



Round 1 Hartwell series Mt Gambier – Wrap Up.

Hello all and welcome back to the heart of racing and back to the Hartwell motorcycle club series for 2026!

There was a lot of anticipation for this round as it's been months since the final round of last year's racing. Mac Park is the first for the year and the first of 5 rounds for the season, with another round at mac park scheduled mid-year, 2 rounds at Broadford and 1 round at the amazing Phillip Island grand prix circuit. The committee did an amazing job at locking in Phillip Island this year, even phoning Lindsay Fox directly and asking for a time slot that suited the club, to which Lindsay full heartedly agreed. After losing the Moto GP to Adelaide Lindsay sure in hell was not going to lose his number 2 draw card being the Hartwell club series!

Many of us had been cooped up for far too long and it's been a while since we last kicked the 'old girls' over, which meant many people were eager to get to the track as soon as possible and travelled on Thursday to Mt Gambier, to find the best spot, set up, and be ready to do Friday practice.

For some the drive over was an eye opener due to the fires that had recently been there. The damage in some areas was quite immense and had a profound effect on some which made you appreciate what the firefighters go through. A stretch of road from Skipton still bears the scars of a fair dinkum fire. Burnt trees and destroyed sheds lined the highway for a good 5 kms. It was a scary sight. The farmland was scorched and the paddocks were just dirt with no crops. From what I could see the homes were saved, so a full-on effort must have gone into saving them. Other club members who drove through the night missed all this as they couldn't tell in the darkness, but I'm sure when those fires were raging it would have been lit up like daylight. Many thanks go out to the CFA and volunteers who risk their lives to put these fires out.

However once one had arrived at Mt Gambier, we found the streets lined with the locals welcoming us and cheering us on. A great feeling, and sight to see, and to be a part of. When we eventually made it to the track after all the autograph signings, there were slight rumblings of laughter and clanging as the few that had got there early started to unpack, and have a meandering yarn with passers-by, competitors, and friends that they hadn't seen for a while. But as more gear was being unloaded some were quick to find they were not as organized as they thought they were. Some erecting pop-up frames only to find they forgot the cover (PS they don't give much shade when used this way) while others forgot to bring any clothes whatsoever, forcing them to do a quick visit into town for a couple of pairs of everything to get them through the weekend. It was joked that items like undies thongs and socks can be worn for up to four days each by turning them inside out and back to front. Didn't have anyone who put their hand up who actually wanted to try that, but if one of you out there wants to give it a go, let us know how it went!

Most importantly Tlaloc the Aztec rain goddess had her say the previous week and had 'rained herself out' for the classic of Mac Park, and saved all the good weather for us which, was a sigh of relief as pop ups were not the only thing left behind. Spare wheels for wets were also on the forgotten list. Funny we should say we were hoping it wouldn't rain as the past two years running it has been that hot that we were praying for rain to bring some relief! Anyhow as the flight of the concords say, "conditions are perfect...its business time!"

Friday practice kicked off with the usual rider briefing first, and many of us were put on the spot when Alistair out of the blue gave out a random question to which no one could answer... which was "can anyone recite the duty of care statement". Everyone looked around and everywhere except at Alistair "no one?" he quipped. Still silence, so he proceeded to recite what we already knew but we couldn't say word for word off the top of our heads. While reading the statement he was then interrupted by some 'unknown' in the crowd and asked if he himself could stop reading off his notes and recite the duty of care without looking at it. The crowd gasped, no one had challenged Alistair like that before....there was still more silence, all you could hear was the wind blowing in the trees, which quickly turned to laughter. It was a great way to break the tension. He then threatened the riders with a test the next morning, but it was all in good jest, except for that one person who was kept back on detention and had to write "I must not interrupt Alistair while he is talking" over and over for about an hour. So let this be a reminder to all of you. Motorcycle racing is dangerous.....

Friday practice kicked off first with the first timers being led for the first time by the newly appointed and first-time president the honourable Marty Peters. The aim here is for first timers to have an 'experienced rider' to lead out the beginners in a line astern pattern and show them around the track i.e. which direction to go in (don't laugh as there were some people asking this) and which line to take. Then on the second lap the experienced rider would hang back and follow the less experienced riders and give them some pointers such as, if they are too wide or too tight into a corner etc etc, then they were to return to the pits. There were only 2 bikes this time, a 300 rider and a superbike rider. The first lap went to plan; Marty allowed the others to pass and followed them but on the final lap only the superbike pulled in. The 300 stayed out on track and was trying to sneak in an extra lap. Well Marty wasn't having any of this, so he gunned his motor and set off in pursuit to catch the wayward 300 to head him and lead him back into the pits. Now it must be said that I have never heard Marty gun his motor so much and have such a hard time trying to catch someone, it was only the fact that he had superior speed down the back straight that he could catch the young fellow who was riding quite well. After leading the 300 back into the pits the kid came up to Marty and asked him where he could improve but it was noted that Marty said the same thing back to the kid! It was also noted that after Marty had taken his helmet off, he had worked up a big sweat trying to catch the little 300 pilot and quickly asked "what was my lap time?" He set his best lap time ever. But due to it not being a race the lap time didn't count. Sorry Marty!

After a few sessions many people started wandering in at random times and some riders just showed up to do half days as to not wear them or their machines out.

Hartwell's best photographer Cam White showed up as 'early and excited' as a little school boy for 3 reasons.

1st He gets to see all the club members again which anyone would be excited about, 2nd he has a new camera lens to try out, 3rd and most importantly, this was going to be his sons first ride at a Hartwell event. Little Bron who has been doing a lot of dirt tracking is now trying his hand at road racing and trundled around the track completing the practice day with flying colours and without any issues. It even got the thumbs up go ahead from Alistair to race but due unforeseen circumstances and reasons out of Cams control, little Bron had to sit out and just watch as the other juniors had a great time. Long way to come to not race, but maybe next time eh Bron!

Kettle meister also showed up with a new creation being his super mono 500. It turned a few heads and ran quite well considering it was its first time out and was a good conversation starter.

Many people were seen looking over the fence at it scratching their heads unable to work out what it exactly was. Even the locals at the Bellum Hotel came to the track to have a look after hearing about it at the pub. Statement of the day was “what the hell is it?” Safe to say it’s bits of everything. Honda, Yamaha, Kawasaki, Hyosung, Triumph, MV Augusta and KTM. With the nick name Frankie (short for Frankenstein) it seemed quite fitting to name the bike that, though Kettle was adamant it was a female Frankie! Marty couldn’t say it right and just kept saying “ya das frankenfirter”.... Maybe it’s the German coming out in him.

Another discussion for the weekend was the lights at the track. Do we have lights to replace the flaggies, do we not have the lights and have the flaggies. Do we have the lights and the flaggies? As riders what are your thoughts on this, or did you not notice either of them! Note to Alistair to tell riders to keep an eye out for flag points!

After the practice day was done, you guessed it, it was a quick shower and into town for a nice cold frothy and a meal. Many were seen at Macs pub as there was also a birthday party on which the 400 lads tried to blend in with to get some free nibbles, but it’s amazing how well you stand out when you are with only teenagers. They were soon ousted, but had had enough by then anyway, as the conversations with the teens were just not ‘kicking off’ and they returned to the camp site to then do some star gazing, which several more people joined in wondering why everyone was looking up at the sky for so long. Turns out they counted over 60 satellites in less than an hour whizzing overhead. Odd bunch that lot, but interesting at the same time. You spotted them easily at the track over the weekend as they all had sore necks from looking up for so long.

Come race day and before the sunny sun had come up the fog was actually quite thick but soon passed once the morning wakeup call was announced. Bacon and egg sangers where the order for the mornings breakfast, and a cup of coffee or three, as the camp site was awakened to lovely weather reports from the other side of the world.

The first timers were up first again for a practice start and a couple of flying laps but this time they were led by a more experienced unknown rider due to Marty going AWOL for some reason. No dramas this time round so things were off to a good start and shaping up for a good weekend, but then someone slipped on a banana peel and 3 bikes went down in the 1000cc class, bringing out a red flag and a slight delay to proceedings before things got underway again.

The format had been changed for this year to give everyone equal time on track, and also more time on track outright, with longer races. It gave you more time to assess and make cleaner passes, but some people were still hoping for the chequered flag to come out sooner. Just goes to show how fit professional riders are, being able to race at excessive speeds for much longer. The races were coming thick and fast, and just as you caught your breath, you were up again before you knew it.

The 400 crew were pitted in their usual spot along the fence line next to the canteen, but this year some decided to pay the extra couple of bucks and upgraded to the pit sheds where they had decent power and a solid roof over their heads, as well as forking out for a hotel room back in town. As for the rest of that riff raff, they just roughed it as usual with Nick Leith doing his usual midnight walkabout and networking. During the day they were up to their usual antics and repairing not only their bikes at the track, but also their equipment, as Nick Leith rolled up with his trailer tongue barely hanging on, as the support had rusted away and bent the tongue up to about a 40 degree angle. Nothing the locals couldn’t help with though, as shorty whipped out his

welder and a few support plates to help with the repair. Nick put his stick welding skills to the test, and no one could fault it for once, no matter how much they clucked like chickens.

The famous trivia night was postponed this year, but dinner was served as usual on Saturday night by Mt Gambier Motorcycle Club, and it was a good feed of beef or chicken schnitzel with pav or cheesecake for dessert. The topic for some was the amount of different ciders there are available now and were eager to try a few different brands and flavours, but to their dismay, no ciders were on offer from the bar, and they had to settle for something else.

Saturday left off where Sunday took over and it was much of the same, with just the odd little incident, which accumulated in time and forced the termination of the last race for everyone. No one complained as most had their full and were happy to leave early for the drive home.

In summary for the weekend -Dave Trotter put his local knowledge to use and won every race on his rapid Ducati for the over 600 expert. Matt Ritter was fierce on his little 300 taking honours in the twin sprint. John Fannin also leading the way in thunder bikes. Ralph pink was celebrating his success by wheelieing damn near every lap of every race in the super mono class on his chook chaser. Jaysen Hammond, who according to the time sheets, didn't have a passenger in the side car class just held on to win by 5 points over Goldie and Johnston, strange that the timing monitors state that, as during one of the races a side car passenger did actually fall off on the last turn onto the straight! Reaching for the grab rail he mistimed it completely and grabbed nothing but air and subsequently slid off the back of the car right in front of the spectators on the front straight. The Driver didn't know until turn 1 when he almost flipped it and turned back to find his swinger missing. Again, the side cars always bring the entertainment and put on a great show for the spectators! Ryder McKenna cleaned up in the junior 150 class showing the other how it's done. Jason Embley continued on from where he left off last time in the formula 400s and was giving it to the little 300 rockets when he could. The Commuterlites put on a good showing and some extremely close racing with many of the lads coming in laughing their heads off while going 4 wide around the water tower. Christopher Gilbee was sensible enough not to do that and only just won the day over Thomas Nicolson. Surprise rider of the weekend being Shane White who sent his bucket into orbit. He had to beg borrow and steal a bike and then went on to win every race that weekend on that bike that wasn't his. I think he may be onto something there. Dean Oughtred won the 600's, Krue KNIGHT won the 300's while Matt Ritter again cleaned up in the GP class. For the Greg Bailey, Darren trotter again dominated while in the liteweight cup Matt Ritter again put on a great display winning by over 20 seconds! (c'mon Matt, give the others a chance and make a race of it would ya!!) Most classes saw that one rider stood out and dominated for the round. It will be interesting to see if they can continue that trend as the year progresses or if other riders step up and take the challenge to them. Either way it's shaping up to provide some fantastic racing for the year. Thanks to all involve who help to get these events up and running. Volunteers, marshals, sponsors, photographers, Mount Gambier Motorcycle Club, Hartwell Motorcycle Club and last but not least, thanks to **all the competitors**.