

# THE EASTER BATHURST BIKE RACES



Easter in the 1970s and 1980s meant one thing for motorcycle racing fans – Bathurst! A 3-day race meeting was held over the Easter weekend every year, and attracted motorcycle-racing fans from all over the country. For many it was a ritual – where they went and what they did every year at Easter. I never went there, but a couple of my mates were regular attendees. One, Phil Hall, began as just another spectator but ended up being a photographer and then a commentator.

The racing was always great; in some instances, truly legendary. As **Phil Hall** wrote, in an article published in the online magazine **MCNews.com**, “The races themselves were always wonderful, even those that appeared to have the least promise. After all, you could scarcely expect 125s to turn on a show on a course that had a 174m difference in elevation between its highest and lowest points. But what the track lacked in appeal for the smaller bikes it made up for in colossal fields and close racing.” **There were over 1,000 riders from all over Australia, and even some from overseas, competing in various categories over the weekend.**

But of course it was the larger capacity classes that attracted the most interest. The 500cc bikes were always a big attraction, and for many years it was the 500cc bikes that made up the Australian Grand Prix. The Unlimited Production race saw much larger capacity machines competing.

Click [here](#) to watch a video of the 1983 Australian Grand Prix. Click [here](#) for the 1986 Unlimited Production race. And [here](#) is an on-board video of Dennis Neil riding a lap of Bathurst in 1981 on a Honda 1100 – with commentary!

**The Mount Panorama circuit at Bathurst is not an ideal motorcycle racing circuit** – in the same way that the Isle Of Man is not an ideal motorcycle racing circuit.



There are concrete walls and Armco fences all around the place. There are some drop-offs beside the track that, back in those days, were only separated from the track by wire fences. So if you had an off up there, it was almost guaranteed to be a bad one!



On the left: Roger Hayes lost control and rammed the fence. On the right: The commentator described Malcolm Campbell's crash: “A moment ago he was the crowd's delight; now he's a tangled body, in a leather bag, dumped on the track.”

Both of the above survived and recovered. Many didn't. The list of deaths in motorcycle racing at Mount Panorama goes back to when the track first opened, but as we're focusing on the races of the 70s' 80s, and early 90s, I'll list those.

1972 Lan Hog, sidecar

1976 Ross Barelli, Suzuki RG500

1979 Ron Toombs, Yamaha TZ 350F

1980 Rob Moorhouse, Yamaha TZ750

1980 Alec Dick, Kawasaki

1994 Jim Colligan, Sidecar

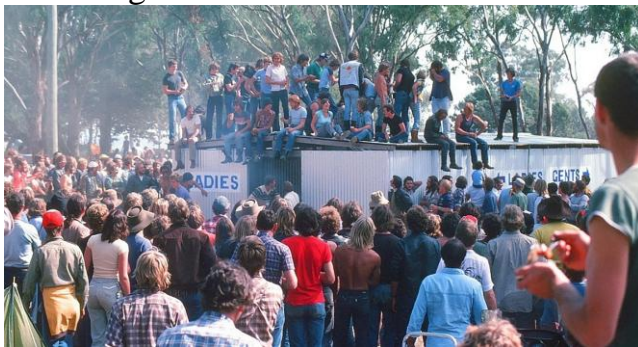
1994 Ian Thornton, Sidecar

Click [here](#) for a story by Phil Hall of the tragic weekend that saw the death of Alec Dick and Rob Moorhouse – with Rob Moorhouse being the focus of Phil's story.

*(\*Phil's story states the year as 1981, but all the references I saw listed it as 1980).*

Sadly, while famous for the racing, the Easter weekend became just as famous – or infamous – for the rioting, which plagued the event in the 1980s.

Phil Hall described the situation that developed at the top of the mountain. "It was at the top of the mountain that the, how shall I say it, more 'rowdy' element of the crowd gathered and it was that group, which grew steadily in numbers year by year, that was to precipitate the riots that blighted the races and dominated the media reports in the late 70's – early-80's. For altogether too many of the mountain-dwellers, Bathurst was an excuse for a three day booze-up and many of these people never even raised themselves from their positions to go out to the fence and watch a race.



"The concern by the authorities about the increasingly raucous behavior on the mountain especially at night once the races were over (burnouts in the dirt, torching peoples' bikes, fights and excessive drinking / drug taking) led the police to be in increasing numbers on the mountain which only inflamed the situation. Stand-offs between the police and belligerent spectators became increasingly tense and ultimately led to ugly riots that garnered all the wrong sorts of publicity."

But confrontations with police started before the bikers even got there. As Phil Hall describes, "Nearly all motorcycles coming into town from any direction were routinely stopped, license checks were carried out and luggage searched for drugs and weapons. It was claimed to be for safety reasons but it basically amounted to officially sanctioned police harassment."

Click [here](#) for a Channel 7 news report of the riot in 1985.

As far as I can tell (exact details on the last meeting are a bit scarce) the races came to an end in 1994, following the deaths of another 2 competitors that weekend. Yes, there was one held in 2000, as a kind of tribute to the race weekends that had gone before, but from what I recall it was all a bit flat. There was some good racing, but it didn't have the atmosphere of the ones before. And it never happened again.

*(\*Click [here](#) for the full article on the races by Phil Hall)*

*(\*Photos: Various online sources)*