

This was to be Beau's last indiscretion, but not so for the other two "stars". Cath was immediately impressive in her practice, noticeably smoother than the other two rabbits on the team, while still carrying good speed in the rain. Bec hardly needed any practice, after having completed 8 odd hours on this same scooter last year.

Start time approached, and still it rained. By now a steadily growing band of helpers had appeared, a strategy was planned, and Bec volunteered to start out first.

The "race," which we were now calling it, started in a LeMans style lineup, in bike number order. The Motoaus PMX Naked was number 7. After a bit of push and shove, several hectic laps later, things had settled down a little. It soon became apparent that a few of the scooters were much faster than the rest, and some were much slower than most. It was going to be a long 24 hours.

The girls started out with about 30 minute stints each, and at this early stage, they are still all keen to have their turn, despite the miserable weather. The rain eases though, and the pace picks up. Cath gets run off the track and crashes. Our "B" class PGO Naked is running in about 9th outright, with about half of those in front in the unlimited "C" class, which includes the 4 man "stunt" team on the modified Derbi GP1, who seem to be lapping at about twice the pace of everyone else.

The PMX Naked is running smoothly, it only requires fuel and an occasional check on the injector oil. All looking good.

Suddenly the race is red flagged, a large strew of scooters litter the exit of turn 2. Cath has been caught up in a crash not of her own doing again, and this time has hit another fallen rider.



It looks very nasty, the rider is lying unmoving on the track and has taken a hit to the face from our scooter through his open visor in the resulting melee.

Cath has hurt herself a little more, but feels she can carry on after a rest, but is understandably upset about the injured rider. Amazingly, the injured rider would return to the track after a visit to the hospital, sporting a large patch and a black eye. No need to tell him to harden up!

Next up it is Bec's turn to test the tarmac, again a crash caused by someone else, this time the postie bike running in the event dropped its saddle bag in front of her, causing her to hit it and crash. After remounting in a less than favourable mood, Bec managed another lap before this time decking the scooter herself in a red mist.

Again, no serious damage done, although Beau's shared rainsuit was now resembling a set of door ribbons. However the rain had gone, and now as night settled, only tiredness and fatigue would be the obstacles.

The darkness hours blurred into one another, the riding stints were increased to up to 90 minutes per rider, to try to allow some sleep time. I know this because someone told me, I myself had settled down for a comfortable snooze in the back of the van.

Night soon dawned to a beautiful morning, sunny and warm. With the end of the 24 hours in sight, the girls busied themselves in trying to put in some faster laps. All 3 managed their fastest laps more than 20 hours into the event. The PMX just kept going, fuel and oil was all it needed. As the final few hours of the event ran down towards the 12 o'clock lunchtime finish, tiredness was pushed aside as the finish to the madness loomed.

The ridiculously fast Derbi "race" scooter was so far in front they had apparently had time to go and get a replacement chain or something after it broke, no doubt stopping at Maccas on the way back for a bite, whilst still retaining the lead.

The electric scooter was still circulating, its near silent hum as it passed our pit in stark contrast to the world's most annoying sound of the seemingly bafflesome mini-moto that a team of loonies next to us had entered. Thankfully they crashed it so many times the poor thing faltered and went silent after a while.

And then it was over. 8th outright, 5th in the class. And about 50 guys behind them. All three girls jumped on the scooter together for a "victory" lap, whilst the winning Mingay/Bolger/Morrison/Stamnos team did power burnouts and gloated after finishing 69 laps in front of second place! Class B was won by a similar machine in stock form.

All up in 24 hours and 50 seconds, the official time sheet showed the girls did 1884 laps of the circuit. The really amazing statistic is that this PGO scooter had completed the full 24 hours at last years event. And another 24 hours the event before that, in 2007.



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Next time you are wondering if your PGO scooter will last, consider the fact that this poor little mule has had the throttle held wide open for over 72 hours, or about the equivalent of 280 odd Australian Superbike rounds.

The only thing needed doing at the track was fuel, oil and a tweak on the handlebars after it was flung on the track 5 times by the girls over the course of the event.

Most likely we will see if it can get 96 hours of track time up, by running it in next years event as well. Or perhaps condemn it to a life of track days. Or maybe someone can ride it to work and back. After all it does about 100mpg. Not bad for a little race bike.

Thanks to all concerned in this rather gruelling event. In no particular order:

Bec, Beau and Cath, Riders.

Tim Black, Select Scooters for the PGO PMX Naked.

Mal, Karen, Craig, Lee, Wazza , Gold Coast Suzuki.

Jason, A1 SuperCheap Tyres.

Mark and Jess, ETF Australia.

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