

Gulf Monsoon Scooter Rally Post-event

Avtar Singh displayed awesome riding skills under extremely tough conditions to emerge triumphant in the 22nd Monsoon Scooter Rally, sponsored by Gulf Oil for the 11th straight year, and organized by Sportscraft,, in Mumbai on Sunday.

In a field of 31 riders, Avtar, astride a Honda Activa, negotiated the dirt tracts of Navi Mumbai efficiently to upset fancied riders like former champions Manjeet Singh Bassan, Rustom Patel and Shamim Khan and win the gruelling 75 km race with 48.56 seconds in penalties.

Bassan, astride his trusted LML Vespa that has seen him win many titles in the Monsoon Scooter Rally, was second in 50.20 seconds, while Kunal Rao had to settle for third place in 54.48 seconds.

The popular monsoon rally had an unusual flag off from Our Lady's Home (St. Paul School) in Parel, at 8.30 am, after the participants, who sported black armbands, observed two minutes' silence as a mark of respect for the victims of the recent 13/7 bomb blasts in Mumbai.

For the first time, perhaps, the riders took the start with a black flag, which is normally used to penalize riders for breach of rules or riding protocol. This time though it was used to denounce terrorism.

From Parel, the riders travelled on the transport sector to Belapur for battle on its backwoods, which was the competitive sector.

It was here where one witnessed the challenge of both man and machine. Riding on the gravel-laden, slushy course was dicey. The riders had to exercise extreme caution while negotiating the steep inclines and hairpin bends. Practically all took a tumble or two and some even damaged their scooters.

Rain during the rally and over the last week left many stretches water-logged, making the challenge even more difficult. Many riders lost their balance while negotiating the knee-deep water. But it must be said that they went through the exercise bravely, using their basic instincts to come out successfully.

How good Avtar was can be made out from the 1 minute 24 seconds that separated him and second placed Bassan in the final time calculations.

Sunday's rally saw the return of oft-crowned champion Zubin Patel, who quit rallying after a near-fatal accident in the Raid de Himalayas in 2000. He finished a creditable seventh, even ahead of his brother Rustom, who finished a poor ninth.

Babuddin Ansari, astride a Kinetic Honda, was adjudged the best first timer and awarded the late Firdosh Vajifdar trophy for his spirited riding.

The rally was we-appreciated by the participants, who thanked Gulf Oil for their continued promotion of motorsport. Said a disappointed Bassan, "This was a real monsoon scooter rally. Perhaps, the best challenge we have got in all these years."