

Supermoto gaining in popularity

Company converts dirt bikes for SM

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If you haven't heard of Supermoto, it's not a surprise. The fledgling sport that got its start in Europe in the 1970s is just beginning to gain ground here in North America.

Take a dirt bike, strip it down and add street tires, a wiring harness and big brakes among other mods, and you've got yourself a street worthy urban-assault vehicle that you can ride pretty much anywhere.

This is the concept behind Vancouver Supermoto Ltd. (vancouver-supermoto.com), a local outfit that opened this year on Powell Street. It's owned and operated by Mark Hrehorsky and Annie Ni of Vancouver.

"In 2005, Honda launched their factory SM bike, the FMX650, but it's not available in North America," explained Ni.

"In Canada, people can only get hold of the Suzuki DRZ400SM and some KTM SM models. We've created Vancouver Supermoto to satisfy a growing demand."

They now convert any late-model dirt bike to a supermoto.

"It's not easy. We've had to slowly piece everything together as our Canadian suppliers don't carry much of what we need. We go direct to Europe, the U.K. and U.S. for various tires, wheels, brakes, and electrical components that we need.

"The rest we build and fabricate ourselves. This summer we've put more guys' dirt bikes on the road than anyone in Canada."

Go to youtube.com and search "Bulgaria Supermoto" to get a taste of how big this sport really is in parts of Europe. Boy, is it fun to watch. These bikes are extremely forgiving, lightweight and fun to ride (I took out Ni's converted Honda CRF250 and it was some of the most fun I've ever had on two wheels).

This weekend the final two rounds of a local Supermoto series wraps up at the Tradex in Abbotsford. Round four goes Saturday and the final (round five) is Sunday. Practice starts at 9 a.m. with the racing at noon for both rounds. Admission and parking is \$10. Kids get in free.

Gaston Morrison is the race promoter and founder of the B.C. Riders Promoting Motorsports Association.

He has lofty ambitions for this type of racing and hopes in future to hold a race series with tracks all over the Lower Mainland, including a flagship race in Vancouver.

"The beauty of the sport is that it's perfectly suited to an urban environment. Back alleys, laneways and gravel paths are where these bikes excel," said Morrison.

"Tracks are typically asphalt and dirt, but races can incorporate cobble stones, steel ramps, grass turf and more. The emphasis is on tight, twisting corners. The jumps aren't huge, nor the speeds exceptionally high, making Supermoto an easier sport to get into than traditional road racing or Supercross."

Sept. 1, 2 -- Supermoto's last race weekend. Practice at

9 a.m., racing at noon at the Tradex in Abbotsford. Admission, \$10 adults, kids free.

Sept. 23 -- Eighth Annual "Hog Wild" About Reading ride for literacy. Registration, coffee and doughnuts at 8:30 a.m., ride to Harrison Hot Springs at 10 a.m.

Sept 23 to 26 -- 26th Annual Oyster Run to Anacortes, Wash. This is a free event. No time schedule, no required route, no official starting point. Pick your own route and stop at biker friendly places along the way. See oysterrun.org for ride details and its history.

Oct. 7 -- 29th Annual Vancouver Motorcycle Toy Run. Leaves Coquitlam Centre at 10 a.m. Monetary and new-toy donations benefit the Lower Mainland Christmas Bureau. For information, call 604-580-0111 or e-mail office@bccom-bc.com.

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