WORDS & PHOTOS // **DYLAN RUDDY**

Tassie TURNS UP THE HEAT!

ANOTHER HARD ENDURO, THE INSANE RIDE, HITS ITS STRAPS IN TASSIE

Mark Gallagher flies off the prologue tyre wall

Emma Broadbent went seventh in Silver class

The view from above was impressive

Anthony Solar fried his Beta's clutch

Tasmania is an odd place. It's full of incredible scenery and adventure, while its inhabitants are are mad for extreme enduro. Sure, they sound like us and look like us, but there is something about them that makes them not like us.

Maybe it's the brutally cold weather, or the fact that the rest of the country often forgets them, but they certainly breed them tough down on the Apple Isle. Maybe that's why it is the perfect place for hard enduro events like the InsaneRide in Poatina, near Launceston.

The InsaneRide, run by the legends at Hard Enduro Adventures Tasmania (HEAT), is one of a growing number of extreme enduro events popping up around Australia in the wake of a boom in Europe that started when Andreas Werth and Karl Katoch organised the Erzberg Rodeo in 1994.

The major events now attract huge numbers of riders but not all of them are cut out for the challenge. In 2015, only five made it to the finish of Erzberg. To put that in perspective, 1500 started the prologue and 500 started the main race. Yeah, it's tough.

Australia was a little slow to cotton on. While there has been a dedicated group of 'extreme' Aussies travelling to Europe to compete, we've had a noticeable lack of events. Wildwood Rock has been the pinnacle for a number of years but, as the popularity of the sport grows, a number of other events have popped up around the country.

There is a misconception that Australia doesn't have the right terrain for extreme enduro but the InsaneRide is proof that we do. Tassie has plenty of it.

Interestingly, the InsaneRide has been going quietly since 2014 and was started by Josh (also known as Stats) as a 40th birthday celebration. A group of mates headed out on a two-day trailride and had so much fun they decided to turn it into an organised event.

In 2015, they ran an organised trailride. It was supposed to run for two days but everyone was too exhausted after the first one. In 2016, the event adopted the InsaneRide name and grew again. GPS was introduced in 2017 and, last year, the ride moved to private land and became a fully-fledged event.

For this year, the HEAT crew decided to step it up another notch. They introduced a purpose-built prologue track and ramped up the promotion. High-profile riders like Tim Coleman and Chris Perry, as well as local trials gun Chris Bayles, were to headline and the village of Poatina was happy to host volunteers, riders and spectators for the weekend.

Poatina is a small village about one hour's drive from Launceston. The benefit of running the event in Poatina is that it is a gateway to incredible terrain (all on private land) that is perfect for hard enduro.

Two-thirds of the field this year were "mainlanders" (or Australians, as Cyril from the golf club calls us) and the HEAT crew were determined to put together an event that would challenge even the most skilled of them.

Cam Bice came home eighth in Gold class

PROLOGUE

I arrived in Poatina on Saturday morning just before the prologue. The track was built by a bloke known as Mumbles and clearly he took inspiration from some of the classic extreme events in Europe like Romaniacs. The track was a closed circuit and featured man-made obstacles constructed from just about anything that was lying around.

By 10.30am, the first riders had made the 1km trek from the village to the prologue and were walking the track. The event was split into Bronze, Silver and Gold classes. Soon enough, the riders were sent out on a sighting lap, with the Bronze crew going first.

Some riders were already spent and they were only halfway through the sighting lap

I went for a walk around the track and noticed that some riders were already spent, and they were only halfway through the sighting lap. Many of the obstacles were proving to be very challenging. There was one bloke who tried tackling the 'see-saws' but he was so exhausted that he only got halfway up and tipped over sideways. He tried again but did the same thing. His solution was to just drag the bike over the metal beam blocking his path.

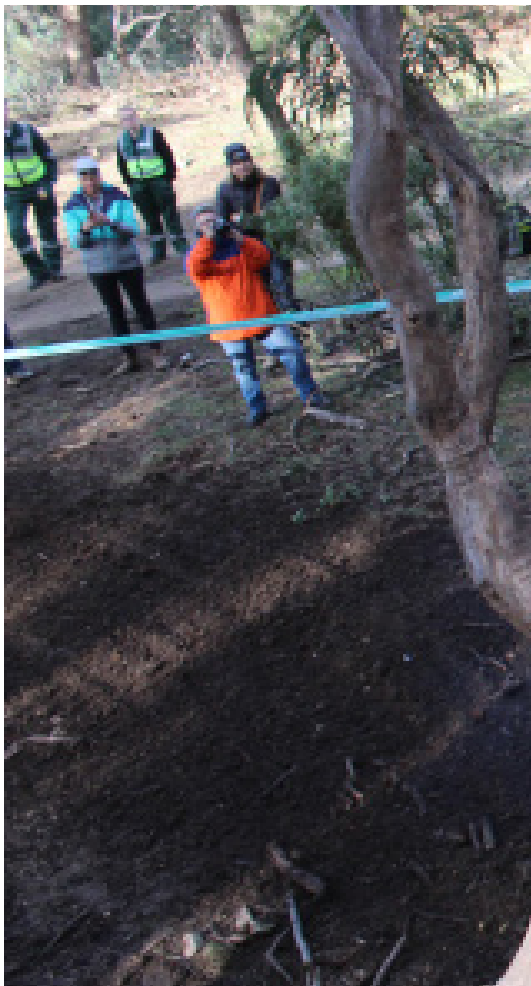
Things started to speed up once the Gold riders like Perry, Coleman and Bayles started to come through and it was impressive to watch their superb bike handling skills up close.

Macky Reitsema tiptoes through the concrete

After the sighting lap, the riders geared up for the timed lap, but several had already decided they'd had enough. Once again, the Bronze class went first. A steep wall of tyres proved to be an entertaining spot. One rider used a little too much gas and, as the rear wheel gained traction, the bike flipped backwards in spectacular fashion. Another rider over-estimated the speed he needed and launched off the top and into the bushes.

When all riders had done their lap, the 10 quickest were sent to a shootout. By this stage a crowd had begun to build and there was certainly a buzz in the air. The shootout featured all 10 riders tackling the track together, but

There goes another muffler end cap



Ina Halls didn't make it to the finish

Winner Chris Perry had three goes at this hill

These guys helped each other to finish Gold class

the quickest guys like Perry and Coleman were held back by a few seconds. Within less than a minute, the crowd got what they came for as the pack of riders all hit the rock garden together, creating chaos.

The lead chopped and changed over the first of four laps, but it was Anthony Solar from the Wildwood club who gained the early advantage on his Beta. One obstacle was a big concrete ramp with a kicker on the end of it that no one had been game enough to try it. Local Matthew Vos decided he'd give the crowd something to cheer about and launched off it. The crowd erupted.

After a couple of laps it appeared even Perry, the reigning champ, was struggling. He looked exhausted but he kept pushing. Meanwhile, Coleman was slowly picking his way through and managed to pass Solar on the last lap. It was an exciting finish as the two riders were just seconds apart as they approached the last obstacle, a concrete wall and maze of metal fences. Coleman proved to be too good and took the win with Solar and Perry joining him in the top three.

Following a presentation in which the top three were presented with new Karchers, everyone headed back into the village to begin preparing for the main race the following day.

The Poatina Chalet, which is where I was staying along with many of the organisers and volunteers, put on a roast dinner for everyone. It was here that I got an insight into the enormous amount of work that goes into this event. Organiser Josh was busy loading the GPS coordinates for the competitors, while many of the volunteers were ensuring everyone knew their role and where they would be stationed during the day.

It's a complex and agonising process to make sure an event like this runs smoothly, but the whole crew did a fantastic job. I was up at 6am the following morning and it was close to -5 degrees outside. The HEAT guys had organised for me to ride Mumble's Husky so I could get to the best locations for all the action. I was tagging along with Will, a member of the club and videographer for the day. I

didn't know it at the time but Will also designed the course.

About five minutes down the trail, I began to learn why these Tassie guys are so crazy. It was bloody freezing. All the tracks were frosted over and, being early in the morning, the poor light meant low visibility. Not long after we turned onto a fire trail. I was hurtling down it at a reasonable speed when a deer jumped out of the bush and straight into the side of my leg. He then bounced off and continued into the bush. Somehow I stayed upright and I soon realised that the bike, the deer and myself had all escaped damage. Close call.

Eventually we reached our first photo opportunity and began walking through the bush down a very steep hill. We reached the open area where all the action would be and quickly took our positions.

Soon enough we heard the first two-stroke engine. It was Perry. He took a quick look at the hill. It was steep, slippery with loose dirt and a few pesky kickers to make things difficult. Perry wound it on and launched up the hill only to flip the bike halfway up. Wowee! First bike through and we were already seeing carnage. Perry took his KTM back down and tried again with no luck.

By this stage, a few other riders had arrived. Perry nailed it on his third try, ringing the neck off the two-banger as he flew to the top. The next few riders struggled a lot, but Coleman glided effortlessly up in one go. Bayles had a few gnarly get-offs before making it up, while several other riders agreed to help each other to save time.

BIG BOULDERS

Next up was Slimy Creek. You don't have to use your imagination with that one. The riders rode the length of the creek that ended up in thick bushland with big boulders. Perry and Coleman had a bit of a buffer now. Solar was in third but there was a strange odour coming from his bike. Will and I headed to the Quarry, the main checkpoint and spectator location, which looked like it had been transported straight from Erzberg. It was here riders took a compulsory 20-minute break. The frontrunners were long gone and were on track to post very impressive times.

After the Quarry we left the crowds and headed to the back part of the course. We took a few short cuts by riding the actual race trails. At another checkpoint, Peter told us that Solar had fried his clutch and was out. That explained the smell.

We headed to a super steep and rocky hill which overlooked the grassy plains back towards Launceston. We went about halfway up the hill before it got super gnarly. We then walked over to the Gold line where a couple of riders were in all sorts of pain and trouble. "Why the f--- am I doing this?" yelled one rider in frustration. Another rider took a calmer approach, saying, "You've just got to ride little bit by little bit."

Gold class

1. Chris Perry, KTM, 3:24.51
2. Tim Coleman, Beta, 3:42.41
3. Chris Bayles, Gas Gas, 4:08.37
4. Neil Foster, 4:18.03
5. Matthew Vos, 4:18.13
6. Tom Woodhouse, 5:31.48
7. Craig Stevenson, 6:22.03
8. Cam Bice, 6:45.25
9. Sam Preece, 6:55.08
10. Keegan Howe, 6:55.35
11. Callum Millar, 7:18.04
12. Hugh Edmondson, 7:26.10

No other finishers in this category

Some riders were taking over half an hour to make it up this tricky section.

Heart Attack was the next location. It was another rocky, slippery creek that ended up in extremely thick and dark forest. It was a lot like Slimy Creek, but on steroids. A good number of spectators had made their way here and were helping the riders who were in all sorts of trouble as they attempted to tackle the massive slippery boulders.

The Gold line was like nothing I've ever seen. Three of the riders were slumped in the scrub, their bikes scattered down the creek. "How are you travelling?" Will asked one of the riders. "I'm cactus," he replied. Another rider had a go at us because we were filming and not helping.

These three were helping each other but they were nearly at breaking point. Just as it looked like they'd had enough, Solar emerged walking from the top of the section. He was out of the race, but had come back to help the struggling

Things were squeezy in this rock section

A good number of spectators had made their way here and were helping the riders who were in all sorts of trouble

Mitchell Lyne was still clean on the prologue

Fancy wrecking your bike in a demolition site

This probably won't end well

The see-saws provided hours of entertainment

Local Chris Bayles ignores the ambulance

Stay there, I'll be back shortly

riders. "How is this for service?" he said while riding one of the bikes to the top.

Will and I headed back to the Quarry. We received word that Perry had won with Coleman in second and Bayles third. The last spot we went to was a long, steep hill with plenty of loose dirt and a few switchbacks. One of the last riders to come through was on a 15-year-old Gas Gas.

At the start of the day, he had asked for a cup of water to top up his radiator. I thought at the time that he would struggle to get that bike to the finish, but here he was, just minutes away from doing it. He had a few goes at the hill, but remained calm the whole time. When we saw him at the finish he looked absolutely exhausted but simply said, "It was a good day. I feel like I should have gone harder." We asked him if it was hard. "It was hard enough," he responded.

Back at the village, the sun was beginning to set. Many of the 100 or so entrants had not finished but that didn't dampen anyone's spirits. As is always the case with dirtbike riding, no matter how tough a ride is, you always look back fondly and have plenty of stories to tell.

The Poatina Golf Club hosted the presentation and Cyril and his crew did a great job of cooking up burgers and snags for the exhausted competitors. The cold beverages and stories were flowing and the trophies were presented to the placegetters in each class.

Feedback suggested that it was a successful edition of the InsaneRide. Many were keen to return next year to have a crack but one older fella said "great event, but I think I'll just come back as a marshal next year".

No one said hard enduro was meant to be easy. And those Tasmanians certainly know how to make enduro hard. ADB

Got something to say about this yarn?
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