

No deserts or nomads, but watch out for the moose

The Ottawa Citizen

Friday, July 18, 2008

Page: D1 / FRONT

Section: Driving

Byline: Jean-François Bertrand

Source: Citizen Special

There's this internationally renowned two-week 10,000 kilometre rally, which used run from the French capital to the capital of Senegal. They called it the Paris-Dakar.

And there's this small one-day 790-kilometre rally, which starts in Paris, Ont., and ends in **Dacre**, 30 kilometres west of Renfrew. They call it the Paris-**Dacre**.

The logo for the Dakar is a stylized Tuareg, a nomadic man of the Sahara. The logo of the Paris-**Dacre** is a stylized moose, an ubiquitous quadruped of the Ottawa Valley. Both are appropriate to the terrain they cross.

And while the Dakar is open to cars, SUVs, heavy trucks, ATVs and motorcycles, the Paris-**Dacre** is exclusive to dual sport bikes, street-legal off-road motorcycles.

The Dakar is a race across deserts and canyons that sometimes proves deadly. The Paris-**Dacre** is a challenge, not a race, not a competition. But the goal is the same -- survival.

Of the 98 motorcycles which left Paris at 4 a.m. last Saturday, 33 arrived in **Dacre**, some rolling in as late as 11 p.m., after completing a grueling 790 kilometres of gravel roads, muddy dirt trails, rocky 'roads' under hydro lines and water crossings galore. Riders followed a route involving hundreds of GPS waypoints.

Of the 26 teams that entered, Team Orange Krush -- for the colour of their KTM Austrian bikes -- arrived first, just before 6 p.m. They had been riding for 12 hours and 34 minutes, averaging 63 km/h.

"I don't think I could have done another 20 kilometres," said exhausted John Baxter, the man who organized the first Paris-**Dacre** in 2005. He and his muddied Orange Krush teammates arrived with water sloshing around inside their boots.

Rally organizer Kevin Burnett, of Rally Connex, created a route that was 80 per cent off-road -- some asphalt roads linked trails on Crown land, roadway allowances, dirt roads and several highly technical sections under hydro lines. For safety's sake, there were three cut-off points, or "bails", where participants who checked in later than a specific time were forced to take highways to get to **Dacre**. Teams of sweepers ensured no one was left behind.

Thirty-three riders completed the route, 55 bailed. Most met with finishers in **Dacre**. A few couldn't.

Burnett reported one participant broke a foot, another an arm. A few were left with messed up collarbones. One rider, Ray Stickland was lucky to avoid injury after colliding with a deer 30 kilometres into the rally.

Team Kaboom -- five guys riding \$100,000 worth of big displacement KTMs -- lived up to its name. Within 30 minutes, three of them had crashed out. The leader, realizing he was on the wrong trail, made a U-turn just as his teammate was looking at his GPS. At 40 km/h. Ouch!

Steve Brooke, on the run for the second time on his Suzuki DRZ 400, turned 60 two days before the event. "Perhaps at 60, that's it. Perhaps this is my swan song," he said at lunch in Kinmount, 500 kilometres into the challenge.

Seven hours and 300 kilometres of technical trails later, Brooke was still in great spirits. "The most challenging section was a right of way under an hydro line. It was rocky, uphill and downhill. And just out of the last major water crossing, five metres from the end, I toppled."

Most agreed by far, the biggest challenge was the morning fog. "It was so thick, it was vertigo-inducing," said Michael Lobodzinski, from Toronto. "I couldn't tell up from down, side from side."

Lawrence Hacking, who has the honour of being the first Canadian to complete the real thing -- Paris-Dakar, in 2001 -- arrived almost spotless in **Dacre**. The same could not be said for his scraped and dented motorcycle.

Why undertake such an adventure? "I'm a glutton for punishment," replied Josh Agnesi, 33, a third-time participant from Pembroke. His teammate in Team Loose Nuts, rookie Terry Schaubel from Deep River, said at lunch that he was looking forward to the more challenging and technical sections ahead. "When it's gnarly, I want more of it. Then you can't think about the pain."

Stephen Miller, who returned for a third time, after being part of it in 2005 and 2006, was absolutely honest.

"It's the stupidity that brings me back," he said. "After two years you forget how horrible it was the previous time."

Illustration:

- Colour Photo: The Paris-**Dacre** rally is not be a race, but it is certainly a major survival test over almost 800 kilometres of tough Ontario terrain.
- Colour Photo: The Paris-Dakar rally has always been considered the ultimate motoring survival test.
- Colour Photo: Rob Harris, Citizen Special / Numerous water hazards made for a tough test for rider and bike as the Paris-**Dacre** rally wound its way from central Ontario to the Ottawa Valley.
- Colour Photo: Willie Urbanik, Citizen Special / John Baxter, the man who organized the first Paris-**Dacre** in 2005, 'couldn't have done another 20 kilometres.'

Idnumber: 200807180085

Edition: Final

Story Type: News

Length: 722 words

Illustration Type: Colour Photo