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H.G.

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Rally driver shares experiences

TED BROWN
Staff Writer

On New Year's Day, 2001 Halton Hills resident Lawrence Hacking embarked upon a lifelong dream.

For decades he had followed the famous Paris-Dakar Rally, annually held the first 21 days in January, which covers 10,000 km across the Sahara Desert.

Every year, hundreds of competitors would embark upon the rally—on motorcycles, off-road vehicles and trucks—to try and finish the most grueling and demanding rally in the world.

And in 2001 it was Hacking's turn to try it.

By the time he crossed the finish line on his custom-equipped Honda—he was the first Canadian competitor to finish—he knew he would write a book about his experiences.

Entitled *To Dakar and Back: 21 Days Across North Africa by Motorcycle*, the book chronicles his struggle to be the first Canadian to finish the rally while facing lots of personal challenges and hardships.

"The Dakar was certainly a life-changing event," said Hacking, "but even when I was riding through the desert, it was in the back of my mind that I'd write about my experiences."

Hacking said the event moved at such a fast pace that he had little time to make notes beyond sticking post-it notes on his road book (map) to remind him of the day's activities.

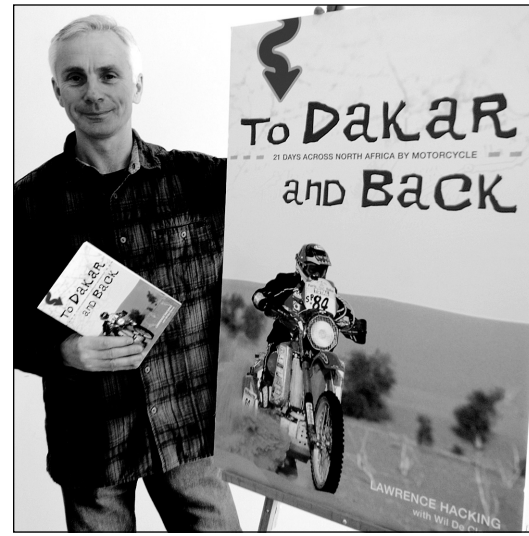
"When competing in the Dakar, life is going by you at 100 miles an hour," said Hacking, "So you don't have much time to write."

"Immediately after, I had written 158 pages—a nucleus for the book—and about a year later, I got in touch with my old friend Wil De Clercq, who is a writer. I turned my notes over to him and he put it together."

"The book is pretty much a blow-by-blow account of the Dakar, and the ups and downs and highs and lows I experienced while taking part," continued Hacking. "It captures the emotions, hardships and determination to finish the thing," added Hacking.

Hacking said the book is designed to be read by someone who isn't really familiar with the Dakar, but hopefully will be drawn in to the excitement of the event.

Hacking was in Lisbon, Spain this past month when the 2008 Dakar was cancelled due to terrorist threats, and has hopes of taking part in the



Lawrence Hacking has written a book about his experience in competing in the Paris-Dakar Rally.

Photo by Ted Brown

2009 race—this time on four wheels, not two. The 2009 race will take place in Argentina and Chile, South America.

"It's a special breed that competes in the Dakar," said Hacking, "something like a person who climbs a mountain, or rides a bike around the world. The Dakar is considered to be one of the world's top adventures, right up there with climbing Mount Everest."

"What the Dakar requires most is accepting the fact the 'buck stops at me,'" said Hacking. "In taking part, you test yourself to the limit."

The Dakar was one of a long list of accomplishments Hacking has racked up since he began riding motorcycles as a teen. He has represented Canada and medaled six times at the International Six Days Enduros with a perfect record of finishing each one. In 2005 and 2007 he entered the Beijing to Ulan Bataar International Rally across the Chinese Gobi desert and won the 250cc class. Hacking finished sixth overall in the Pro Truck category of the 2007 Baja 1000 in Mexico last November, and more recently competed in the Parker 250 off-road race in Arizona.

Hacking's book is published by ECW Press and is available at bookstores and through online bookstores in Canada and the U.S.

Hacking will be at The Freckled Lion, 56 Main St. South, this Saturday from 10:30 a.m. to noon to sign copies of his book.

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