

## Africa Korps R 12 wins 'Concours d'Elegance' Down Under

In Australia the premier Concours d'Elegance is the Bay to Birdwood. This classic event was established in 1980 and is run annually from Adelaide to the National Motor Museum in Birdwood, taking in around 70 kilometres of magnificent riding through beautiful countryside.

The most recent event was open to vehicles produced up to 1956 and featured a cavalcade of 1,500 cars and motorcycles from the earliest days of the internal combustion engine. And just like every year, it attracted a selection of beautifully prepared machines with their owners entering the spirit of the day by dressing in period costume.



Among the magnificent display of motoring history was David Lean's 1941 Afrika Korps R 12 outfit, complete with all the equipment needed in the desert while serving in WWII under Erwin Rommel. To complete the ensemble, David and his passenger were dressed in the desert field uniform of the Wehrmacht.

The R 12 was the BMW workhorse of the pre-war era. Released in 1935, it had a pressed-steel frame and side-valve M56a 750cc motor. Producing 18 hp (20 hp with twin carburettors) the R 12 proved itself to be a very reliable motorcycle as a solo or fitted with a sidecar. Over 36,000 were made and many saw service with German civil and military authorities.

David's R 12 was one of the last produced before the model was discontinued and motorcycle production (with the R 75) was relocated from Munich to Eisenach. After the war the bike found its way to India where it was in continuous use until 1991. It was subsequently brought to Australia where a superficial restoration was carried out before the bike was housed in a museum.

“I had always admired the R 12 and thought that it deserved a better fate than it had received, so as soon as it became available, due to the museum closure, I jumped at the chance,” said owner David Lean.

He began a two-year full strip-down and restoration project. Missing parts were acquired from around the world and if necessary David reproduced the part himself. While scraping layers of paint from the bike David found the original tropical colour, giving an indication that the R 12 had been issued to the Afrika Korps. David researched the Korps and the R 12 is as authentic a restoration as possible.



“I was just happy to have the R 12 in the Bay to Birdwood, where it could be seen and enjoyed by the crowd,” said David. “It was a great day to be involved in and when I heard my name called I thought, ‘that’s great I have won the award for motorcycles’. As it turned out, there was no motorcycle award – the R 12 had been awarded the outright Concours d’Elegance! I was stunned, to say the least, but it was a fantastic day and made the restoration well worth the many hours of effort.”

The Concours entrants were subject to a rigorous judging regime with the judging panel checking and rechecking down to the smallest detail. The R 12 was described as a credit to David and the workers who produced the bike 67 years ago.