

Two-Wheel Rally/Wheels Test

Scooting around the lake

22-hour run leaves 'bikers' sore, tired
Three Hondas, one Yamaha make it

ROB HARRIS
SPECIAL TO THE STAR

It's 9 p.m. and the rain is falling — a downpour that would drive most motorcyclists to seek shelter under the nearest bridge.

Undeterred, the four of us stride out from the dry sanctuary of a New York gas station and into the misery because we're not on motorcycles.

We're on scooters.

We've been awake for 18 hours. Now we have the rain and another six hours on the road before we arrive at a warm room and a welcoming bed.

Welcome to Hour 16 of the recent CMG Mad Bastard Scooter Rally. Starting point Toronto, destination Toronto, reason unknown — a circumnavigation of Lake Ontario by scooters.

This Canada Day weekend adventure was the result of winter musings about something interesting to do with a 50 cc Honda Ruckus, preferably involving a large number of kilometres.

A rough measurement on the map came up with an estimated 850 kilometre trip around the lake, all of it on secondary roads.

With a maximum speed of just over 60 km/h (much less when faced with a steep climb), the most optimistic estimate was still a seat-numbing 16 hours.

It was perfect.

The ride was intended for just myself and photographer Richard Seck, but it soon took on a life of its own and we opened it to anyone with a scooter.

Motoretta Scooters on College St. offered a start and finish location, as well as a grand prize of 1,000 loonies for the "maddest entry," whatever that meant.

Six people filled in the pre-registration form, five showed up and four made it past the second hour of the ride.

By 4:55 a.m., the first streaks of light were breaking through the cloud cover, signifying the start of the rally. The motley crew rode three Honda Ruckus

scooters supplied by Honda Canada, a Yamaha BW-S belonging to Gary Davidson and an ancient Honda C70, piloted by endurance rally veteran Bobb Todd.

For us, at least, this was enough to claim it as a rally.

Toronto proved a bit chaotic, but once we'd finally cleared Oshawa to the east, Hwy. 2 became a relaxing country road with only the hum of our gaggle of scooters breaking the silence.

At the first fuel stop, Richard Szpin said his Ruckus was aggravating his bad back, so he dropped out.

The rest of the drive to Kingston was enjoyable. We crossed into the United States on the Wolfe Island ferry where we were joined by another endurance rider, Peter Hooegeven, on his Yamaha FJR1300.

Although not quite in the spirit of the whole event, Hooegeven proved to be a very patient person in cruising at scooter speed all the way while doing invaluable service keeping a watchful eye on the group.

The trip went swimmingly un-

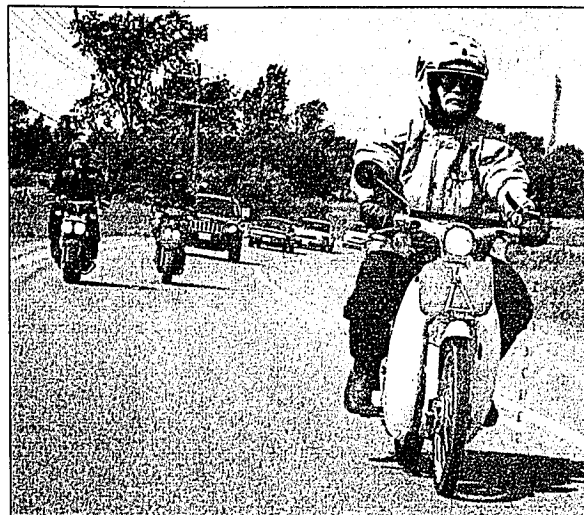
til the minor road 104 became the major expressway 104. Although the map warned of this problem, Todd optimistically thought it would be a minor blip on an otherwise excellent route.

Todd, on his C70, led the gallant four riders into the Valley of Death, accompanied by much panic braking and swerving.

A post-Rochester gas stop was full of tales of close calls and stern looks at Todd, who had been oblivious to the chaos unfolding behind him.

But that's all behind us as we leave the gas station despite the pouring rain and our growing fatigue. At this late stage, the madness of the idea is rammed home — the dusk deluge, the chaos of escaping Niagara Falls, the sheer pain of traversing Hamilton Mountain as the last embers of warmth drain from our chilled hands and feet.

Within a few hours we're on the home stretch travelling along a deserted Lake Shore Blvd. We've found our second, third, even fourth wind as we knock off the last few kilometres with nary a red light to impede



RICHARD SECK

Bobb Todd leads the way, with Peter Hooegeven, on a Yamaha FJR1300, in the middle. Hooegeven joined the mad pack in New York.

progress. It's just past 3 a.m. when we turn onto College St., pulling up at Motoretta.

Our trip takes 22 hours and 15 minutes. Todd had hoped we might do it in as little as 16 hours. But it didn't matter, we'd done it, in one piece and within the allotted 24 hours. Our celebrations are only dulled by the overriding urge to go home and

get into bed.

As for the 1,000 loonies, it's a toss-up between Todd and Davidson. We'll find out the winner at the MBS Rally Awards presentation on Aug. 3 at Motoretta Scooters, 554 College St. The event will run from 7 to 9 p.m.

Rob Harris is the editor of www.cmgonline.com.

Tops off to Mazda for getting Miata right the first time



The Mazdaspeed Miata is the one you call "sir," sporting as it does a 178-hp, turbocharged, 1.8 L four. Buyers also get a six-speed manual gearbox and a premium suspension. Price: 34,395.

JIM KENZIE
SPECIAL TO THE STAR

Should your first new car be a sports car?

It might be more than a trifle indulgent.

But if you feel you've really earned a reward, why would you buy yourself a minivan?

Especially when you can probably justify the Mazda Miata on reliability alone.

Old-car fans may remember when "reliable" and "sports car" could not be used in the same sentence. That's because "sports car" and "British" were all too often used in the same sentence.

The Datsun 240Z was first to break that mould; the Miata simply nailed the concept once and for all.

The Mazda looked just like a mid-'60s Lotus Elan. It handled like a dream. It was slow, but entertainingly so. And it didn't blow up, leak oil all over your driveway or leave you stranded on a dark and stormy night.

It even had a soft-top that you could unclip from the windshield header and simply toss back behind the seats.

The car was updated in 1999 to lose the frog-eye, pop-up headlights and to fit a proper glass rear window into that soft-top.

It now has a 1.8 L, twin-cam 16-valve engine producing 142 hp at 7,000 rpm and 125 lb.-ft. of torque at 5,000 rpm. The five-speed gearbox is simply one of the best.

The handling is still spectacularly entertaining. It can get a bit squirrely if you get into a corner too quickly and lift off on the throttle. But the quick steering should let you catch it.

Granted, the Miata is small. If you're tall, especially through the torso, you'll be staring right at the windshield header.

Trunk space is modest, and the soft-top makes the car noisy when it's up and cold in winter.

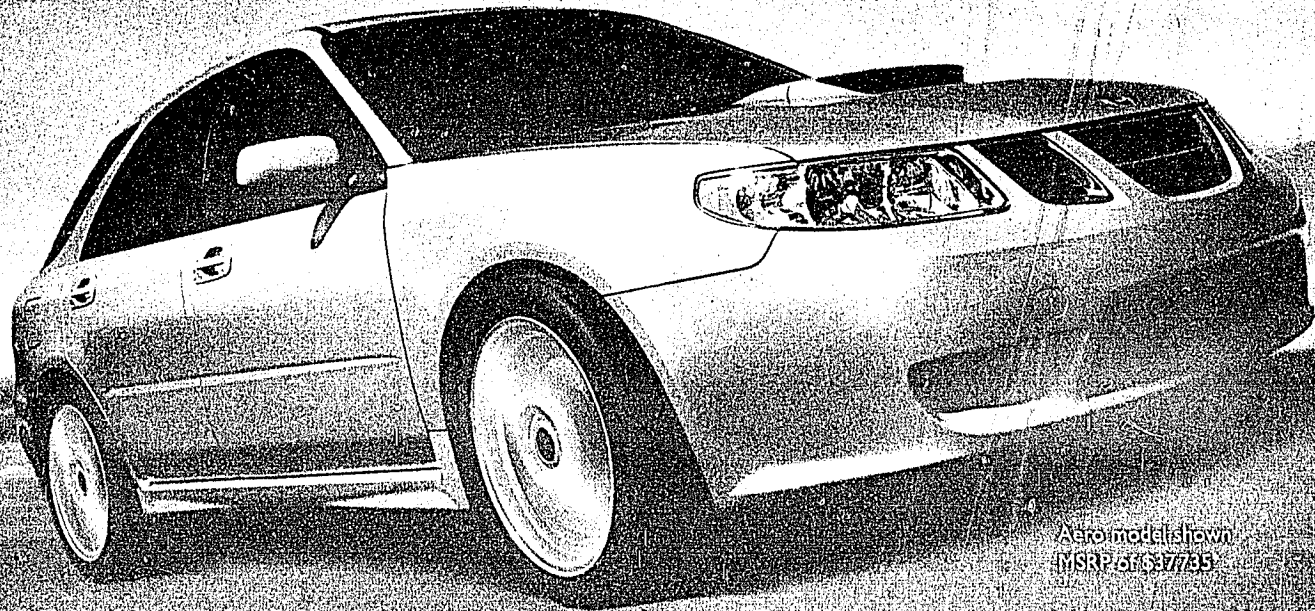
But you should put it away before the snow flies, anyway.

At \$27,895, this sports car isn't exactly cheap. But you can't get anything like it for anything near the price.

If you're feeling flush, take a look at the new Mazdaspeed Miata: 178-hp turbocharged engine, six-speed gearbox (which, despite the generally appreciated extra ratio, isn't all good; it doesn't shift as sweetly), uprated suspension and unique trim, all for only \$34,395.

At least until Pontiac gets its Solstice roadster into production later this year, Miata will remain unchallenged.

Can a car take you from rat race to adventure race?



Aero model shown
MSRP of \$37,745

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