





WALCHA TURNS IT ON

The Walcha Motorcycle Rally has quickly turned into one of the best events in the country..

BY NIGEL PATERSON. PHOTOS PATERSON & KIRRILY VINE



The trials show is a hit!



"...ROADS AUSTRALIAN ROAD RIDER OFTEN USES TO TEST MOTORCYCLES..."



Classics on show at the Walcha Royal Café.



Mental Health Checks were available on-site, for free, by fellow motorcyclists.



Bikes begin to gather on the showgrounds for the grand parade through town.



There are permanent signs leading into the small town of Walcha letting everyone know its Motorcycle Rally happens on the third weekend of November each year.

It's rare to see any signs related to motorcycling in Australian country towns, and one which encourages a visit would be rarer still, but Walcha is a motorcycle town. On the Saturday of the rally a few months back, hundreds of bikes participated in the parade through town, looping around from the local showgrounds where participants can camp and lots of the activities of the event are held.

I particularly liked the Postie Bike Derby, with young and old belting around the beautiful New England grass which more commonly sees prize farm stock paraded around for the local country show or some showjumping maybe. There's a classic photo in the hall of a young lady jumping with her horse and setting a record of over six foot... while side-saddle.

But this weekend was about horsepower rather than horses, with hundreds of riders turning up for the festivities, the riding and entertainment.

THE LOCATION

Walcha is located on the south-east edge of the Northern Tablelands. From the coast



Adventure rides are a big part of the program.

you travel up over 1000m to get there, and that means hills, and that means winding roads – Mount Barrington lies to the south, Round Mountain to the north-east. More importantly, the Oxley Highway lies to the east and Thunderbolts Way will take you south, so when the rally organisers say Walcha, the town that sits at the junction

of two of Australia's best riding roads, they aren't exaggerating. These are roads *Australian Road Rider* often uses to test motorcycles for your reading pleasure.

But it's not just about the roads, it's also about the adventure. The countryside joining Walcha to Gloucester (south) and Wauchope (east) is both varied and spectacular, with

The lady riders gather together for a photo...

"...GUIDED ROAD AND ADVENTURE RIDES LED BY LOCALS..."



We're guessing a Harley-loving couple...



The sidecars were .ut in force!

Rat ute and caravan.



Evening entertainment was included each evening.



The bargain sidecar, made from available junk...





The Grand Parade.

thousands of kilometres of dirt roads and trails running up and down the Great Dividing Range.

Walcha was established as a stop along the way to transport wool from the larger towns of the New England region, as a base for red cedar timber cutters and farming. There's no cedar left to cut and the trucks don't go through Walcha anymore, so the locals have quietly added tourism to the agenda and motorcyclists make up a large part of that, because Queenslanders come through on their way south and it's the most northerly point on a solid loop from Sydney... and really popular with riders from the larger cities of NSW including Newcastle, Coffs Harbour, Tamworth and Dubbo.

The locals love visiting bike riders, be they the race replica set, dressed in black with open-face helmets or arriving covered in mud. There's plenty of pubs, food outlets and the famous Walcha Royal Cafe to stay and dine at.

THE RALLY

The Walcha Motorcycle Rally features a mix of activities for riders to join in with and others where you're a spectator. There's guided road and adventure rides led by locals who know the way, there's the parade I've already mentioned, there are slow races and events you can join in with on the grass of the showground.

Then there's the more serious stuff, like the dirt bike barrel races, the Postie Bike events and Saturday night's demolition derby, and who doesn't like seeing cars getting trashed?

There are trade stalls, lots of food trucks and the local volunteer/charities offering up sausages, there's a bar at the showgrounds and live music too (and a free shuttle bus service if you'd like a drink or three). The undercover show & shine featured many beautiful bikes and great restos. The wheelie machine was there, trials and enduroX demos



and some country flavour with wood chopping and BackTrack dog jumping.

For those arriving on the Thursday, the event started with the bar opening and a band followed by two full days of activities and events... breakfast was available on the Sunday morning and then you've got the rest of the day to ride home.

Born out of a failed attempt at running a commercial motorcycle event in town, the locals are now running the show and doing an awesome job. With the support and some of the resources of the local council behind them, a handful of local residents – all of them with close ties to motorcycling – are putting in the effort to make the Walcha Motorcycle Rally a major event for the town, bringing in hundreds of riders not just for the event, but spreading the word and encouraging return visits.

It's worked, too: the accommodation in town was full, despite camping being available at the showgrounds, which was popular with rallygoers, and the pubs and restaurants we visited were all doing some solid trading without the chaos that comes at places like Phillip Island during the MotoGP.

So make an entry into your diary – the third weekend in November, Walcha. Book a bed early if you don't want to camp, because I suspect lots of people will be back and they'll bring their friends. It's a fantastic event, a credit to the organisers and the town, and having a great ride there and back makes it even nicer. **ARR**



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