RIPPING YARN

The day Andrew McFarlane holeshot Australia's first ever MXGP and changed the course of Aussie motocross forever.

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THERE'S NOT A PERSON IN THE 15,000-STRONG CROWD at Broadford in March, 2000, who won't remember the electric atmosphere when KX500-mounted Andrew McFarlane holeshot the World 500cc Motocross GP and kept the world's best in his dust for more than 20 minutes. It was, and always will be, a defining moment for Australian motocross, and it typified the fighting spirit and national pride of a guy who would be tragically killed at this very same track a decade later.

The year 2000 would mark the last season of the stand-alone 500cc GPs before the contentious triple-header format was introduced. It was a time when the 500s were still top dogs in World Motocross and when the GP circuit was considered the pinnacle of the sport. It was also a time that Kevin Williams, a driving force behind the Broadford GP, remembers with mixed emotions. The long-time Australian Motocross Championship promoter takes up the story...

The GP at Broadford was the brainchild of Stephen Webster, the then President of Motorcycling Victoria (MV). Some 18 months earlier, on the Monday after the 1998 ISDE at Traralgon, we'd had a meeting with the Victorian state government and told them we'd like to run a GP. After the huge success of the Six-Day, they immediately agreed. Stephen Webster, Peter Shacklock and I formed a committee, and I was contracted to MV's Major Events Unit to run it. That's how Australia's first ever World Motocross round got out of the gates.

I went to my first MXGP in Italy in May of 1999, and the following March, Australia staged the opening round of the World 500cc Motocross Championship. That first year, it cost $120,000 to get the GP to Australia, plus the event staging costs. In a tiny office in my garage, we did everything from putting together the corporate packages, selling the sponsorship, organising seating and ticketing, ordering the toilet paper and dealing with all the European teams ... who'd invariably call us at 3am!

But we didn't get off to great start. The first bike container that Customs opened was Andrea Bartolini's, the reigning world champ, and it was full of pasta and jam! That delayed things for everyone a bit, but we got it sorted and it all came together for race day. It was the biggest crowd Broadford had ever seen and the track was mint. When I reflect on that day, I still get a lump in my throat and tear up. Every time! I remember standing on a hay bale outside the first corner. The gates dropped and the crowd went absolutely nuts.

Against the factory teams, Andrew "Sharky" McFarlane powered his 500cc KX up the long start straight and claimed the holeshot, with Michael Byrne right next to him on a CR500. As the Aussie mechanics ran past me on the way up to the pit board area, we exchanged looks of excitement I'll never forget. We watched in absolute awe of Sharky and Burner. You knew where the Aussie riders were by the fans around the track. It was like a Mexican wave of squealing voices!

When it started to rain, Sharky was pipped for the final spot on the podium – behind Joel Smets, Darryll King and Marnicq Bevoets – but what he did that day for Australian motocross was amazing. He made Aussies believe that we could cut it on the world stage.

In the Jury Meeting after the moto, I broke down and cried. It was just the elation and emotion and enjoyment of the whole occasion coming to a head. Words can't describe the feeling. We'd put a successful event together in a very short period of time; the Aussie riders had done so well; and that moment – that vision of Sharky's Kawasaki coming over the crest of the hill in the lead – was the reward for all the hard work we'd put it. Sharky had won

the 1999 Aussie MX Championship and was on fire, but after what I'd seen in Italy, I really didn't expect the Aussies to be competitive.

I'll always remember Sharky had a cheeky attitude about him that weekend. He felt something special. It wasn't an arrogance; just such incredible enthusiasm. Like wearing the baggy green for the first time, the boys had a real sense that they were flying the flag for Australian motocross on home soil.

The spooky part about it is that Sharky had that same cheekiness the day he passed away. I stood there with him at Broadford last year and said, "You're feeling it, aren't you, Sharky?" He just smirked and said, "I'm feeling 10 years ago, Kevvy!"

In 2001, McFarlane did it all over again, this time on the Rinaldi Yamaha. It was a carbon copy of his Kawi holeshot. He diced with Stefan Everts before finishing second and claiming the podium he deserved the year before.

Looking back, what the boys did at Broadford in 2000 was incredible. They helped focus the world's attention on our motocross talent, and the following season, both McFarlane and Chad Reed had factory contracts in Europe. They paved the way for more Aussies to race in both Europe and the USA in subsequent years.

People in Europe still talk about that Australian Grand Prix and are excited about staging it here again. The GFC has made it tough, but never say never. Before I hang up my promotional boots, we'll have another GP here. And it'll probably be at Broadford.

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Left: The McFarlanes and the Reeds sign autographs in 2001. Right: Kevin Williams and 2000 MXGP winner, Joel Smets.