

Motorcyclists take to Lake Koshkonong for stunt competition

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Ryan Suchanek is accustomed to popping no-hands wheelies with his street bike.

But not on a frozen lake.

"This is a lot harder," he said.

The Milton man was among a dozen street bike stunt riders to compete Sunday in the Ice Stunt Competition sponsored by Sunset Bar on the north end of Lake Koshkonong.

Although stunt competitions are common on asphalt, this is the first time anybody knows of such a contest being held on ice.

Riders competed to see who could ride the slowest while popping a wheelie or ride a wheelie farthest with no hands. There also was individual and team trick riding.

For the unusual event, the riders of the street bikes-sometimes called crotch rockets-had to borrow technology used by dirt bike riders, who have been racing on ice for years.

To provide traction, they screwed thousands of sharp-headed studs into their front and rear tires.

"Different stud setups are key," Suchanek said. "I'm a firm believer that a pattern works better."

While heavily lugged dirt bike tires provide a clear pattern and plenty of rubber to hold studs, the smoother and thinner street bike tires require more ingenuity. On the rear, they put a tire within a tire for twice the screw-holding power.

Joe Beavers, one of Suchanek's partners in the stunt group Vertical Mischief, said a rear tire studded with 1,100 screws weighs about 60 pounds instead of 15.

"They're so heavy, they want to stop rolling," Beavers said.

Most of the competitors Sunday ran with little or no air in their back tire to improve traction.

Beavers said the studs on ice actually have better traction than rubber on asphalt.

"You dump the clutch, and it's right there," Beaver said.

Beavers has been riding street bikes for about six years and stunting for three. He, Suchanek and the two other members of Vertical Mischief-Andy Lancaster and Dan Rupnow-met through motorcycle riding.

Vertical Mischief was born from on-street mischief.

"One person says he can do a wheelie, and somebody else says he can do one better," Lancaster said. "It just goes from there."

Finding a place to practice stunts is the biggest challenge.

"A wheelie-no matter how fast you're going or where you do it-is a ticket for reckless driving," Beavers said. "If he wants to be a jerk, the cop can write it for reckless endangerment."

Beavers currently is unemployed. He lost his eight-year garbage man job because of his driving record.

But his driving brought cheers from the crowd that gathered on the ice Sunday.

In the acrobatic freestyle competition, Beavers stood on the gas tank of his bike and waved. He sat with his legs over the handlebars. He skated on the ice behind his bike while hanging on to the rear fender.

He said riding on ice takes confidence.

"You think it's going to be slippery, but it's not."

The trick, he said, is convincing yourself.

"It's a mind thing."

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