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SIDECARS ROCK OLYMPIC PARK

A wonderful night of Sidecar racing brought Olympic Park's competition season to a brilliant close last night, when the Broken Hill team of Rick Howse and Adam Commons stormed to a superb win in the Coca-Cola Sidecar Spectacular final over some very tough opposition.

Top points scorers for the night were Mildura riders Warren Monson and Deven Gates, who rode with plenty of speed, taking the first selection in the final on countback from the eventual winners. Third on points were fellow locals, Byren Gates and Mick O'Loughlin, who capped off an excellent season with another solid performance, while just sneaking into the final was World Champion, Mick Headland, with youngest son, Jesse in the chair. A three way Countback decided positions five through to seven, indicating the strength of the meeting all night.

Howse and Commons were delighted to receive the Keith "Curley" Carmes Trophy for winning the 33rd Spectacular, which has finished off their best season ever in Sidecar speedway. The popular duo was full of praise for the slick conduct of the meeting and the excellent track which was presented to riders. They also paid tribute to all team members who have helped over many seasons of top competition, particularly, Phil Austen, who has spent many years of dedication and travel while on the spanners for his Silver City colleagues.

Following rider's favourable comments on track quality, Mildura officials suggested that they have never seen so many front wheels coming from the ground during races, which is an indicator of the amount of grip which was provided under each machine over the full width of the track. The Howse / Commons pair have had a stellar year, even though they could be disappointed that the country's major prize eluded them by just a whisker, but they will be all the better for their consistency; proving that a team from a remote area can be right up with the best in the world. They continue to prove that their second place in the World in 2008 was no fluke and this season's performances at a range of tracks around the country justifies the respect that all other Australian outfit riders have for the Howse / Commons combination.

A large crowd enjoyed all events and certainly justified the Mildura Club's decision to only postpone the Spectacular when it was rained off back in March. The Mildura Sidecar Spectacular is the longest running, non-title event in Australia and is an event which riders over the 33 years of conduct have said is, "one of those meetings that a rider must compete in" to complete the full journey in Sidecar speedway.

The Monson and Gates team started the night in electrifying form, taking a significant heat win over Gates and O'Loughlin, while Clint and Danny Mayes started with a good win in the opening event. Howse / Commons and the father and son, Headland combination, each took wins to complete the first round.

Clean, but incredibly fast racing was the order of the night and by the completion of the third round the Monson / Gates team were unbeaten, with Gates / O'Loughlin, the Headlands and Howse and Commons, all just one point behind on eight points each. By this time too, Jason Bradshaw and Simon Cohrs had taken a heat win, as had the Adelaide pair of Daniel Puddy and Matt Morgan, who were making constant adjustments in set-up as they came to terms with the vagaries of the Olympic Park circuit. Their changes and some friendly advice from some of the Mildura teams assisted the Adelaide pair in improving their racing situation during the night.

Consistent riding had also brought six points to the Munro brothers, Scott and Kyle, from Ouyen from their three second placings while Clint and Danny Mayes were next on five points.

During the interval, it was obvious that the Mildura crowd, who had been starved from speedway for just a few weeks, were hankering for some great action to complete the year and they were not to be disappointed; as the final two rounds and the final itself was some of the best speedway seen at Olympic Park for a long while. The evenness of the field was a contributing factor and by the conclusion of the twentieth heat, all riders had been beaten in one heat which made for a final which was awaited by all.

Teams were cheered onto the arena for every contest, so the crowd was really getting into the action, which encouraged the riders to always be having a red hot go at winning at all times.

It was obvious by the end of round four that Monson / Gates, Howse / Commons and Gates / O'Loughlin were all safe in the final. In that round the Headlands had pulled to the infield during their heat, so did not score any points, which then put the pressure on them to do the business in their last heat, which was against the unbeaten Monson and Gates team. Headland won the start, but Monson was looking for the unbeaten status in the meeting and fought Headland right to the finish flag. Headland, with this heat win, secured the last place into the final, which proved to be one of the best individual events for the year.

The start of the final saw bikes climbing all over each other from the start as there were many grooves on the line and beyond, as the bikes had ripped the track with massive horsepower from the start line. At least two passengers took a knock during the incident, with Mick O'Loughlin and Adam Commons both showing some effect of the encounter. The start line was re-prepared for action and after a short spell; all teams approached the line for a further try. The final was a blistering affair and the crowd noise over the engines was most evident as patrons cheered on their respective favourites as they swapped positions and some paint during the journey.

The Broken Hill pair of Howse and Commons, took a slight advantage into the second lap, but the remaining three teams had no desire to be at the rear of field, so the fight for the minor placings was furious, with chances being taken and lost while positions were swapped. Lap times only varied by point zero one of a second as the leaders, Howse and Commons charged ahead. The reception for their Spectacular win at the chequered flag could be heard from Broken Hill, even though many Broken Hill fans had made the journey to watch this prestigious event. The crowd loudly applauded all four teams for the entertainment that they had provided.

Classic sidecars were the support for the meeting, with a popular first ever meeting win going the way of Ash Needham, with first up passenger Blain Tucker taking over from Ash's wife, Kat, who had had to take a spell after a recent shoulder injury. Patrons also enjoyed the distinctive sound of the new Bryan Gathercole, Harley Davidson powered classic sidecar machine, ably ridden by Dale Milner and Nick O'Brien, which appeared along with the Mildura pair of Roly paver and Rex Byrne and the visiting Gavin Murtagh, Honda machine, ridden by Ian Treloar from Melbourne.

The large crowd willingly participated in a solemn and moving Anzac tribute prior to the commencement of the meeting.

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