

Into the Valley 2011: A Chimp's Tale

So finally the last weekend of April was upon us, and it was that time of year again for those good weather bikers to dust off their machines and crank up the engines, as the Yorkshire MAG hosted their first rally of the year: Into the Valley. Set in picturesque East Yorkshire, well most of its nice other parts are twinned with Beirut, the Dalton Estate in South Dalton provides an ideal venue for a 3,000-strong gathering of rally goers. Ironically the venue itself is situated within a valley, which luckily fits in really well for the name it's been given.

Previously held at Sledmere House, the rally was entering its 13th annual event and was looking promising for being a great start to the biker rally season. This rally was also the first time I'd decided to join the dark side at an event.... or became a marshal as I believe is more common phrase. So as you can imagine as I loaded up my MZ with kit for the weekend I was full of trepidation: what would it be like? Would I fit in? Would I prove myself useful, or in typical chimp fashion absolutely bloody useless? But above all else, I asked myself: how far would I get before the bike broke down?

Miracle upon miracles, I managed to make the colossal 13 mile trip with the bike intact and was instantly greeted by the marshals on the gate of the event. It was upon arrival that you really begin to understand what the rallies mean to people. Despite their occasional sarcastic demeanour, the MAG marshals are enthusiastic and welcoming to all with a lot of effort going into the organising and setting up of such events. With an array of stalls, booze and food outlets galore as well as the event and band marquee – there promised to be something for everyone.

After pitching up the tent, I was quickly drafted into marshalling the campsite making sure everyone was ok, letting people know where the amenities and facilities are (that's toilets and fire buckets for the uneducated reader), and just generally welcoming people to the rally as they got set up. Clearly the marshal team had identified my true abilities and potential and had obviously given me prestige of carrying out one of the more technical duties..... Obviously the older legs amongst the group couldn't hack the 8 hours walking, so passed it onto the chimp!

Joking aside, it was great to engage with a variety of bikers from across the country, most of who were at their first rally of the season. So it was great to soak up the community and relaxed atmosphere being generated by the majority. On top of that, despite all the walking, I was like a kid in an un-attended sweet shop as I got to view the array of rides people had come on. Bantams, Fizzies, Viragos, Harleys, *cough* trikes *cough*, I even spotted a Norton Commando on my patrol. I also had the pleasure of chatting with another MZ-er, who was on a silver 250 and proceeded to show off the MZ logo tattoo that they had proudly had inked on their arm. Obviously I was thoroughly captivated with the flow of the conversation and finally escaped what seemed like hours later.

The most pleasing part of my campsite duties though was the number of L plates at the rally. You see, for those of you reading this who have perhaps just done your CBT or are of the impression that rallies are mainly for the rotund, heavily tattooed, hairy, Harley Davidson style biker (which to be fair this species does exist) then you'd be

wrong! With live bands, comedy events and a custom bike show to entertain over the course of the weekend, there's so much to enjoy and really make the rally your own. You can chill, drink and rock out to your hearts content as it's a true social gathering by bikers for bikers, and whether you travel by moped, scooter, trike or bike, as long as you're there to have a laugh and enjoy the event you'll be warmly welcomed. And if like me you've got initial concerns of fitting in – fear not. As during the Saturday afternoon, in traditional homage to the Royal wedding that was taking place, a 6 foot bearded biker (of the male variety) sauntered through the main stall area in full bridal costume and veil. So as you can see most social reprobates are accepted!

The weekend was glorious and lived up to expectations with the custom bike show engrossing all on the Saturday afternoon with the different designs and builds. The comedy show entertained as usual with no topic or individual expense spared. And the main marquee with the range of beers, ciders and real ales alongside a great band line-up – rocked Dalton and the surrounding estate into the wee hours right across the weekend. I could write about Metz behaving like an AA attendee who had stumbled upon a free keg of beer but it's a long story. I could tell you about Aidy's theory on dolphins or why cat skeletons aren't found in trees but that's an even longer story. The point is, that you need to experience the rally for yourself and make it your own gaining your own experiences to remember it by. So in summary, 13 might be considered unlucky for some, but not for me as Into the Valley was top notch and really kick started the rally season into gear!!

Phil "The Chimp" Thompson