

Lettenbichler scales the heights at Hell's Gate

BMW Motorrad Motorsport team rider Andreas Lettenbichler was among the seven finishers at the 2009 running of the Hell's Gate event in Italy on Saturday 14 February. One of the toughest one-day enduro style races in the world, 'Letti' finished in an impressive sixth place as trials riders and WEC regulars filled the final finishing positions.



Bringing together many of Europe's best extreme enduro riders to this picturesque area of Tuscany, Lettenbichler and BMW team-mate Gerhard Forster were among 50 riders hopeful of qualifying for the infamously tough main Hell's Gate race. Faced with a four-hour qualifying enduro, which itself was anything but easy, Letti and Gerhard cruised through into the main event after finishing seventh and 11th respectively.

Well aware of just how demanding the four-lap Hell's Gate race would be, both riders set off from the start hopeful of remaining among the front runners. With riders removed from the competition by the event organisers when they fall more than 30 minutes behind the leader, both BMW riders pushed hard to ensure they remained in the event.

With defending Hell's Gate winner Taddy Blazusiak setting the pace at the front of the pack it wasn't long before the organisers started removing riders from the rear of the field. But having started well, and maintaining a solid pace, Letti spent much of the first half of the race in fifth place. Frustratingly for Forster, his race came to a premature end when he dropped too far behind the leaders. As one of the last riders to be withdrawn from the event Gerhard had nevertheless given his all and showed just how tough he and his G 450 X were.

With a prized finishing position well within his reach Letti continued to work his way towards the finish, being passed by only one rider during the closing stages of the race. Comfortably less than 30 minutes behind eventual winner Blazusiak, Letti found the

final hour of the race hard but still managed to find the energy to muscle his way to the top of the event's finish line, named Hell's Peak. In doing so he claimed a well-deserved sixth place finish, giving BMW its best ever Hell's Gate result.

Andreas Lettenbichler – BMW G 450 X: “I always knew that the Hell's Gate event would be tough, but I wasn't expecting it to be as tough as it was. There was nowhere you could relax because the ground was frozen – you needed to be 100 per cent focused all the time. I'm really pleased to have finished though, and really enjoyed the challenge, but I did find it tough.

“Finishing seventh in the morning qualifying enduro was great. It put me in a good position for the start of the Hell's Gate main race. I didn't have too many problems in the main race and my bike was great, but it was hard out there. I pushed as much as I could, and was in fifth for much of the race, but towards the end I was feeling tired. Riding at night was challenging because the terrain was so slippery. To reach the top of Hell's Peak was a real relief.”

Hell's Gate 2009 results

1. Taddy Blazusiak (KTM); 2. Alessandro Botturi (KTM); 3. Dougie Lampkin (Beta); 4. Graham Jarvis (Sherco); 5. Tom Sagar (Husaberg); **6. Andreas Lettenbichler (BMW Motorrad Motorsport)**; 7. Piero Sembenini (Gas Gas); **9. Gehrard Forster (BMW Motorrad Motorsport)**.