

# 660 at 60

Mad Bastards do it slowly, and just for the fame and glory!

Story and photos by Hobie Post

By 9:30pm the Petro-Canada parking lot in Kingston had become a lonely place. I hadn't seen a fellow rider for about half an hour and the 209th kick hadn't coaxed my ride alive. A boost from a sympathetic cabbie didn't help my tired battery and I couldn't face another run-and-bump start attempt. It looked like the rally was over for me just 86 km from the finish.

It had seemed like a good idea to head out here at the time – a 660 km rally on quiet secondary roads through Eastern Ontario to Ottawa, finishing with a nice long 60 km/h bumble along the upper St. Lawrence River. There was a catch though. This was a one-day point-to-point run, beginning and ending in Belleville, ON, and it was for scooters only.

The Mad Bastard Scooter Rally is the brainchild of Canadian Motorcycle Guide Online magazine publisher Rob Harris. When presented with a Ruckus scooter from Honda to test for the summer of 2004, an endurance challenge was devised over an evening of drinks to suitably run the machine through a wringer. When some fellow enthusiasts got wind of his plan, they begged to join his act of madness and the rally was born, and named.

The first edition – a ride around Lake Ontario (about 800 km) in less than 24 hours – had a mere five participants but by the following year the rally had 22 aspiring madmen competing for the grand prize of a Yamaha scooter. This year's event had a total of 55 entrants vying for a Kymco scooter to be awarded to the most mad of 2007.

In this rally, scooters are handicapped by engine displacement and accordingly allotted maximum rally finishing times. A 50cc scooter has a full 24 hours to complete the route while a 200cc ride must be home within 15 hours. Extra "Mad" points are given to the smaller scoots and older riders in an effort to balance the playing field.

Although you have to finish within the allotted time, accumulating "Mad" points is the key to winning. Up for grabs were points for Best Costume and Best-Decorated machine as well as a series of scavenger hunts for even more extra points. Furthermore, any photographically verifiable acts of madness can earn bonus points

at the discretion of the judges. Previous editions have awarded points for kissing waitresses and displays of nudity – not necessarily at the same time!

With the ringing endorsement of my supportive wife – "On that old thing? It'll never make it!" – I signed up.

"That old thing" was my surprisingly reliable 1989 Vespa 125EX. Although cosmetically challenged, this veteran of the Italian Postal Service hadn't missed a beat on my downtown commute in years. It was "surprisingly reliable" in that I performed no maintenance on the brave little buzz-bomb and it still gamely managed to start on the first kick.

For urban transport, scooters are the way to go. Light, peppy and semi-weather protective, you can squeeze through any city traffic jam and still keep your suit clean. Operating expenses are laughably low and they're heaps of fun to ride. In the city, that is.

In the weeks leading up to the rally, I began having second thoughts. I had never ridden more than an hour on my Vespa and never at night. As well, Lakeshore Boulevard in Toronto was about as serious a road as I had ever dared to trespass with my scooter. Could it handle country highways, I began to wonder?

The week before the Mad Bastard Rally, my battery burped and died requiring a stop on my way to Belleville for a new one at my local scooter shop. While I was there, I picked up some two-stroke injector oil. Good thing as my Vespa slurped up the full litre while a bystander pointed out that my spare tire was flat. Perhaps some pre-emptive maintenance might have been in order?

The Belleville Ramada Inn served as rally headquarters and the parking lot was swarming with scooters as I pulled in Friday



Apparently tech inspection didn't catch the auto-dim headlight installed on the author's ex-post office machine. Group riding saved the campaign.

afternoon. Eccentricity abounded! We had Vikings, an alien, Elvis (looking pretty good) and elsewhere a whole slew of Honda Cub owners discussing oversize piston kits.

After dinner Rally Master Harris went over the route and after enduring a bombardment of questions chased us off to sleep.

My 4am wake-up call came way too early, so I stumbled down to the lobby to fortify my resolve with coffee and complimentary Red Bull to psyche for my 5:20 start time.

I got the good-to-go signal and putted out of the parking lot to the long climb up the bridge over the Bay of Quinte. The sun was just rising as I cleared the top of the bridge and I thought 'This is going to be fun'. At that moment, my Vespa coughed once and died.

Kilometre four and I was on the side of the road desperately trying to start my previously reliable ride – this couldn't be happening! I had entered a state of true panic when the sweep truck appeared an hour later and the Vespa still wouldn't fire.

Taking pity on me, the driver offered to push start me before we pushed it into the back of the rescue truck and, miraculously, that did the trick. I was back in the rally!

The next hour was spent riding as fast as I could to catch up with anyone on two wheels and to keep the spectre of the big black sweep truck out of my rear view mirrors.

I finally caught up with the Kymco gang at the first of the mandatory gas stops. After pocketing the gas receipt (proof of

passage) issued by a bemused attendant, the rest of the ride to Ottawa proved to be a bit more relaxing as my 18-hour finish deadline appeared to be in the bag.

I started sending mental kudos to the Rally Master! The marvelous route was passing through lovely villages on traffic-free secondary roads although, incredibly, always into a headwind.

Ottawa's thoroughfares were certainly busier and although I did acquire some 'Mad' points, Stephen Harper was inexplicably unavailable to shake my hand, despite the 500 bonus points such a vote-getting act would reward.

I settled for complimentary pop and pizza at Derand Motorsports on Bank Street then headed south for Morrisburg and the run back to Belleville along the St. Lawrence River on Highway 2.

Now brimming with over-confidence, I pulled into the last of the mandatory gas stops in Kingston at around 7:30 with but a piddly 85 kilometres to go. Piece of cake!

But, one kick, two kick, three kick, more... oh-oh. The Vespa wouldn't start,

again. I rolled down to the parking lot and began flailing away at the kick start. The stubborn little thing refused to ignite.

After almost two hours of trying everything under the rapidly setting sun, I was just about to give up and tearfully phone for help when the buzz of two-stroke engines pre-announced the arrival of a pair of fellow Mad Bastards.

My oil-blackened hands and bloodshot eyes convinced them I was in need of some assistance. After a lot of poking, prodding, and testing, Andre Drodz and Brian McGibbon of Team Space Oddity suggested a bump start as a last-ditch attempt. Lightning struck twice as my Vespa reluctantly ring-a-dinged back to life!

But fearful of a stall, I cranked the idle to near full throttle while I pulled my helmet and jacket back on. Brian patiently waited. It was now past 9:30 and we all needed to be back before midnight to officially finish the rally.

Once outside of Kingston, I realized that my headlight was merely a nightlight illuminating a scant 2 or 3 meters of highway

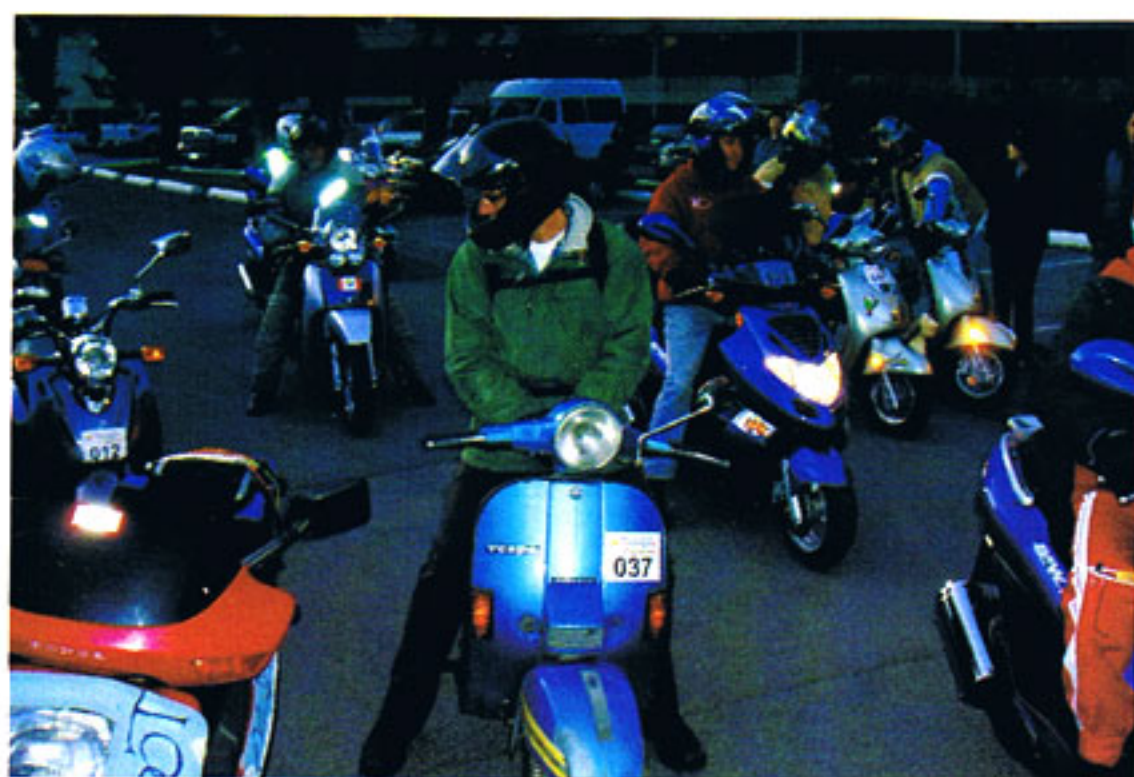
and not even producing enough wattage to reflect a traffic sign. I tucked in tight behind Brian and relied on his headlight beam for guidance. Fortunately, Highway 2 was reasonably straight and smooth but this tailgating was still a bit perilous even at scooter speeds.

We pulled into the Ramada at about 11:15 with 45 minutes to spare feeling more relieved than triumphant. There would be no 120km optional loop for us but popping cans of beer out of plastic loops was definitely compensatory.

After an entertaining awards ceremony and rounds of congrats to the maddest bastard in our midst, Doug Wright of Team Wheel Easy, the following day, I stuffed my battered Vespa into my van and headed west on the 401 back to Toronto.

Leaving the Ramada Inn parking lot, I vowed never to do it again. By the time I pulled into my garage in downtown Toronto, I had already decided on my costume for the 2009 edition.

And maybe even investing in a new sparkplug. **IM**



You run what you brung. But you don't have to be nuts to do the Mad Bastard. It just helps.