

TRANS-TASMAN DRAG BIKE CHALLENGE

Report by Steve Parish and Jay Jukes, Photos by Chris Vambucca

The second and final round of the 2006 Trans Tasman Drag Bike Challenge was the underlying feature in a huge night of bike racing at Darwin's Hidden Valley on 19th August.

Seven Top Fuel motorcycles headlined the event in what was the biggest bike meeting seen in the Top End since the legendary meets of the late 80's early 90's.

Track records were reset round after round and personal best ET's and MPH were recorded by many of the riders in what is the ultimate compliment to the excellent track preparation by host King Cobra Rod & Custom Club. Racers traveled from Perth, Sydney, Tasmania, New Zealand, Brisbane and Alice Springs to support the event and all were impressed with the facilities and the amount of traction on the flat Darwin surface.

A large crowd filled the grassy hill and corporate spectator stands and they were treated to close, fast, thrilling, uninterrupted racing throughout the night and truly appreciated the opportunity to see some of the fastest bikes in Australia and New Zealand in action. The five motorbike brackets being Modified Bike, Street Harley, Street Jappa's, Nostalgia bikes and Top Fuel Motorcycle were well supported by Darwin's local band of Supercharged Outlaws and full fields of Top Competition, Super Street and Street along with a huge burnout display by Brett 'The Boss' Stevens in his supercharged BA Falcon ute.

Combined with recent successful meetings and great weather, this event highlighted Darwin as the place to race

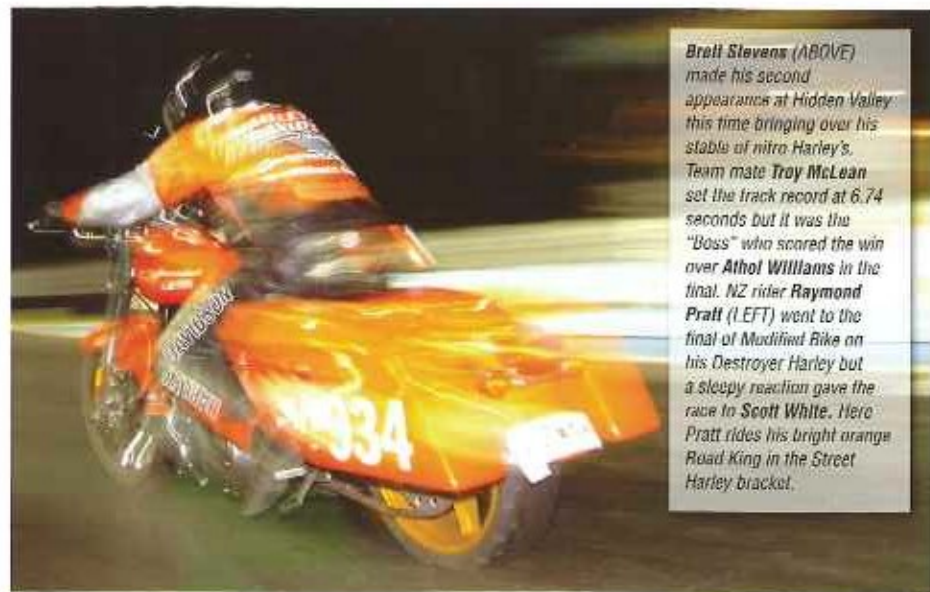
and one of the 'must visit' regional tracks in Australia.

TOP FUEL MOTORCYCLE

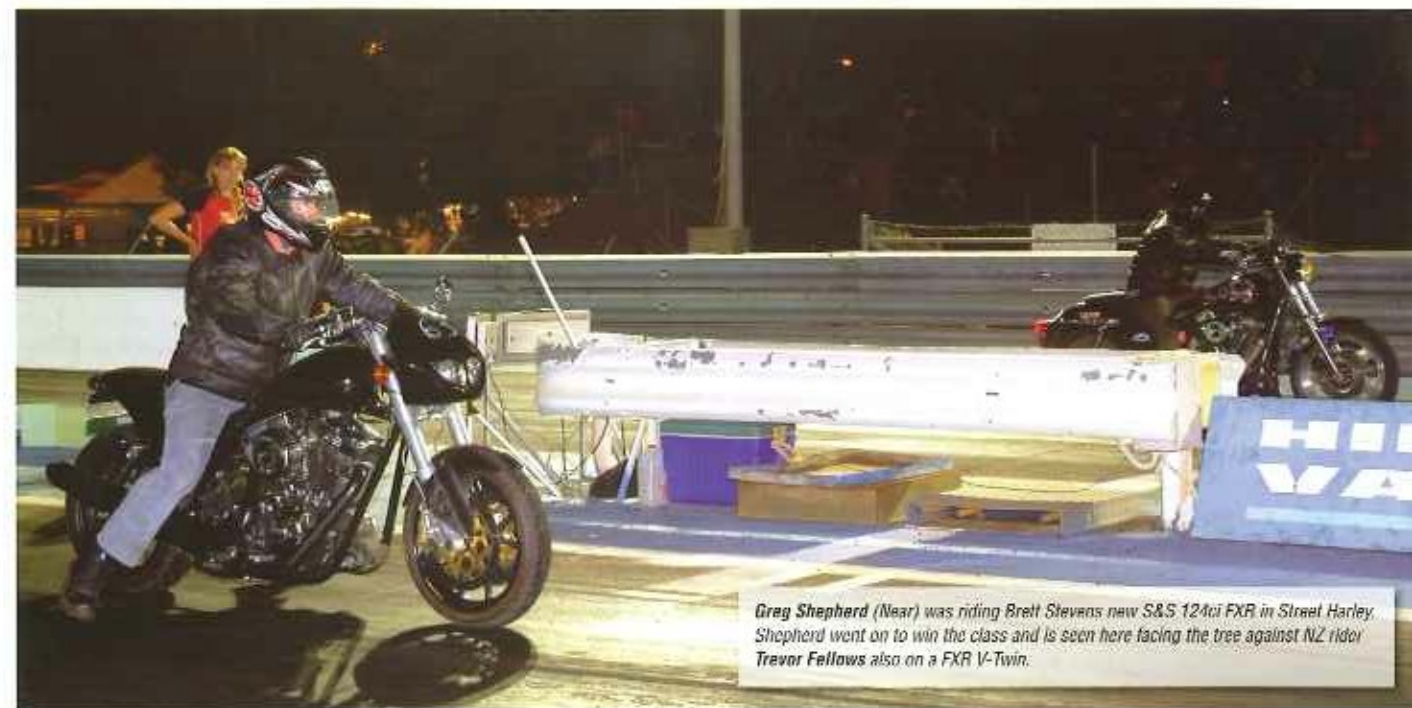
Fast and furious action is the only way to describe the Top Fuel Bike Bracket. The previous motorcycle track record of 7.70 seconds set by Jay Upton in 1991 was smashed in qualifying by the flying kiwi Athol Williams who laid down a 6.966 at 183 mph in his first ever pass on the track. Stunned onlookers set about adjusting their time ups in an attempt to match the New Zealander with Brett Stevens getting closest with 7.41. Troy McLean did run a 7.38 which was disallowed as he hit timing blocks, while Perth's Mark Ashelford was also on a number but crossed over into the other lane.

Local 'NOS Boss' Brad Perry's nitrous Kawasaki certainly looked the part but the fire went out in the burnout box while Perth based Ian 'Single' Ashelford also had trouble with broken cam gears on his impressive new twin magneto Harley. Craig Bonwick made the trip up from Sydney to pilot Mick Murray's recently acquired ex-Attitude nitro Harley and qualified in third spot with an 8.01. Mick Murray did ride the nitro machine the following morning when he put down two good licencing passes to get an addictive taste of what is to come.

Racing commenced at 7.00pm with Athol Williams up first after earning a round one solo and once again impressed the large crowd and the other racers with another record setting 6.876 at 193.97



Brad Stevens (ABOVE) made his second appearance at Hidden Valley this time bringing over his stable of nitro Harleys. Team mate Troy McLean set the track record at 6.74 seconds but it was the "Boss" who scored the win over Athol Williams in the final. NZ rider Raymond Pratt (LEFT) went to the final of Modified Bike on his Destroyer Harley but a sleepy reaction gave the race to Scott White. Here Pratt rides his bright orange Road King in the Street Harley bracket.



Greg Shepherd (Near) was riding Brett Stevens new S&S 124ci FXR in Street Harley. Shepherd went on to win the class and is seen here facing the tree against NZ rider Trevor Fellows also on a FXR V-Twin.

mph. Troy McLean on the Jack Daniels Harley was lined up next against Mark Ashelford on his Attitude Racing Harley, noise, smoke and nitro fumes filling the air after big burnouts. Troy got away first and was never headed, crossing the line with a 7.319 to Ash's 8.495 at 169.17 mph. Craig 'Charlie' Bonwick on the now blue Mick Murray Harley lined up next against Single on the other Attitude bike, Charlie taking an easy win with an 8.520 at 160 mph after troubles with the Perth based Harley. Brett Stevens ran a cylinder dropping 7.771 at 161 mph to defeat Brad Perry whose Kawasaki failed to make it past the burnout box.

Round two of Top Fuel and more records were set. An incredible side by side 6.8 second pass by the Jack Daniels Harleys was a real treat for the Top Enders. Brett's 6.875 overcome Troy's 6.871 as Troy clipped a timing block at the 1000 foot mark, but the track record had been reset again.

Athol Williams then paired up with Craig Bonwick and notched up another win for the Kiwi's popping the parachute early with a squiggle 8.31 to the Harley's early shut off 15.06. The air was good and the traction even better as Troy McLean and Mark Ashelford entered the burnout pad for the consolation final.

After suitably warming the tyres, Troy raised the bar again with a 6.744 at 195 mph to

rest the track record again and dispose of the Attitude racer's 7.644 at 154.1 mph. It was an excellent run by Troy and now stands as the quickest and fastest pass ever by a motorcycle on the Hidden Valley surface.

The main final between Athol Williams and Brett Stevens promised so much with Suzuki vs Harley and New Zealand vs Australia, but a fuel line leak forced Athol to shut down the supercharged Jappa and allow Brett to run a 7.44 solo.

Seeing these vehicles race and run the numbers that they did was a real boost for bike racing in Darwin and was certainly appreciated by the local crowd, the riders seemed to be having a pretty good time of it too.

MODIFIED BIKE

Modified bike action was fierce as 12 riders fought it out for top qualifying honours. In the end it was Kiwi Ian Hilder with an 8.494 on his Rice Rocket Suzuki narrowly ahead of the Turbo Suzuki of Phil Petersen's 8.51 who traveled up from Perth for the event. Greg 'Dude' Taylor secured third spot with a 8.700 on his 1327 Suzuki closely followed by Steve Paris's 8.704 and Scott White's 8.79 all done with Suzuki power.

The highest placed Kawasaki belonged to 'The Flying Dr Flick' aka Wayne Bird with a 9.31 who made the long tow up from Tasmania to be

involved in the Challenge. Baldy Sainsbury was ecstatic about his PB 9.434 at 145 mph to put him in seventh spot while Margie Paris was consistent as ever with a 9.49. A welcome return by Mick Murray on his PCB Harley had him next with a 9.65 in what may have been his last meeting on this Harley. New

Zealander Ray Pratt aboard his V-Rod Destroyer Harley qualified in 10th position with a 9.786 ahead of Ian 'Benny' Bennet's 10.0 on his ZX1R200, the only no wheelie bar bike in the field.

Dave Lewsley was riding the ex 'Mad' Ron Laycock's supercharged single cam 830 Honda but teething problems

WHAT IS THE TRANS TASMAN DRAGBIKE CHALLENGE?

Initially run in New Zealand in 1993 and resurrected in 2005, the first challenge to be held on Australian soil was conducted over two meetings being the Mackay All Bike on 12 August and Darwin's Hidden Valley on 19 August.

Five of the seven Northern Territory riders who went to NZ last year (being Mick Murray, Greg Taylor, Geoff Hall, Margie and Steve Paris) and Bob Castle towed to Mackay to race in round one. Kiwi riders who made the journey across the ditch are Athol Williams (Supercharged Suzuki Top Bike) Ian Hilder (Suzuki Modified Bike) Ray Pratt (V-Rod Destroyer and a 1214ci Road King) Trevor Fellow (96ci FXR) and Dave Anderson (96ci FXD).

Due to the variety of machines involved, all the Kiwi bikes ran in their respective brackets and raced against an Aussie each time they fronted the tree. One point was awarded for each win to either Australia or New Zealand each time a Kiwi raced.

After Mackay the score was 9 to 6 in favour of Australia, but things really heated up in Darwin when the Kiwi's raced to a 15 to 14 lead with one round of Harley's to go and then the finals. I am pleased to report that Col Smith, Brett Stevens and Rob Toms won their last round races in Harley Street, and Scott White won the Modified bike final over Ray Pratt and Brett Stevens beat Athol Williams who broke in the Top Bike final.

The final tally was a win to Australia 19 to 15, the third win in a row from the three events held.

We would like to thank everyone who was involved in assisting and promoting drag bike racing between the two countries, especially the Top Fuel Bike riders and the interstate travelers who helped make the Darwin meeting such a success. A huge effort was put in by 'The Outback Seven' (who did NZ last year) and the committee of King Cobra Rod and Custom Club to stage this event and attract a quality field of bike racers to the Territory and their efforts were rewarded by the happy sentiments of racers and spectators after the meeting. Last but not certainly least thanks to all the Kiwi's for traveling to our shores to party and race in Australia and further develop the friendship that is drag racing - see you in New Zealand next year.