

'Can and able to do Raid De Himalaya'

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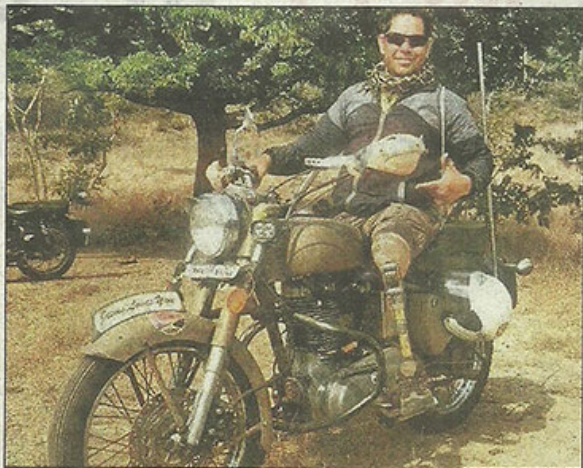
Shimla: In a global first, two amputees will compete on motorbikes in the world's highest cross-country rally raid, the Raid de Himalaya. Setting this global record are Vinod Rawat of Mumbai and Ashok Munne of Nagpur. What makes these amputees take on a rally that is the litmus test for motor-sport adventure seekers in the country? The four words that people have thrown at them over the years, "You can't do it."

The raid, considered among the top 10 toughest rallies of the world, will start from Leh on October 8 and finish on October 14. Over 200 competitors participating in Raid de Himalaya 2018 will race over some of the most challenging roads in Kargil, Zaskar and Ladakh sectors, speeding over rock, gravel and dust.

The amputees, Vinod Rawat and Ashok Munne are competing in the toughest category, Xtreme Moto. Racing motorcycles at high-altitude roads and mountain passes is a task few can accomplish.

Munne is a Nagpur man. He is a gifted para-athlete, a mountaineer, an expert para-glider, a scuba diver, a marathon runner, a black belt in martial arts, a skilled gymnast and kayaker, yoga expert and ace swimmer.

Munne climbed the Everest in 2016 and plans to repeat the feat in 2019. He lost a leg in a train accident in 2008 but didn't let the handicap limit his life. "I was 24 when I lost my leg in a train accident. People said life as I knew it was over. But I proved that I could and would do



(From left) Vinod Rawat and Ashok Munne are ready to participate in one of the toughest races in the world

everything in life. There is no physical limitation. I will live my life the way I want to."

Munne, who uses a blade leg, is brand ambassador for two multi-national artificial limb companies. He climbed the Mera Peak in Nepal, at a height of 6,476 meters, without oxygen. In 2013, he drove 3,000 kilometers through Ladakh on his motorcycle. He says he is ecstatic to be able to fulfill his dream of participating in the Raid de Himalaya.

"Now everything is a surprise in life. Everything is a new joy. It feels wonderful that I am competing in the Raid this year. I had never thought I would live such an exciting life," said Munne.

Rawat, who lives in Mumbai, lived the Raid dream in his head for nine years. His leg was amputated when he was child. He got his driving license in 2000, and has been an avid motorcyclist since. "I came to know about the Raid in 2010.

THE TEAM | Ashok Munne, who uses a blade leg the Mera Peak in Nepal, at a height of 6,476 meters, without oxygen. Vinod Rawat has been practicing in Leh every year since 2011

Since then, it has been my most cherished dream to finish it," he said.

Rawat was not the one to take his Raid dream lightly. He has been going to Leh since 2011 at least once a year, practicing motorcycling there to get himself acclimatized to high-altitude terrain.

In 2017, as part of his Raid preparation, Rawat went to Leh on a cycle all the way from Manali via Khardung La. He says he undertook the rally to check his stability and stamina. "Like we test

the power of the bike, I wanted to test myself. Machine doesn't take the man. The man takes the machine," said Rawat.

Rawat is driving a 150-four stroke Indian bike at the Raid and he is confident that he will finish it. "You may call it over-confidence, but I believe in it 100%. For 18 years, ever since I became a motorcyclist, people tried to scare me because I am an amputee. I have always stood my ground. I will prove them wrong this time too," said the determined 43-year-old.

Rawat's Raid dream is being sponsored by Jaipur Foot, the artificial-limb providing company that gave him the rubber-based prosthetic leg to enable normal movement. "We want to reach the disabled and give them hope," said Rawat. "When I compete at the Raid, people with disabilities will know that they don't have to live restricted, fearful lives," he said.

The Mumbai man admits that he could have chosen to be the first amputee globally to participate on a motorcycle in a rally as formidable as the Raid de Himalaya. "But I thought I should take another amputee along. This would be such amazing inspiration for the disabled," he said.

Raid de Himalaya is the flagship event of the country's premier motorsport club, Shimla-based Himalayan Motorsport. President, Himalayan Motorsport Vijay Parmar said their club has always promoted the spirit of excellence in life and achieving against all odds by supporting para-athletes like Deepa Malik, Arun Bareja and now Ashok Munne and Vinod Rawat.

"At the end of the day, without the possibility of an impossible challenge, the human being is nothing at all! We are amazed by their determination, and what they have achieved," said Parmar.