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SPEEDWAY ROARS INTO LIFE

A large crowd filled the Olympic Park speedway on Sunday night to partake in the first meeting for the season, which featured the World Sidecar champions, Mick Headland and Paul Waters, in an excellent list of "A" grade sidecar competitors.

The first ever World Champs were not beaten in their four heat rides, having some strong battles with Broken Hill pair, Rick Howse and Adam Commons and all of the local teams, including, Jason Bradshaw / Simon Cohrs, who had a great opening meeting, Byren Gates / Mick O'Loughlin and the very fast, Warren Monson / Deven Gates combination.

Newly elevated Andrew O'Rourke / Jason Mayes, were solid competitors all night, as were Clint Mayes / Jamie Knudsen, in the top grade. Both these teams are using new passengers this season and both swingers acquitted themselves very well, which is good for the future of the sidecar class.

As the track changed slightly towards the end of the meeting, it was an adjustment in set up which had the largest impact of the night's racing, when Howse and Commons came out in the Sidecar final, from the usually non preferred gate three position and blitzed the opposition, which included the previously unbeaten, Headland and Waters, from the inside gate, the hot Bradshaw / Cohrs team, from gate two, as well as Monson / Gates from the outside.

The Howse / Commons domination was total, with none of the other three teams able to match either the straight line speed, or particularly, the corner speed of the Broken Hill pair. Howse and Commons won the final with a fast finishing Headland / Waters closing hard, but not able to bridge the gap. The small adjustment showed how critical is the art of reading track conditions and Howse and Commons benefitted greatly from their expertise. Some of the other sidecar teams lamented not making a change, believing that the impact of such an adjustment might not have been so noticeable.

Solo action was full of talent, with visiting Yorkshireman, Josh Auty, giving a wonderful display of his many speedway talents. Auty looked to be the consummate professional, making some excellent starts and handling the tight corners of the Olympic Park circuit with ease, keeping fast corner speed, which is always important at Mildura. Auty had some good on track battles with local rider, Justin Sedgmen, who showed local fans that he has improved markedly during his first stint in England as a professional rider.

Sedgmen has a lovely style and it is a style which allows him to ride fast and he used his local track knowledge to keep the pressure on the visiting Englishman. Sedgmen only dropped one point to the Sheffield and Coventry rider, in what was a great opening performance and one which might see the Merbein youngster included as a direct seed into the 2010 Australian Solo Championship, to be held at Mildura on Sunday 3rd January 2010.

Sidecars continued to be a feature attraction with a good showing from the "B" Grade division, where spoils were shared between Broken Hill pair of Rick Stephens / Dean Hobbs, Mildura's, Dale Milner / Nick O'Brien and Ouyen brothers, Scott and Kane Munro. Chris Holmes and Neale Hancock kept the class interesting ,with some good performances being given by all contenders.

Two classes of sidecars gave patrons plenty to watch and allowed any carnage on machinery to be covered during the course of the meeting. Many of the riders in the field returned to the way of yesteryear when some of them rode in Adelaide on Friday night, Renmark on Saturday night and were trackside again at Olympic Park on Sunday night.

Mildura Club used the opening meeting for the season to acknowledge the first ever World Sidecar champions, Mick Headland and Paul Waters in the opening ceremony, which featured an Official Opening speech by Mayor of Mildura Rural City Council, Cr. Glenn Milne. Headland and Waters had earlier put their race machine on display in the Clubrooms and were joined by a steady stream of interested fans in having a close look at the race machine used at the 800 metre, La Réole track in France and the FIM World trophies from that meeting.

A strong field of Quad racers was also in attendance and patrons saw some very keenly contested handicap races. Local riders were at the head of the pack for much of the night although wins were shared amongst a couple of the visiting riders from Murray Bridge. Mildura patrons are warming to the excitement of Quad racing, as riders slide from side to side on their machines as they dip low into the corners, trying to carry as much corner speed as possible.

During the interval the Club also acknowledged newly crowned 2009 Australian Superbike Champion, Josh Waters, after his excellent win in the Australian Championship series contested over seven grueling rounds of racing. Waters, like Headland and Waters, was well received by the very knowledgeable Mildura crowd, who gave each of the champion's generous applause as they were paraded around the arena.

Josh Waters is the first "rookie" to win the Australian Superbike Championship and he joins some very well credentialed riders who have gone before him and have, following their win, gone on to many bigger and better accolades in the sport. At twenty two years of age he has a wonderful future ahead of him, wherever he chooses to ride.

Next meeting at Olympic Park will be the Qualifying meeting for the 2010 Australian Solo Championship. That qualifying meeting will be held at Mildura on Wednesday 30th December, when sixteen riders will contest a very cut throat event to select just six riders to go on and join the top ten seeded riders into the Championship series. A total of thirty four riders have nominated for the 2010 Championships, with only sixteen places available for positions in the field.

Action returns to Mildura early in the New Year, when round two of the Australian Championship series will be held at Olympic Park on Sunday 3rd January 2010.

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