

CHAMPIONS OF THE WORLD

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I've always liked enduro and everything it stood for. I like the fact its riders are tough, unpretentious and unaffected by success. And I like that the sport's fiercest rivals also manage to be decent human beings to one another. But I never fully understood the sport – not properly, anyway – until I attended the International Six Days Enduro (ISDE) when it came to Traralgon in Australia in 1998. Up till that point, I'd never realised that breaking the rules was only considered cheating if you were caught. At Traralgon, I came to realise that applying rules to the sport

between Australia and the world's best teams in 1998.

All of which made it that much more gratifying when the announcement came late last year that the French federation's appeal against their riders' disqualification at the 2015 ISDE had been rejected, and that Australia's World Trophy team had, rightfully, won the Slovakian event. Australia had won the Olympics of Motorcycling, the Holy Grail of enduro, and they'd won all three classes. Wow!

After hearing the news, I spent much of the day on the blower with Australia's

formative years of Australia's ISDE effort, and about the inception of the 4-Day to help Australian riders at the international event. Yes, if only John could have been around to bear witness to all three Aussie teams – Senior, Junior and Women's – clean sweeping the Slovakian ISDE. Due largely to the foundations John Hall laid, we sure have come a long way since that 1977 Australian team returned from Czecho with a 100 percent DNF rate.

Ironically, within a few weeks of the announcement about Australia's ISDE success, Motorcycling Australia confirmed

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of enduro was a fluid, creative process, made infinitely more complicated at an international event like the ISDE, where national pride and a host of cultural considerations come into play.

That 1998 ISDE also taught me the difference between national teams with ample funding – those who enjoyed the luxury of ghost riders, spare bikes, uniformed support crews and a crack legal team behind them – and those on a shoestring budget, who raced largely for the love of the sport. And it taught me that Team Australia, in spite of having a few superstars on the world enduro scene at the time – namely, Shane Watts and Stefan Merriman – was a long, long way off the pace. Even with the home-ground advantage, there was daylight

enduro fraternity; many of whom I'd not spoken to in years. Call after call, a similar thing happened: grown men tearing up about an incredible sporting achievement that was many years in the making and which came against all the odds.

Common to many of those conversations was an emotional reference to the late John Hall – the guy who took Australia's first ever ISDE team to Czechoslovakia in 1977; who was the driving force behind Australia's ISDE teams for many years; who was the founding father of the Australian 4-Day Enduro in 1978; and who became widely regarded as the doyen of the Australian off-road racing scene. Talk of John made me reflect on the last time I spoke with him in 2010 – shortly before he succumbed to a long illness – about the

speculation that a reduction in funding from the Australian Sports Commission would impact on their support for our ISDE teams in 2016. Translation: when the Olympics are on, 'peripheral' sports get shafted in the funding department. Shortly thereafter, the French Motorcycling Federation announced that they would not field a World Trophy Team at the 2016 ISDE in Spain – a pathetic, knee-jerk response to not winning their appeal (or perhaps a result of squandering all that money on a legal team who failed to win the ISDE for them).

But as disappointing as those two developments are, nothing can take the Slovakian ISDE result away from the Aussies. Our teams all earned their wins. You. Bloody. Beauty. 🇺🇸

