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MITCHELL BLASTS THE SHOOTOUT

2009 Australian Sidecar champions, Mark Mitchell and Tom Golding, blasted their way through strong opposition to win the Dudley Bradshaw Trophy and take the prize in the 2011 Riordan's Paint & Panel Sidecar Shootout at Olympic Park on Saturday night.

The Birdwood, SA, based pair rode solidly all night qualifying highest in their group of seven teams, but just on countback from fellow SA riders Damien Niesche / Jack Spear and Mal German / Sean Colby, with locals Clint Mayes / Andrew Summerhayes taking the last chance into the semi-final.

In the other set of seven, Andrew O'Rourke / Jason Mayes topped the score from Jason Bradshaw / Steven Behsmann on countback from Byren Gates, with brother Deven on side and Mark Radford / Matt Putkins in the fourth qualifying place.

Some excellent riding was seen during the course of the heats, with NZ visitors, Andrew Buchanan / Phillipa Burns enjoying their first ever outing, riding in Australia. The Buchanan / Burns team were very tidy and soaked up the atmosphere and information gleaned from fellow riders, saying that they totally enjoyed their experience and rated Olympic Park as the best track that they had ever ridden.

Hard but clean racing was the order of the night as all teams gave no quarter and provided some wonderful entertainment to the good crowd in attendance.

As was expected the last three events were the features of the night, with the first semi-final making an impact right before the start when one of the night's fast men, Niesche, could hear an engine noise immediately when the machine was "bump" started. Niesche and his crew worked on the bike for the full two minutes allowed, but on restart the machine still had the bad noise. Niesche decided that the race was not worth blowing an engine so, withdrew from the start.

Mitchell made good from his inside gate start and lead the hard charging Mal German for just over half the race. Local tea, Mayes / Summerhayes, had been closely watching the German lines for the entire journey and when German drifted slightly wide on the corner due to high entry speed, the wily Mayes was able to duck underneath and take the second place, which would mean a place in the Riordan's Paint & Panel final for the night. The partisan crowd, roared their approval of every good move made by the locals and were generous in their applause for good track work shown by any of the teams.

The second of the semis was also not without drama, as right from the start it was obvious that there would be no quarter given, especially as there were our top three local tams fighting for just two spots in the main event. The tapes flew and O'Rourke, Bradshaw and Gates all moved together, with Bradshaw, between O'Rourke and Gates, just lifting slightly from the line. When his machine came down it clipped Gates' machine putting Bradshaw slightly off angle, which then took him to the infield and out of the race. Bradshaw maybe expected a race stoppage, but he was deemed to have contributed to his own demise. Gates made the best of the start and went on to take the event, although O'Rourke chased very hard as though it was the main final.

The next point of interest was the toss of coin and gate selection for the main final, where Gates selected correctly and took the inside gate position. Toss loser, Mitchell, then made the bold step of selecting the outside gate with his choice, leaving the two second placed semi-finalists to pick between gates two and three.

Gates flew from the start ahead of Mitchell who stayed wide on the track, while Mayes consolidated in third, with O'Rourke, who nearly lost passenger Mayes, then charging from behind. By half race distance, O'Rourke had picked up Mayes and set out to chase Mitchell, who was gathering a lot of momentum. Gates meanwhile was looking good, even though his regular, and very lightweight passenger was replaced by brother Deven and they continued on riding good lines.

Mitchell, however, who is a meticulous planner of events and circumstances, was positioning himself to jump whenever Gates allowed a small space in which Mitchell could fit. Mitchell and passenger, Tom Golding, have an uncanny understanding and communication of where to be and what to do and this final was no exception. Mitchell was able to just muscle in on Gates, when Gates was just half a bike width off the inside line. Mitchell carried excellent corner speed and put his nose right beside Gates and then the advantage went to Mitchell as they raced into the straight again.

Once Mitchell had established his lead Gates was not able to retaliate, nor were Mayes, who finished in third or O'Rourke at the rear. Mitchell enjoyed his well planned win and was congratulated infield by "Noddy" Riordan and delighted to win the beautifully presented, Dudley Bradshaw trophy from the family.

Solo support was great, with a wonderful debut to youngster, Sean Peterson, who picked up a good second place and then a win in his opening meeting. Best on the night was SA visitor, Rob Medson, who showed that his efforts to travel to many tracks and not be scared of any of them, was paying dividends already. Medson has benefitted from a couple of good outings as a reserve in the recent Australian Solo Titles. He is a good watcher and listener and is reaping the rewards of his learning and humility.

Classic Sidecars were also classic in the meeting with some wonderful challenges being thrown to stalwarts, Roly Paver / Rex Byrne, especially from Byrnes' son Tim, with Mick Powell and Brodie Gebhart / Adon Pearce, who both worked hard as they each rode the top division as well as the classic supports.

The night was not without some potential drama, as Corey Gates / Adon Pearce just clipped the fence with their sidecar wheel coming down the back straight and flipped and cartwheeled down the straight. A big fall, especially to Gates, saw immediate Ambulance attention given to both men, with Gates being the recipient of a lengthier first aid. Thankfully both rider and passenger got up and walked back to the pits unaided. The Gates machine was badly damaged in the many cartwheels before coming to a stop near the fence.

An interested spectator in the Olympic Park crowd last night was also, current and first ever World Sidecar Speedway Champion, Mick Headland and his new wife Karine. Mick's passenger, Paul Waters, is having his operation this week to remove the steel work from his leg, which was the result of their big crash last year at the home track of our current NZ visitors.

Mick is letting his sons, Trent and Jess, get back together for their tilt at the Australian championship in three weeks time and will wait himself until Paul is fine to ride. Headland senior has been seeded directly into the 2011 Australian Title as the current World Champion.

Action will continue at Olympic Park in just a week's time as the Club will conduct the North West Funerals - 2011 Sidecar Spectacular, which will be jam packed with Australian Champions and those who are contenders for this year's Australian Title which will be held at Gillman, Adelaide on the 25th and 26th March. The Sidecar Spectacular is the longest running, non title meeting in Australian Speedway and has drawn entries from the best riders ever in three wheeled speedway in Australia and overseas.

Glenn O'Brien, four times Australian Champion and still track record holder at Mildura is back, by popular demand as is former Champ, Gary Moon from Queensland. O'Brien has made a massive and very professional return to the sport, travelling from his WA base now with a very young and talented passenger and big "Slim" back on the spanners.. The advent of a possible World Title is obviously part of the reason for O'Brien's return, but Australian sidecar speedway is all the better for one of the hardest chargers ever in the game to make a comeback.

Joining this talented field will be a lad with strong Mildura roots in sixteen year old, Dylan Blain / Aaron Stewart. Blain is the grandson of former Mildura Mayor, John Blain and is already touted as the future of Australian Sidecar speedway. Blain has graduated from Juniors and straight onto the massive one litre machine. Returning too, will be NZ pair of Buchanan / Burns, who will be better for their ride last night. Mechanical problems lead to their early retirement, but they looked the best of any NZ visitors of the past.

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