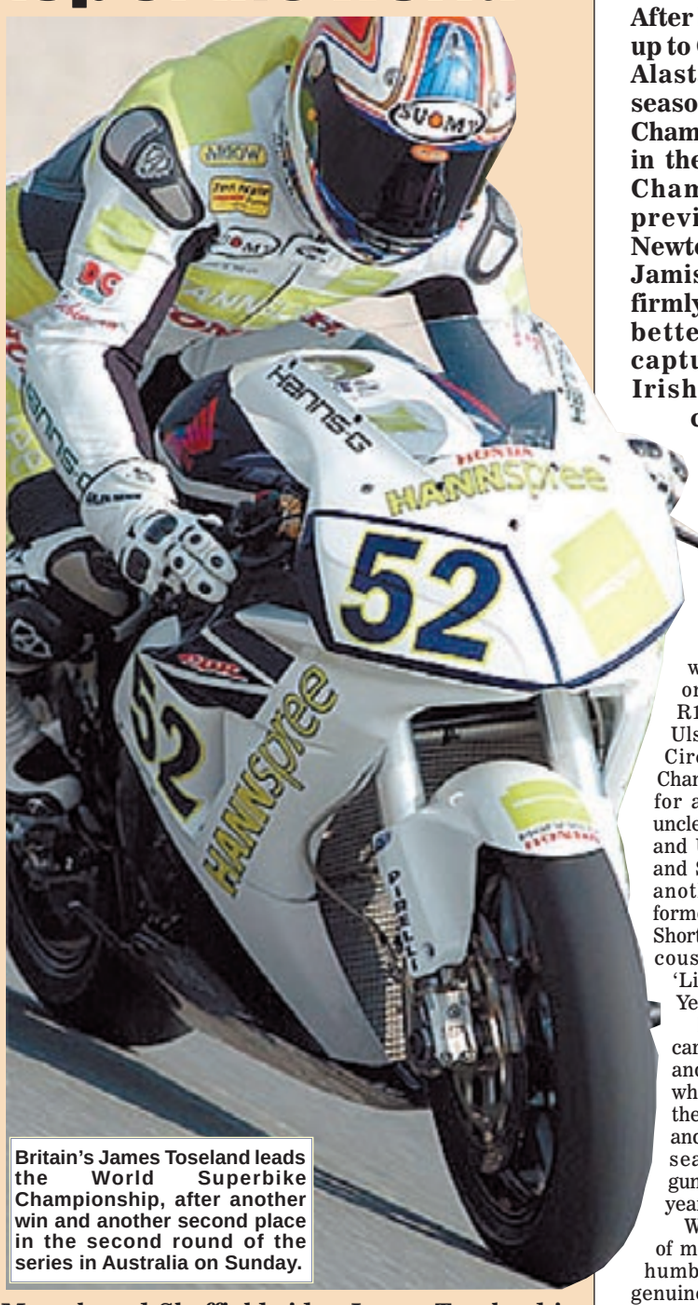
Motor cycling with John Savage

Toseland is on top of the world



Britain's James Toseland leads the World Superbike Championship, after another win and another second place in the second round of the series in Australia on Sunday.

Manx-based Sheffield rider James Toseland is on top of the world, following another win and another second place in the second round of the World Superbike Championship, at Phillip Island in Melbourne, Australia.

After sharing a win and a second place with Italian Max Biaggi in the curtain-raiser to the season in Qatar the previous weekend, Toseland finished runner-up to home hero Troy Bayliss in Sunday's first race, before he out-foxed and out-rode the defending champion to win the second.

Astride his factory Xerox Ducati, Bayliss grabbed pole position for his home race, and the first race developed into a duel between Bayliss and Toseland, with the Englishman leading for 18 of the 22 laps, aboard the Hannspree Ten Kate Honda Fireblade CBR1000RR, before Bayliss hit the front and went on to take his 35th WSB victory, ahead of Toseland, with Biaggi third on the Alstare Corona Suzuki GSX-R1000.

In the second race — a brilliant spectacle — Toseland produced arguably a career best performance to fend off a concerted challenge from Bayliss, as Noriyuki Haga grabbed third in a photo-finish with Biaggi and Haga's factory Yamaha team-mate, 2005 WSB champion Troy Corser.

After his tenth WSB victory, jubiliant Toseland recounted: "Race one was a tough one. I was going hell for leather and I was expecting to open up the gap between Bayliss and myself, but it never happened — he stuck to me like glue. It's his home track, but that makes no difference. Troy ran a fantastic race, so fair play to him. I was pleased for him, but I wasn't so pleased to be in second.

"In race two, I tried to preserve the [rear] tyre and I managed to keep Bayliss behind me. I knew it would be hard, but I just kept going and I got the win. It's an honour to be riding with such great competition and to hear Bayliss complimenting me is very flattering."

The third round of the 13 rounds, 26 races, World Superbike Championship is at Donington Park on April 1, and unsurprisingly Toseland beamed: "It's a great feeling to be going to Donington as the championship leader. I feel like I am getting better and better and I can't wait to race at home."

2004 WSB champion Toseland leads Biaggi by 16 points ahead of his home round, with Bayliss a further ten points adrift.

Frenchman Fabien Foret scored his tenth World Supersport Championship triumph, and Kawasaki's first WSS victory for four years, when he brilliantly brought his ZX-6R home ahead of championship leader Kenan Sofuoglu's Hannspree Ten Kate Honda CBR600RR and Aussie Broc Parkes' Honda, with defending champion Sebastien Charpentier fourth on the second Hannspree Ten Kate Honda. After his 12th place in the opening round in Qatar, the only British rider in the race, Craig Jones, grabbed another couple of points for 14th place on the Reve Ekerold Honda. Turkish rider Sofuoglu has a seven points lead over Foret, ahead of the next round at Donington Park.

JAMISON MAPS OUT TITLE CHALLENGE

After he finished runner-up to Carrickfergus man Alastair Seeley in last season's Irish Superbike Championship, and third in the Irish Supersport Championship the previous year, Newtownards man Kirk Jamison has his sights firmly set on going one better this term, by capturing an elusive Irish short circuit championship title.

The 26 year old finance manager, for H&J Martin Construction, understandably harbours an ambition to follow the Jamison family tradition and bring home an Irish championship medal.

His father, Norman, who 'wields the spanners' on Kirk's Suzuki GSX-R1000, won the Irish and Ulster 350cc Classic Short Circuit and Road Race Championships from 1993—96, for all but one season; his uncle, David, is a former Irish and Ulster 200cc Road Race and Short Circuit champion; another uncle, Brian, is a former Irish and Ulster 80cc Short Circuit champion; while cousin Nigel is a former 'Lightweight Rider of the Year'.

It is a proud burden to carry for Kirk, a personable and eloquent father-of-four, who has been racing since the end of the 1997 season, and fully enjoyed his rookie season amongst the 'big guns' in superbike racing last year.

With his grandfather — one of motor cycle racing's most humble, gentlemanly and genuine enthusiasts — having passed away just a few weeks ago, 2007 would be a apt year for 'Jamison junior' to continue the illustrious family tradition and bring home another Irish title.

'Feckin quick!' Kirk Jamison puts the Jim Angus Contracts Suzuki GSX-R1000 through its paces, during testing at Bishopscourt last Saturday.

Kirk is back to full fitness, after he dislocated a shoulder for the second time, as the result of a crash during an Irish Superbike Championship race last September, at Mondello Park, in Co Kildare, then exacerabted the injury at last October's end-of-season Sunflower Trophy meeting at Bishopscourt.

Last Saturday — in preparation for the opening round of the Irish Superbike Championship at Mondello Park on St Patrick's Day — Kirk had his first shakedown of the year at Bishopscourt, astride the same Jim Angus Contracts-backed Suzuki GSX-R1000 he raced last year

He recounted: "The day passed without a hitch. The bike feels great, and I feel in a better physical condition than ever before. Whilst I know it is going to be a tough year, I am full of confidence, heading to round one of the Irish Championship at Mondello.

"I have three Irish Superbike Championship (ISB) races, plus three races for the Leinster 200 Trophy that weekend, so it is a hectic start to the season, but one I am looking forward to.

"I am running the same Jim Angus Contracts Suzuki as per last year. The bike has been refreshed and repainted, and I have been putting the hours in at the Spa Gym at the Culloden, under the watchful eye of assistant manager David McMinn.

"My shoulder injury from the tail end of last season is getting back to full strength and there is even a bit more room in the old leathers this year, which is always a good sign!

"2007 will be my second year in the Irish Superbike Championship, and after finishing runner-up last year, I am obviously aiming for one better this time around.

"As well as a full ISB campaign, I will be making my first trip to Scotland for round two of their national championship in April, and sampling the new Anglesey track in Wales in June, before returning to Croft in July to defend my Ken Redfern Memorial Trophy, and hopefully becoming the first Irishman to win it twice".

The unique Ken Redfern Trophy, one of the most famous trophies in British motor cycle racing, is presented in memory of Ken Redfern, a motor cycle racer who was killed in a road traffic accident in 1973.

The trophy — a magnificent sculpture of a wild goose and a laurel wreath — was originally and formerly awarded to the winner of the Ken Redfern Trophy race at the Oliver's Mount parkland circuit in Scarborough, but more recently the race for the magnificent trophy has been staged at Croft, the British Superbike Championship venue in north Yorkshire.

Previous winners of the trophy, which has been awarded since 1977, include Roger Marshall, Steve Henshaw, David Jefferies, Iain Simpson, Brian Morrison, Jim Moodie, Jim Whitham and John McGuinness, and the only other previous Irish winner was Joey Dunlop, back in 1984.

Kirk also has other plans: "Towards the end of the season, I will be returning to Anglesey for my first attempt at the Anglesey Grand event and hopefully taking in one British MRO round.

"I have also been offered the chance to travel to Spain at the end of the year to take in the last two rounds of the CEV Championships at Jerez and Valencia, but I won't know how viable it will be until the time.

"As if it weren't a busy enough year, I look set to be riding the UK Fleet Monitor CBR600RR Honda on my trips to Scotland and Wales, for Englishman Wayne Griffiths".

Kirk has had a good response from local businesses to his search for sponsorship, with continued backing from Jim Angus Contracts, Nice Bike Paintshop, Sew-Biz, Pressford Shutters, and Stephen Bailie Estate Agents. In addition he has attracted backing from Portaferry-based 'Feckin Irish Whiskey', his employers, H&J Martin, plus, N. G. Bell & Sons, Rodney Brown Gardening Services, and Muckle Haulage.

Kirk acknowledges all the support he has received: "I cannot thank them enough. Retaining sponsors is always a real confidence booster, as it must mean you are doing something right. In addition to these, I have acquired some excellent new backing. All in all it's the best financial package I have had to date, and I am indebted to these people's generosity."

Kirk also wishes to thank Derek Keenan for organising last month's fund-raising evening in Conlig Orange Hall, and thanks everyone who turned up to support the evening.

Jezza geared up for Ilmor debut

In his own words, Ulster's world championship grands prix veteran Jeremy McWilliams 'can't wait' for the opening MotoGP of the year, in Qatar on Saturday.

The 42 year old veteran, and last British rider to win a grand prix — the 250cc world championship race at Assen in Holland in 2001 — makes his MotoGP debut for the Ilmor GP team at Losail in Doha on Saturday with the philosophy: "Let's see what we can do!"

Jeremy partners Australian Andrew Pitt in the fledgling Ilmor GP team in this season's blue riband MotoGP World Championship, despite suffering a fractured left femur, broken collarbone and the loss of a fingertip, when he crashed at high speed, while testing the 800cc Ilmor XR3 machine at Jerez in Spain last November.

It's been a long and sometimes painful road back to fitness for the evergreen McWilliams, who made his grands prix debut 14 years ago at Philip Island in Australia, in the former 500cc world championship.

The Ulsterman has made 177 starts in the 250cc, 500cc and MotoGP classes, during which he has scored three pole positions and mounted the podium five times, perhaps most memorably when he finished a brilliant third in the 2000 British 500cc Grand Prix at Donington Park.

Following what the factory describes as 'a productive test' at Jerez at the end of last month, Ilmor GP — MotoGP's newest and only British team, based in Northamptonshire — is now in Qatar for the first round of the 18 rounds MotoGP World Championship, for which qualifying takes place today (Thursday) and tomorrow.

Jeremy McWilliams again flies the flag for Ulster, when the MotoGP World Championship kicks into gear in Qatar on Saturday.

The team, headed by former Formula One motor racing guru Mario Illien, admits it heads to the Middle East in nervous anticipation, as the company lines up alongside the might of rivals, Ducati, Honda, Kawasaki, Suzuki and Yamaha.

McWilliams and Pitt both felt progress was made with the Ilmor's engine development during testing in Qatar and at Jerez, and during the Spanish test the duo put the new Ilmor engine through its paces for the first time.

The factory admits this weekend's Qatar debut will witness the engine get a further performance upgrade, following analysis of the data accumulated at Jerez.

Swiss-born team owner Illien is renowned as an engineering genuis. The Ilmor company was founded by Illien, Paul Morgan and Roger Penske in 1984 and rapidly became successful in the USA in Indycar racing and progressed to competing in Formula One in the early nineties, winning the world championship with McLaren in 1998 and 1999.

Ilien revealed: "I'm hopeful that we have made some progress with all the data we collected in Jerez. The electronics team have been working very hard since we got back. I'm really looking forward to the first race. It's going to be really exciting for us, as a team, to compete in a race situation again."

Nevertheless, team manager Mike Janes signalled a note of caution: "We've made steady progress in the past few months and we are much clearer on the direction that we need to work towards now. The whole team has been working flat out at the Ilmor factory in Brixworth since Jerez and I know everyone is full of anticipation and waiting to see what we can do in Qatar.

"We've come a long way in a relatively short space of time, but there are still a number of areas in which we need to improve. I'm pleased with what we've achieved so far, although it's important we continue to make progress as the season gets underway."

Eternal teenager McWilliams found it difficult to disguise his enthusiasm: "I can't wait for the first race. It will be great once the lights go green. There's so much anticipation and nerves before the first race of any season, so it will be good to get it out of the way."

However, Jeremy conceded: "My only slight worry is that due to my accident at Jerez last November, I haven't had as much time on the bike as I would have liked. Physically I feel good. My leg is still a little weak, but my upper body is really strong and once I'm on the bike I forget about my leg."

He cheekily grinned: "Losail is a great circuit to ride. It's really technical and quite complicated to ride well, so I'm looking forward to the challenge. Let's see what we can do!"

Encouraging Ducati test for Laverty

Toomebridge man John Laverty has had his first test on the Buildbase Ducati, aboard which he is expected to be a front-runner in this season's British National Superstock Championship.

24 year old Laverty finished fifth in last year's Superstock Championship, astride a Buildbase Suzuki GSX-R1000, but the team has switched to the new Ducati 1098 for the forthcoming season, and neither John, nor team-mate Kieran Clarke, had ever ridden a V-twin Ducati, which has totally different characteristics to the Japanese in-line four cylinder machines and requires a completely different riding style.

The Ducati 1098 was unveiled at Milan Motorcycle Show last November, and the bikes were launched the following month at the Kyalami circuit in South Africa, where they were put through their paces by World Superbike champion Troy Bayliss and his Xerox Ducati WSB team-mate, Lorenzo Lanzi.

Australian ace Bayliss broke the Kyalami lap record by over a second and early indications are that the Ducati will be extremely competitive and capable of challenging the four Japanese manufacturers for the National Superstock title, which last year was claimed by Aussie Brendan Roberts.

Laverty and Clarke tested last Thursday, Friday, Saturday and Sunday, at the sun-baked Cartagena circuit in south east Spain, where the new Ducatis performed impeccably, and did not miss a beat during the four days of testing.

It was the first time the entire team had met each other and worked together, so it proved to be an excellent pre-season shakedown for everyone involved.

The team still has a lot of performance enhancements to make to the bikes before the official British Superbike Championship tests at Snetterton in Norfolk later this month, and Buildbase Ducati will benefit from support direct from Ducati Corse in Bologna, Italy, and from Ducati UK, so the Cartagena performances were all the more encouraging, in the knowledge that the bikes were pretty much in road trim.

Rea fastest in Spanish tests

Ballyclare's Jonathan Rea was consistently the quickest rider, when the leading British Superbike Championship teams put their new machinery through its paces in Spain last week.

Having recovered from the leg injuries he sustained when he crashed at the Mallory Park 'Race of the Year' last October, the day after he won the Sunflower Trophy at Bishopscourt, 20 year old Rea topped the leaderboard during three days of testing at the Almeria circuit, in southern Spain, astride the factory HM Plant Honda Fireblade CBR1000RR, and the Ulsterman was again quickest when the teams moved to the Gaudix circuit.

The Almeria test was Jonathan's first outing on the factory Honda, although the machine is not dissimilar from the Red Bull Honda Fireblade aboard which he finished a brilliant fourth in last season's British Superbike Championship.

Jonathan said: "I'm gelling well with the team and my knee is feeling okay. It was great to be back out on the bike, which is really good, as are the tyres. It was the first time I've been out on a bike since the crash, so I have a few aches and pains, but nothing to worry about, and for a first test, my general feeling is that it has all gone very well. All in all it has been a very good workout for me"

On the second day of testing at Almeria, Rea was 0.41 seconds faster than his team-mate, defending BSB champion Ryuichi Kiyonari, ahead of Airwaves Ducati duo Leon Haslam and Gregorio Lavilla.

New Stobart Honda pairing Shane Byrne and Tom Sykes both tested at Almeria, as did Rizla Suzuki duo Chris Walker and Cal Crutchlow, together with 2005 British Supersport champion Leon Camier and the Bridewell brothers, Ollie and Tom, both aboard Team NB Suzukis.

On the final day of testing, Haslam — last season's BSB championship runner-up — closed to within a quarter-of-a-second of Rea's best time, despite taking a tumble during the morning session.

Haslam was pleased with his first good weather test, but admitted: "I was looking forward to improving my times on the third day and my crash set me back, but I am absolutely fine. I am pleased with the times overall, especially as we are still working on some settings on the bike and the new Ohlins shocks. I think, as we work on the fine tuning, the consistency will improve, with more race runs at the next test."

2005 BSB champion Lavilla was upbeat: "This test has been good. We worked on a number of things and it has been a starting point for me, with the bike, tyres and settings. We have tried some different things that we thought about last season, and overall we have done a really good job here. I am looking to get the feeling back with more testing and hopefully we can continue the good work."

Airwaves Ducati arrived at the Gaudix circuit for further testing, as the other teams departed.

Chris Walker, returning to BSB from the World Superbike Championship, was third quickest at Almeria, ahead of Lavilla, Byrne and Kiyonari.

Walker pointed out: "We are genuinely the only team at this test with two new riders who are not only learning new bikes, but coming to grips with new generation Dunlop slicks for the first time. Bearing that in mind, I think it has been a fruitful test and I am very happy with progress and the performance of my technicians."

Sykes, who finished runner-up to Crutchlow in last season's British Supersport Championship, escaped injury when he crashed Paul Bird's Stobart Honda during the morning session on the final day of testing at Almeria, but he was back in action at Gaudix.

Despite suffering mild concussion as a result of a heavy tumble on the first day of three days testing at Gaudix, Rea was again fastest, half-a-second quicker than team-mate Kiyonari.

Byrne was second fastest at Gaudix, just 0.16 secs behind Rea, while Walker was also impressive.

Chris Walker puts the Rizla Suzuki GSX-R1000 through its paces.

Virus hampers Laverty

A stomach virus hampered Toomebridge man Eugene Laverty, during his final pre-grands prix shakedown in Qatar last week.

Last month, the 20 year old tested the Honda he will campaign in this year's 250cc World Championship for former 125cc world championship ace Lucio Cecchinello's Team LCR Honda, at Catalunya, near Barcelona, before moving on two days of testing at the Ricardo Tormo circuit in Valencia, followed by more pre-season preparation at Jerez.

The Losail circuit was Laverty's final pre-season test, ahead of the opening round of the 250cc World Championship at the middle eastern track on Saturday.

During two days of testing last Wednesday and Thursday, Eugene notched up 94 laps of the Doha track, as he continues to adapt from riding a four-stroke Honda CBR600RR in last season's British Supersport Championship, to a factory-kitted two-stroke RS250 Honda.

Despite being plagued by a stomach bug and a 'small' crash, Eugene is optimistic going into the season curtain-raiser.

He said: "I have been here some years ago, so I already knew this track, but on the 250 it was completely different. We carried out some changes on the bike setting and now I feel more comfortable. Basically we must improve the front end set-up, because I need more stability."

The 18 rounds 250cc World Championship begins on Saturday in Qatar and continues at Jerez in March 25, and Eugene added: "I have had very little testing time, but I feel confident for the future, because my team is working hard and the first two rounds will be nice to bed myself in, as I know both circuits."

Qualifying for the opening GP takes place at Losail today (Thursday) and tomorrow.

Eugene Laverty putting the LCR Honda through its paces at Losail in Qatar, where the 250cc World Championship kicks into gear on Saturday.

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