

Save Mt. Seaview – save our sport!

At the NSW State Enduro rider's briefing last Sunday at Mt. Seaview, I had a talk with riders and their families about the future Mt. Seaview and our sport in general.

As you may know, there was some local opposition to the event being held at Mt. Seaview and the local Hastings Council and MNSW received legal documents to ban the event. At the eleventh hour, a compromise was reached between the local activist and MNSW and the promoters, and the event was saved.

What an event it was! Mt Seaview is arguably one of the best off road venues in Australia, offering sweeping hills, open grass paddocks and natural bush. Located just under 5 hours from Sydney, the property has a wonderful set up with camping facilities, amenities block and communal kitchen. Our NSW Enduro State Round was attended by junior and senior riders, their families and friends, and I am sure that everyone who was there will agree that it's heaven of earth for our sport.

So how can we work together to try to save this great venue for our future events?

As an Enduro fraternity, we need to say thanks more often to the wider community that is hosting our events. We also need to promote our sport and educate these communities so that they want us there, not just tolerate us there. We need to help them understand what we all take for granted – that is, we are a family sport, who loves the bush!

When you break it down, we are all under the microscope and we all take it for granted. But to a layperson, this is how we work...

What is Enduro and off road motorcycling? Enduro is similar to a car rally, but competitors ride motorbikes throughout the trails and grasstracks. NSW Enduro Sport is conducted under a permit from Motorcycling Australia (M.A.) and is governed by strict rules and regulations including environmental awareness and noise restrictions for the motor bikes. We aim to have minimal impact on the forests and farms we use, while at the same time promoting the sport of Enduro and all it has to offer.

Organizers must obtain Council permission, Police permission and advise local hospitals and community. We must have traffic management plans, emergency evacuation plans, and medical plans etc. to satisfy the whole criteria as set out by Motorcycling Australia, just to obtain a permit to run an event. With this permit comes 20 million dollars of insurance to cover our event for public liability, so that all the above authorities' are happy that we are safe.

All competitors and support crews are governed by a strict set of M.A. Rules and Regulations; riders have to hold licenses issued by Motorcycling Australia. To obtain a license, riders have to sit a theory test; ride a practical test and junior riders have to specialized coaching clinics to ensure safety and skill. Riders have specific clothing and safety equipment they must wear to compete, not just helmets and boots, but regulation riding apparel and neck protection for juniors.

All machines used in Enduro are heavily scrutinized before each event. Rules relating to noise pollution, use of environmental mats and fire extinguishers and correct disposal of fluids etc. are heavily enforced. There can be no error where the environment is at risk.

All properties we use and subsequent courses we make have environmental impact as their primary concern. You don't just put in a track and hope it holds up to the event, it's carefully planned so that you have the least amount of impact, the access is possible for medical personnel and support crews, and most importantly, promoters have a way to rehabilitate the site. Often kangaroo and cattle tracks are the guidelines for bush sections, nature shows the organizers where the safest and easiest route is between two points. On grass tracks like the one we had a Mt. Seaview, access would be easy to run a machine around, smooth out the ruts and berms and re-seed the paddock – in just a few weeks the course would be on it's way to full recovery.

We all camp on-site, bring our own equipment and water, take our rubbish home and leave just a bare footprint. We are only too happy to support local communities who support us, we all have to eat, sleep, buy fuel etc. Our sport willingly pours thousands of dollars into a hosting community on any given weekend.

So when you break it down, we are a highly organized and regulated family sport, so why doesn't everyone welcome us with open arms?

Well.....

Firstly, it's the fear of the unknown. I have found that when I say anything to do with motorbikes, the layperson seems to think of the Hells Angels or Rebels. Many a folk has looked at me in horror when I said I took my kids to the bikes on the weekend!

We need to be positive ambassadors for our sport; you need to explain it in simple terms as a family, off-road experience. Tell people about the great camaraderie among the riders and their families, the fantastic places we visit, how much fun you and your kids have on any given weekend. Highlight the health and well-being of the outdoors lifestyle and the opportunities for personal development that exist in off road motor sport. Try to refrain from the word "racing", as it conjures up speed and danger in an onlookers mind, use rally, Enduro, cross country or sprint – it's more interesting when you explain our sport like this. We need to break the stereo-type of yobbo's on loud, smokey, unregistered bikes, terrorizing campgrounds across Australia every weekend. This is not what we do, nor do we condone this behaviour!

Secondly, acknowledge that the environment is a big part of what we do. **DO NOT BAD MOUTH ANYONE** who wishes to protect our earth, regardless of your personal views. Bad vibes and bad attitude is how some of the conflict has started elsewhere in the first place. We need to work with these people to form compromise and understanding; after all, they are willing to stand up and fight for what they believe in. They have a huge voice in their community because they use it loud and often, mostly we sit on the fence and whine when it's too late and gates are locked.

We need to be pro-active about the environment. Again stress about our regulations on bike noise, enviro-mats, waste oil and rubbish removal. Let them know that we rehabilitate properties, plough and re-seed them and plan courses to do the have the least amount of environmental impact. We use existing tracks, made by animals, so we can preserve and protect natural habitats. Creeks and watercourses are avoided where possible; in some events where a crossing is imperative, bridges and causeways are built to protect this valuable natural area. We take this all for granted, but no more, we need to talk the talk and protect the bush before it's lost forever.

Third, we need to educate communities wherever we go. Where possible, shop and fuel up in the local area. Let them know you are here for the NSW Enduro held at Mt. Seaview, for example, tell them a little about the event.

When booking accommodation away from the track, again let the host know why you are coming to the area. On average, a family spends around \$400.00 in a community on an Enduro weekend, especially if you fuel up at the local and support the canteen onsite at the event. That does not include if, like us, you stayed 2 nights in a motel last weekend – another \$480.00 plus dinner and drinks. More money into the local economy!

Essentially, we are expanding tourism into many of these smaller rural areas – look at how much was pumped into sleepy Portland and Lithgow during last year's Four Day Enduro! Millions of tourist dollars went into this district and many riding enthusiasts have returned since the event – thus an ongoing tourist commitment is being made. Just ask Dungog how important our Enduro is on their community calendar – the whole town is booked out.

Port Macquarie may not directly feel this tourism influx from our event just yet, but I bet that Jasper's Resort next door to Mt. Seaview, the hotel at Long Flat and the service stations in Wauchope on the Oxley Highway all had a healthy boost last weekend from all of us! We need to take credit where credit is due and let local Council's know how we can positively impact their economies!

Now what??

OK, so I have been preaching to the converted, but now it's your turn! Like I said earlier, we take all this for granted and sit on the fence, but when you break it down, the positives far outweigh the negatives! We just need to get our voice out there too.

Please write to Hastings Council – sooner rather than later. All their contact information can be found on the following link:

<http://www.hastings.nsw.gov.au/www/html/76-contact-us.asp>

Correspondence should be addressed to Mr Neil Porter, who was appointed Administrator of Port Macquarie-Hastings Council in April 2011. (They don't have a Mayor as such.) Thank the Council for allowing us to use Mt. Seaview last weekend; tell them what a great time you had at this wonderful property. Make sure you inform them of your demographic i.e. the family attended the event, my wife and I scenario etc., where you live, how far you travelled just to be there. Give a rough estimate of the money you put into their community and how you hope to return in September for the State and National Rounds of the Australian Off Road Championships.

Remember to give the benefits of “providing our young people with a range of leisure activities and opportunities of personal development” all while recognizing the valuable resource of our environment. Let them know that your family was “actively participating in an inclusive community activity” or words to this effect. These two quotes are from the Hastings Council Strategic Plan 2030 - a copy can be found on the following link:

http://www.hastings.nsw.gov.au/resources/documents/Towards_2030_CSP_FINAL_June_2011.pdf

Read through this and familiarize yourself with the Hastings Council, check out their website and see where their priorities are. Encourage open discussion and make sure you let them know what our environmental policies are, how important the bush and it's regeneration are to our sport.

This has been a long winded rant from a mum who has dealt with the general public and Councils on your behalf over the last few years. It's all relevant and please, make a start to stand up with me to educate the masses of the benefit of Enduro sport.

Together, we have a voice of reason, now is the time to use it.

Thanks, and hopefully see you at Mt Seaview in September.

Have fun and stay safe!
Yours in Sport,

Lyn Braico

