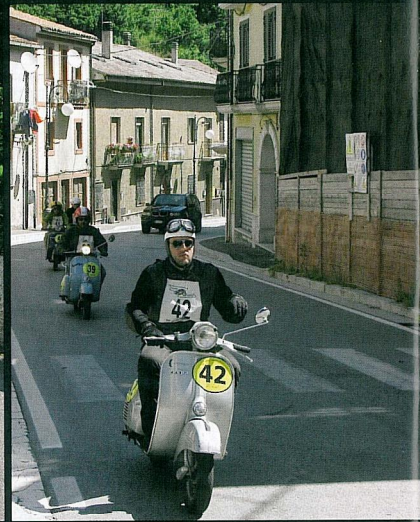




ABOVE Ron De'Pannone, Martin De'Pannone, Graham O'Brien and Bill Guthrie at their base before the race started in Rodano (MI) about 5km from the start, about to leave for Idroscalo.



LEFT Typical Italian village with front doors opening directly onto the street. The rally bikes created quite a racket as they passed through.

BELOW Bill (21) Ron (22) and Obie (23) head out of Idroscalo at a little after midnight to the cheers of the crowd.



The first time check on day 5.



CENTRE LEFT Taken outside the Palazzo Del Governo, this young lady's boyfriend took rather vocal exception to Bill photographing his girl and demanded the photo be deleted. Fortunately the camera refused to obey the command.

ABOVE Graham and Ron making time through the lush countryside.

RIGHT Bill Guthrie with Famiglia Masetti, taken at Latina in front of the hotel 'Fattoria La Principina' on day three.



# MILANO TARANTO 24<sup>a</sup> PARTENZA

PARTECIPANTI  
RICORDATE CHE LA MANIFESTAZIONE  
SI SVOLGE SU STRADE APERTE  
AL TRAFFICO  
SIATE PRUDENTI



# Team Australia rides again

Every year the 'Moto Club Veteran San Martino' hosts the re-enactment under the guidance of Marcello Tortoioli and a different route is chosen. The event has changed over the years but principally it still follows the format to that of the original. Starting in Milan in the North it winds its way down South exploring Italy's hinterland ending up in Taranto on the coast. It's a great way of seeing Italy and is a lot of fun.

Our plans for partaking in the 24th edition of Italy's 'Milano Taranto' (MI-TA) started early back in 2009. Team Australia was previously just Ron De'Pannone and myself. Now we were to have a boost of riders and support for the up and coming 2010 event, with the inclusion of its first motorcycle rider. Martin, Ron's son, could not see himself riding a Lambretta along the expected 1,800km with the other scooter-riding team members and chose to ride his 1971 MV Agusta 350. Peter Guthrie 1949 Mod B 125 Corsa, Graham 'Obie' O'Brien 1959 TV2 175, Ron 1962 TV3 175 and myself 1950 Mod C 125 Longoni Replica were to accompany Martin over the six days of riding.

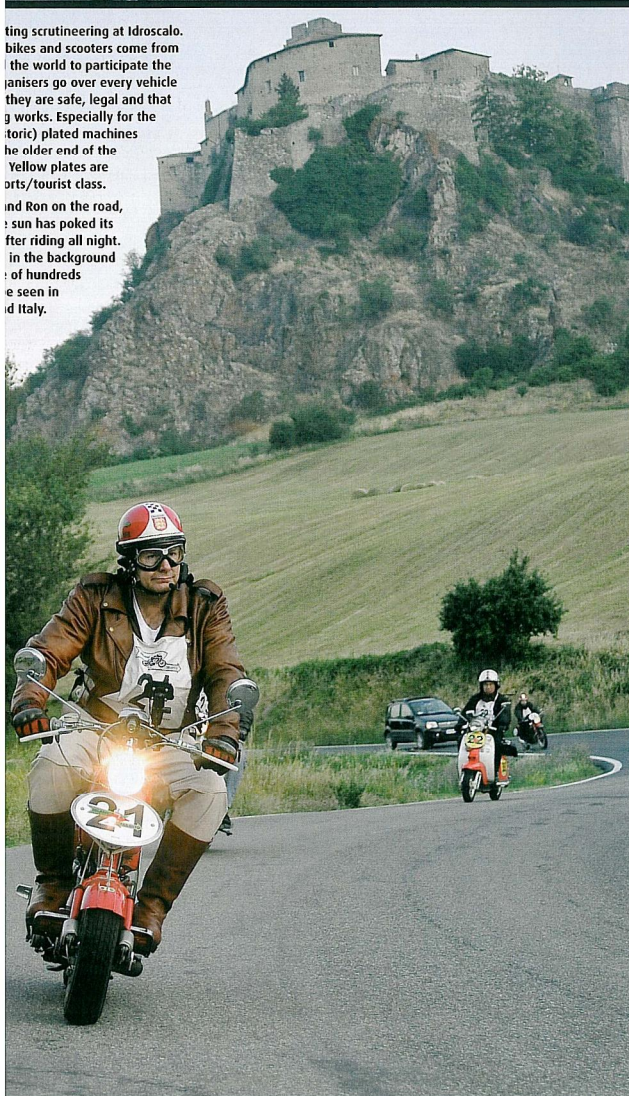
This year was to be the 'one' for me as I'd finally finished building my replica of Ernesto Longoni's factory competition Model C Lambretta racer. This event was to be its debut and what better way of getting it seen than in the same event in which Longoni rode to great fame back in the early 1950s. Obie, Peter and Martin were all new comers to >

Beginning in 1937, The Milano-Taranto developed into a very prestigious open roads race, which came to an end after the tragic Mille Miglia car rally of 1957 claimed eleven lives. It was revived in 1985 as a non-competitive event.

Story and Photos Bill Guthrie.



...ing scrutineering at Idroscalo. bikes and scooters come from the world to participate the organisers go over every vehicle they are safe, legal and that g works. Especially for the (toric) plated machines he older end of the Yellow plates are or ts/tourist class. and Ron on the road, sun has poked its fter riding all night. in the background of hundreds e seen in id Italy.



the event as Ron and I were the only veterans having previous involvement. In December 2009 my brother Peter found out he wasn't able to get the time off work and unfortunately had to withdraw from the team.

Arriving in Italy a week or so before the start date, Ron, Obie and myself took the opportunity to check over our Lambrettas and do some short rides to familiarise ourselves with the Italian traffic and riding on the other side of the road again. My initial concern was a very loud exhaust note that had to be addressed. I'd not put in any baffles to the radical exhaust and I'm certain I could be heard for many kilometres, not that I could hear anything. Ron's TV had been used on previous MI-TA's and required little adjusting but Obie and I recently had our engines rebuilt and we were anxious to put as many Ks on the clock before the start.

### Night One - Milan to Pisa 400Km

Idroscalo, the race's starting point, is an Ex WW2 flying boat base and was the location of the 1960s Olympic Games rowing venue. We were met there by our backup van support team, husband and wife duo, Larry and Kerry. Team Australia was now complete. After a team photo, registration and vehicle scrutineering the three Lambretta riders headed off to the site of the old Innocenti works, just down the road for an obligatory photo shoot. The factory main gates are still there along with several huge buildings and the famous water tower still on site not yet demolished.

After completing our photo shoot it was back to Idroscalo. The humidity was still reasonably intense with the temperature being around 37°C, so we all clambered for some shade, to eat, rest and make our final preparations before the race started. Throughout the afternoon I met up with some old friends, Donato and Carlo, who I'd competed with in 08 and who like everyone else had gathered to see the competitors' bikes and to stay to watch the start.

In next to no time the sun had set and we were being ushered to our starting positions. On the stroke of midnight the smaller capacity bikes led the way followed by the sidecars and then us in the scooter class (approximately 30 scootereests). The remaining field would follow in their various ranking order once we'd passed through the starting gate, with a combined total of 225 entrants in 10 categories.

Leaving the Idroscalo complex my clutch broke and I shot off down the road with Obie close on my tail. Momentarily distracted I missed the direction marker as I rocked past the first turn. Quickly realising something was wrong (besides the clutch) we made our way back to the start where we found our missed turn leading us out of Milan. I got along by blipping the throttle to change gears which I did as gingerly as possible. It wasn't until about the second scheduled stop that Obie and Martin finally got to see their first red direction marker and knew where to look for them. They weren't alone at not seeing them as at night they were very difficult to pick out at the best of times and many riders were riding in large groups to avoid getting lost.



During the early hours of the morning it looked as though we might get wet as there was a huge electrical storm off in the distance continually lighting up the night sky with plenty of evidence of rain in some of the areas we passed through. Luckily no rain bothered us and as dawn approached I got to see the mountainous region I was about to tackle. Traversing the mountains was hard work, having to change gear without a proper functioning clutch made it even harder. I persisted as long as I could but I had to call it a day in the end about 70Km from Pisa as it became all a bit too much (the mountains) and I was concerned that I might damage my new engine. A quick call to our back-up crew saw me being picked up in next to no time. We found out later that several riders couldn't complete the first leg for one reason or another and some had to retire completely from the race.

Upon our arrival in Pisa we were met by a throng of Africans peddling designer knock-off watches, handbags, sunglasses and myriad other junk. Ron, Obie and Martin made the 400Km without any problems and later after we'd all celebrated completing the first stage, rested and had tea, Ron helped me repair the clutch out in the car park of our hotel amongst many other riders fixing this and that.

### Day One - Pisa to Principina 250Km

With my clutch repaired I was eagerly looking forward to our first time check located at the Vespa factory in Pontedera. I have wanted to visit the museum there for some time now and here I was being presented an opportunity without going out of my way. Making good progress and being ahead of the majority of scootereests I was within eye sight of the factory when my clutch cable snapped... dammit! Not wishing to stop I pressed on for the short distance into the factory grounds and proceeded to change the cable. Changing it took up all my spare time and I didn't get to go into the



ABOVE LEFT Graham snatches a cat nap after his Day 4 time check. ABOVE Ron and Obie going through a time checkpoint. In the foreground you can see a direction marker on the scorer's folder. This is what we had to constantly find to know where to go. In the background No:24 was the eventual winner in the historic scooter class.

museum as I had to make my time check which required me to leave the factory grounds (bugger, so close).

Out of Pontedera the roads weren't the best but at least I had a fully functional scooter once again. I was even able to keep up with the majority of the other scooter competitors who were riding considerably more modern models. Obie and Ron were only just ahead of me and I would often catch them on the long straights, that is, until around mid afternoon when I was coming down out of the hills. At the bottom of a hill I was going rather fast and I hit three deep undulations in the road (not visible until I was right on top of them) in quick succession. My little scooter bottomed out heavily over each causing me to over stress the rear knuckle joint and snap the drive train. With the coast in sight and less than 100Km to go I was again out of the race. All I could do now was to wait to be picked up by Kerry and Larry... in the van, again.

Our hotel, the *Fattoria La Principina* was a huge complex hidden amidst an even larger vineyard that was all very picturesque with row upon row of grape vines as far as the eye could see. Hopes of finding a much needed complete drive transmission (rear end) here were very remote but as I was in Italy I was still optimistic. At tea that night I got a huge surprise as the invited guest was none other than the wife of another famous Italian Lambretta racer Umberto Masetti. Famiglia, his (widowed) wife gave an interesting speech of Umberto's career first with Lambretta and his subsequent time with Gilera. After the meal I had opportunity to speak with Famiglia through the MI-TA organisation's lovely interpreter, Anna. I showed Famiglia some copies of old photos I had with me regarding racing Lambrettas from the 1950's and one of her

husband. We arranged that before departing the next day she would see the competitors off and I would do a quick photo shoot of her and myself.

### Day Two - Principina to Latina, 325Km

In the morning Famiglia was surprised when she recognised the scooter I was riding and asked how I became an owner of such a scooter in Australia. I informed her it was a replica I had built to ride specifically in this event and the likelihood of me owning a real one would be highly unlikely, with only 7 or so being built by the Innocenti race department.

Happy with the day's start, despite having to transport my broken steed in the back of our van, I now had a contact for the President of the Lambretta Club who I was reliably informed would be the guest for tea in Latina. Once under way the day was again proving to be as hot and humid as the last two. Ron, Obie and Martin maintained a perfect time sheet throughout the day which became all in vain. After skirting Rome and passing through the site where the Americans fought heavily against the Germans during WW2 (Anzio) a very large number of riders got lost late in the afternoon. Apparently at the location of a four-way roundabout the direction markers were nowhere to be seen, due to the council taking down the signage on which they were placed the day before, to do road works. So no points were deducted for anyone coming in late. My meeting with the President of the Lambretta club didn't bear any parts despite numerous phone calls, but I was given several options to get the scooter fixed over the next couple of weeks. All hope was fading of finding the necessary parts in time to complete another leg so I tentatively resigned my race position. >

## MILANO-TARANTO

**Day Three - Latina to Paestum, 350Km**

Windy roads, windy roads, windy roads. Being a passenger was no better than riding as the winding roads were incessant and after a time Larry, Kerry and I were feeling a little green around the gills. Our breaks from driving the big van became more frequent to give us some respite from the constant turning and going up and down the many hills. A number of riders were doing likewise. The heat wasn't helping matters either and at lunch we all had a long rest. In the afternoon, unfortunately there were several crashes (fortunately no fatalities) but all needing medical attention. Coming into Giffoni late in the afternoon just shy of our day's destination many riders stopped at the top of the mountain pass at 950m to take in the magnificent views before heading down and onto Paestum just 40 K's away. Martin again came in at the end of the day with a perfect score of no points lost. Quite an achievement given the day's course.

**Day Four - Paestum to Matera, 320Km**

Today was to be a constant rise going up to our highest point at 1255m until lunch. Then a gradual decline all the way into Matera was what was shown in our MI-TA handbook as the terrain we could expect for the days passage. I had now resigned myself to the fact that I could not locate any of the parts I required to fix my scooter in time to do another leg, so I relaxed and became a tourist. The final stretch into Matera was I'd say, terrible for the scooterists, as the back roads we followed into our destination were very pot holed and congested. It was difficult to see

far enough ahead due to the heavy tourist traffic, for you to avoid a large proportion of the damaged road. Luckily this was the only bad roads we would experience for the whole trip. Besides the segment where I did my damage and this small stretch, the roads were a dream to ride.

**Day Five, the final day -  
Matera to Taranto, 140Km**

A leisurely day's ride was on the bill for the homeward stretch. After breakfast a walking tour of Casa Grotta (an ancient city within the city of Matera carved out of a type of Limestone) was arranged to be seen - truly an amazing sight to behold.

At around 11 all the riders were formed up in the city square ready for the last starter's flag. Once the scooterists had departed Larry, Kerry and I didn't wait to see Martin off. All Team Australia's bikes were running faultlessly so we drove on ahead of the scooterists to get some more imagery. We caught them up at the first time check for a brief period and then set off directly for Taranto. Larry and Kerry dropped me off at the race finish point outside the Palazzo Del Governo which overlooks the historic port harbour.

Whilst waiting for the arrival of the riders still some two or more hours away, I parked my scooter in the area I knew would soon fill with the other competitors' bikes adjacent to the yet to be assembled finish line. During my time waiting, numerous people came over and asked about the Lambretta and to take pictures. Some could speak English and those that could not still showed their

appreciation. I could have sold photos of it - the amount of people wanting to sit on it and have their photo taken by their friend or partner was amusing.

About an hour before the riders were to arrive the MI-TA staff turned up to erect the finish line and set up the barriers to block the road and keep the well wishers at bay. As I was talking to the official photographer two young kids sneakily road their 'twist and go' over to my scooter some 50m away. The little bastards had my bike started in an instant and were desperately trying to get it to go with the very obvious intention of flogging it. I'm fortunate that it was not rideable as I most certainly would have lost it had it been working properly. A small number of people realised what was happening and raced over to help me stop them. They got away - but not with my scooter. Where were the Polizia when you needed them?

Soon the competitors were racing down the final kilometre, two abreast for the final flag fall to the cheers of those waiting at the line. I got photos of Team Australia coming through the finishing line wishing I was one of them. It was all over for another year.

Watch out Italy, I'll be back.

*Spare Wheel Scooter Club & Team Australia.*

**Footnote - Next years 25th anniversary re-enactment placings are filling up fast. For those seeking some fun and adventure riding in another country with plenty of challenges along the way ... book now and avoid disappointment. I know there will be an even bigger scooter presence for 2011. ■**



Team Australia at the race finish point outside the Palazzo Del Governo which overlooks the historic port harbour.