

MAD, US?

V-Rod tackles Dakar rally

700lb cruiser-based outfit is readied for epic desert ordeal

TACKLING the Dakar rally on a bike is one of the most gruelling challenges on earth. But if racing thousands of miles across some of the most inhospitable landscapes in the world isn't enough, how about converting a Harley-Davidson V-Rod into a sidecar to take on the job?

That's exactly what Americans Scott Whitney and Pat Holmes have been planning all year.

Yet this is no idle whim. The pair are hugely experienced racers and have been competing and winning at the Pikes Peak hill climb (a race to the top of a 14,000ft mountain in the Colorado Rockies) on a Harley Sportster-powered outfit since 1998.

But for 2003 Team Hog Wild Racing (as they are known) built a new machine based around the twice-as-powerful liquid-cooled V-Rod twin.

It may look like something out of Mad Max, but it has been developed with one thing

in mind – surviving the Dakar, which starts on New Year's day. Whitney told MCN: "Pikes Peak was a challenge, but the Dakar is the ultimate test and has always been an ambition of mine. I guess we're trying to prove that even mother nature can't beat a V-Rod"

The sidecar-cross chassis was originally developed for a Suzuki TL1000 V-twin and has been modified to take the V-Rod motor.

The engine produces 125bhp – 10bhp up on a standard – and 74ftlb of torque. That's been achieved with the addition of adjustable fuel mapping and a custom-made stainless steel exhaust. The other major modification

is the conversion to a chain (instead of belt) final drive system. The whole outfit has a dry weight of 330kg and a top speed of 100mph.

The V-Rod has also been fitted with a 52-litre main fuel tank, a 10-litre secondary tank and a 5.6-litre container for the crew's drinking water.

The high temperatures on the Dakar also mean that the outfit has to be equipped with a massive double radiator with three fans. Other essentials include a GPS system, twin 200W car headlights and a 45-litre box for tools and spares which doubles as the passenger seat. But the outfit is still street legal.

The race takes place over 18

days and this year starts at Clermont-Ferrand.

The pair have already tested the outfit successfully in soft sand dunes in California. Its massively wide tyres spread the bulk – around twice the mass of a typical motocross outfit – just well enough to stop it simply sinking under its own weight.

A Harley won the first ever Pikes Peak in 1916 and this V-Rod won the motorbike class earlier this year. Whitney and Holmes covered the 12.5-mile course in 14 minutes 58 seconds. That's an average speed of around 50mph on a winding dirt track that climbs from 9300ft to 14,100ft and is lined with sheer drops.

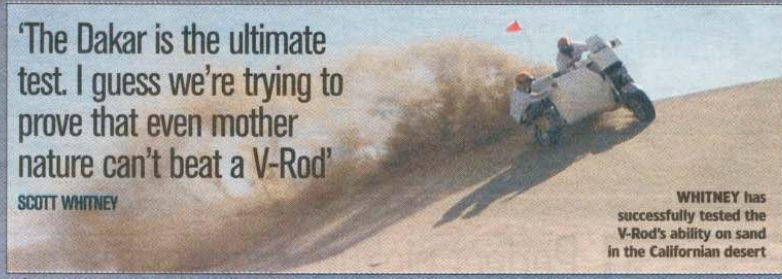
- V-ROD SIDECAR FACTS**
- 1** IT won the Pikes Peak hill climb this year.
 - 2** IT uses a chassis designed for a motocross sidecar outfit.
 - 3** THE tuned V-Rod motor is 10bhp up on standard.
 - 4** IT can carry 62 litres of fuel and 5.6 litres of water.
 - 5** THE outfit weighs 330kg and has a top speed of 100mph.
 - 6** THE three-wheeler is completely road legal.



HOLMES (left) and Whitney believe big is beautiful



FANCY wrestling this for 12 hours a day in 100° heat?



'The Dakar is the ultimate test. I guess we're trying to prove that even mother nature can't beat a V-Rod'

SCOTT WHITNEY

WHITNEY has successfully tested the V-Rod's ability on sand in the Californian desert



HUGE tyres help stop the massive machine from just sinking into soft sand