

Europe's Biggest Café Racer And Sprint Race—Glemseck 101

We report from Europe's largest café racer bike and sprint race scene.

Uli Cloesen - January 26, 2020

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Randy Mamola on the Indian "Appaloosa" getting ready for his first race against a supercharged Harley at the Indian Sprints. Uli Cloesen

The city of Stuttgart in southwest Germany is sometimes referred to as the "cradle of motoring" and considered the starting point of the worldwide automobile industry. Not only is Mercedes-Benz based there, but it is also the home of Porsche and automotive parts giants Bosch and piston builder Mahle. Naturally, such a location can also look back to its own historic Solitude racetrack at the outskirts of Stuttgart.



Left: This French couple rolled their Ducati racer in Batman suits into the Sultans of Sprint competitors paddock. Right: A Triumph café racer competitor looking like straight out of London's Ace Cafe. Uli Cloesen

The former 22.3-kilometer (13.9 miles) mountain course (named after a castle in the area) dates back to 1903 and served initially only motorcycle events, with car racing introduced later. Between 1935–'37, the track was shortened to 11.5 kilometers (7.1 miles). Racing resumed in 1949, with its peak in 1954, when Geoff Duke won the 500cc race at the German GP on his Gilera Four, with New Zealander Rod Coleman (RIP) coming second on the AJS 7R3 in the 350cc class. This event attracted 500,000 spectators, a world record attendance for a one-day motorsport event, that stands to this very day. 1964 marked the last motorcycle GP on the Solitude track, which was then deemed too dangerous for the ever increasing speeds cars or bikes could produce. It then became a public road after its demise.



Triumph's new 2,500cc Rocket was on show in Germany for the first time and getting ready for its maiden demo run. Uli Cloesen

Fast-forward to 2005, when local man Jörg Litzenburger initiated the first "Glemseck 101" motorcycle gathering near Leonberg, named after the Hotel Glemseck next to the legendary former starting grid of the Solitude racecourse. Jörg was driven by the spirit of simply having pure fun on bikes, like in the '60s, when café racers came out of England. Since then, it has become the largest outdoor motorcycle event in Germany and a premier meeting place for international bike customizers and described by many as Europe's best melting pot for lovers of the café racer culture.



This Zuendapp moped just stood like living artwork on the footpath, encapsulating perfectly the whole relaxed creative spirit of the event. Uli Cloesen

The format now consists of organized ride-outs, a dealer mile, camping grounds, rockabilly live music, major manufacturers and custom shop bike presentations, motorcycle celebrities, a stage program, and since 2009 its 1/8-mile sprints on the home stretch of the Solitude track. In 2011, the introduction of the International Café Racer Sprint class for bike professionals added even more to the event's appeal. Today, up to 150 contestants start on Saturday and Sunday of Glemseck 101 and compete in different classes, depending on construction and brand. The organizers select contestants as well as motorcycles, regarding their quality, uniqueness, and implementation of their construction.



Alan Stulberg's Austin, Texas-based Revival Cycles workshop fired up its "Birdcage" framed BMW concept engine to the delight of the crowds. Uli Cloesen

Luck had it that personal travel through Germany coincided with round 14 of the Glemseck 101, which took place from Friday night, 30 August, to Sunday, 1 September, 2019. A glorious 31 degrees Celsius (88 degrees Fahrenheit) on Saturday provided the backdrop for a perfect fuel-filled day. On top of this, the entry into Glemseck 101 is free! There are also no parking fees, if arriving by motorcycle. When arriving by tube and bus, it requires a 15-minute walk through a forest to get to the site, which presents itself like an upturned letter T.



The old-style sprint start per flag girl for the Triumph Sprints went down a treat. Uli Cloesen

Turning left was the way toward the 1/8-mile sprint area, with a grandstand, housing 1,000 spectators, while turning right was one of the dealer miles, with all major manufacturers and custom shops present. First up was the Triumph stand with its latest range of bikes, including some café specials, but also showing the company's newest 2,500cc Rocket 3 behemoths, on show for the first time in Germany. A demo run down the 1/8-mile sprint track later in the day showed one of the new Rocket 3 bikes in action. Indian Motorcycle presented itself just around the corner with flat-track bikes and FTR 1200 customs. BMW Motorrad wowed with its Concept R18 cruiser on display, flanked by its commissioned R18-engined specials from the Japanese Custom Works ZON team and Alan Stulberg's Austin, Texas-based workshop's "Birdcage" BMW special, the latter once started up momentarily near the racetrack in the afternoon, with a hell of a soundtrack, to the applause of the audience. Every meter down the mile surprised with yet another shop or spectator special parked along the roadside, be they BMW or any other kind of Japanese or European specials in the mix.



*The rigid-framed Guzzi sprint bike on display looked like it was going to make Mandello proud.
Uli Cloesen*

Close to the rockabilly live band stage, a set of Zündapp mopeds just stood like living art work on the footpath, encapsulating perfectly the whole relaxed creative spirit of the event. A few meters away, MotoGP legend Randy Mamola was talking to a bunch of people at a stall. Indian Motorcycle partnered with him and Workhorse Speedshop to compete on an Indian Scout Bobber drag bike called "Appaloosa" in the afternoon's 1/8-mile Sultan of Sprint races. Randy later missed a gear at the start and lost his first race against his blower Harley rival.



Female racer Amelie Mooseder on the starting grid on a bomber look-alike R nineT-based sprint BMW. Uli Cloesen

Stefan Bronold Jr., from the German shop Radical Guzzi, had several Moto Guzzi café racers on display, fitted with the mighty 1,400cc mill, which normally serves in Mandello del Lario's cruiser range. The Petrolettes' female Wrench Off teams displayed their wares at the Royal Enfield stand. Tents such as from German BMW customizer Rolf Reick's Krautmotors and custom builder veterans Wrenchmonkees from Copenhagen, Denmark, had apparel and custom bikes to goggle over, while down the road Honda and Yamaha displayed some CB1000 and MT/XSR700 specials, respectively. Even a team from Russia had their Ural 650-based ice racer called "Puncher CR" on show, a bike which broke a record in its class at the Bonneville Salt Flats in Utah in 2018.



Guzzi's 1,400cc cruiser mill in new clothes, transformed by German customizer Radical Guzzi. Uli Cloesen

The 1/8-mile sprints in the afternoon were based at the starting and finishing straight of the former Solitude racetrack, on which an acceleration sprint took place over the 1/8-mile distance, roughly 200 meters. Two riders each competed in a knockout system. The respective starts were launched by a flag girl with a checkered flag. Whoever crossed the finish line first won and advanced to the next round. There was no signal light or light barrier at the finish line and no time measurement; it was pure old-school 1/8-mile racing.



The Petrolettes' Wrench Off builders Mel Weier and Christie Sacco found an old Royal Enfield tank from 1926 and knew right away that they wanted to make it the centerpiece of their build.
Uli Cloesen

The program kicked off with two Triumph Speed Twins competing against each other, followed by the Indian Sprint, involving four FTR 1200s in anger. The Triumph Sprint was moderated by guest commentator Mark Wilshire from London's Ace Cafe, where eight Triumph custom bikes battled it out against each other. Among the Triumph competitors was customizer Mr. Martini from Verona in Italy. The BMW Motorrad Sprint involved mainly BMW R nineT-based machinery, with veteran American BMW racer Nate Kern in the mix, sponsored by German BMW accessories specialist Wunderlich. After his races, Nate commented very favorably about the Glemseck 101, stating it was a most enjoyable event, very relaxed, no fights, and great beer, compared to the United States.



Things you can do to an old oilhead BMW engine. This Sultans of Sprint racer caught my attention in the competitors paddock. Uli Cloesen

The MO Classic Racer Sprint featured bikes from done-up old Hondas to Suzuki's GT750 "Kettles" competing, including Isle of Man TT rider Conor Cummins, the latter which also competed in the Honda Sprint on a CB1000R against rival Alex Polita. The Sultans of Sprint—Freak and Factory Class, also featuring Randy Mamola, was probably the most colourful sprint event of the day, where riders didn't take themselves too seriously, all entering the arena dressed up in fancy costumes, that is until they got to the starting grid. Finally, by about 6 p.m., the Starr Wars Sprint, which established itself at Glemseck 101 over the past five years, was the last event of the day, held on motorcycles whose rigid frame construction can be traced directly back to the early days of motorcycle development.



A supercharged Honda Four appeared seemingly crowned at one of the many trade stalls accompanying the event. Uli Cloesen

Accommodation: I stayed at aohostels.com (Budget) close to the center of Stuttgart (U-station Milchhof), two stations away from the Central Station (Stuttgart Hauptbahnhof), a short walking distance away from the Milaneo shopping/dining complex and/or the Heilbronner Str. 89 area, where you find several motorcycle clothes shops selling brand new gear.

Transport: International: Fly to London (or Munich/Frankfurt) then fly to Stuttgart, then take the tube to Central Station (Hbf). Tourist information is only a stone's throw away at the beginning of the Koenigstrasse, which is the main road into the center of town.

Local Transport: Buy a tube network day pass or a 19-euro three-day pass at one of the tube station E-kiosks

Transport to Venue: Take the tube from Stuttgart Central Station (HBF Tief) toward University, then change to bus #92 and exit at Gerlingen Waldfreibad, from there walk 15 minutes to the venue (can't miss it).

(Check bus departure times across the road when arriving, before going to the venue; they leave hourly back to the tube station on a weekend.)

Food: While in Stuttgart, try Swabian Kaespaetzle (local noodle dish with melted cheese) or Zwetschkuchen (plum tart, in the month of September).

Other Things to Do: While in Stuttgart, visit the Porsche Museum in Stuttgart-Zuffenhausen, open Tuesday to Sunday 9–6 and, oh lord, won't you buy me a Mercedes-Benz? That museum is also open Tuesday to Sunday 9–6.

Contact: glemseck101.de

www.motorcyclistonline.com/story/news/europes-biggest-cafe-racer-and-sprint-racer/