

Motor cycling with John Savage

# FOUR OUT OF FOUR FOR KENNEDY

In a crucial shakedown, before the start of the British Supersport Championship, at Brands Hatch on Easter Monday, young Dubliner Jack Kennedy scored four wins from four starts, when the Irish Superbike Championship swung into action at wintery Mondello Park in Co Kildare last weekend.

Kennedy, who will again contest the Privateers' Cup series, which runs concurrently with the main British Supersport Championship, after his rookie season last year, won both Irish Supersport 600 Championship races and notched back to back wins in the Birrane Cup series.

Conditions were such that the promoting Leinster Club could run only one third of the scheduled programme on Saturday and Sunday, as sleet and snow plagued the Naas circuit on the second day.

Following practising and qualifying last Saturday, the race programme went ahead as planned, however, Sunday's programme was halved, as it was only possible to run one race per class.

Both Irish Superbike Championship races had to be red-flagged, as a consequence of which only half points were awarded in each race.

Superbike rookie Lee Wilson, from Richill, made a winning debut in Saturday's race, having moved up to the superbike class, after winning the Irish Lightweight Supersport Championship for the past two seasons, but injury ruled him out of Sunday's race, which was won by Newtownards man Kirk Jamison.

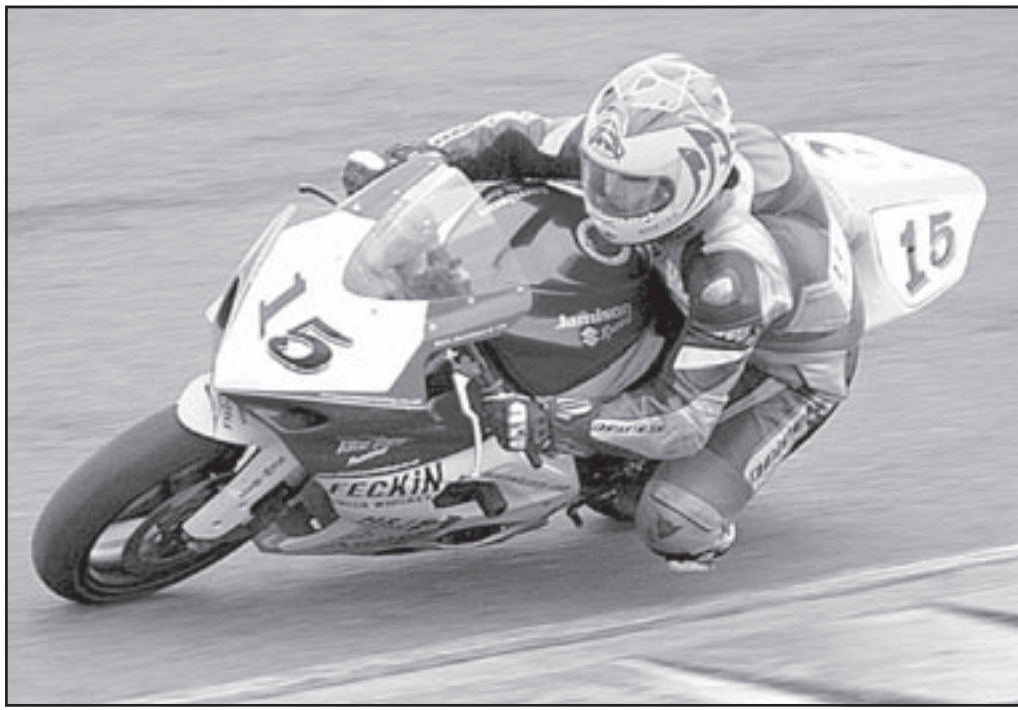
But second places in both races, means Moneyreagh's Michael Pearson is the early pace-setter in the Irish Superbike Championship, with a 2.5 points advantage over Jamison, ahead of the next two rounds of the series, at Bishopscourt on Easter Saturday.

**Irish Superbike Championship**

Kirk Jamison was nearly a non-starter at Mondello, after he was injured while playing football!

The Ardsman takes up the story: "After weeks of preparation, fund-raising and training, I had never been so confident and perfectly poised to make an immediate impact on a season, as I was this year. That was until around four hours before I left for Mondello last Friday when it turned into 'Oh \*\*\*\*, what's Plan B?'"

"I had agreed to play in a charity football tournament for my employers and sponsors, H. & J. Martin. Two minutes into match one and I had scored; three minutes in and I was down with a damaged nerve in



Back on top! Newtownards man Kirk Jamison won the second round of the Irish Superbike Championship at Mondello Park on Sunday. Photo by Roy Adams Photography

my lower back. Two hours of manipulation, electric pulse treatment, acupuncture and massages couldn't undo the damage. We decided to head for Mondello anyway, hoping I would wake up in a better condition on Saturday."

It is a well worn cliché that when you think things can't get much worse, they invariably do. After leaving Newtownards, Kirk's van picked up a puncture and he didn't arrive at Mondello Park until 2am.

Last Saturday's opening round of the Irish Superbike Championship, over the 2.2 miles Mondello international circuit, was staged on a wet track, and Lee Wilson was the surprise victor, although Wilson actually didn't take the chequered flag, on his Honda Fireblade CBR1000RR.

Michael Weldon was running fifth when he crashed and caused the race to be stopped, and on the restart, Wilson and Dubliner Brian McCormack collided and the red flags came out again — the result was declared from positions at the completion of just two laps.

Wilson — who injured a wrist in the spill, and was forced to sit out Sunday's race — was awarded the win, eight seconds ahead of Michael Pearson, with McCormack third and Weldon fourth.

With Corkman Declan Swanton fifth, Jamison took sixth place, and Kirk recounted: "My back was in spasm and I had to be dressed, put into my leathers, and helped onto the bike, such was the pain. Starting from row two, I tagged onto the leading group in sixth, but was struggling to move around on the bike."

Sunday's race also failed to run full distance, after it was red-flagged due to the weather.

Back home in icy Ireland, after his tremendous efforts in the Florida sunshine at the Daytona 200, Michael Pearson set the pace, again on a wet

track, and on the second lap it began to snow.

Undeterred, Jamison turned up the wick on his Jim Angus Contracts Suzuki GSX-R1000 and overtook Pearson, and he had pulled out a three seconds cushion when the race was prematurely halted.

Kirk related: "The Mondello medical staff were fantastic, working with me to try and free the back spasms and control the pain, but to no avail. I was worse on Sunday and couldn't walk more than a few feet. I hoped the intermittent snow would worsen enough to have the meeting abandoned, but the sun came out!"

"Dad [Norman] made the tyre choice, opting for intermediates, claiming the wind would dry the track in time. After being helped onto the bike again, I realised dad had got it spot on — every other rider on the grid had opted for wets and the track had dried."

"I got a cracking start and followed Michael Pearson into turn one. After following him for a lap, the rain and snow came on, which meant Michael had the better tyres. Good old adrenaline kicked in, however, and I decided to go for the win."

"I passed Michael and went for it in the driving sleet. After a lap I glanced round and I had left them all behind. Just as I was about to go onto the last lap, the red flags came out due to the weather and I was given the win. My fastest lap was actually over 1.5 seconds faster than anyone else."

Kirk grinned: "My football days may be over, but my ISB title aspirations are still well on track, although I'm now laid up from work, full of drugs, on my floor at home. Hopefully I'll be 100% fit for Easter."

Pearson's second place was sufficient to give him a 2.5 points lead in the championship, four points ahead of Swanton, who finished three seconds behind in third.

McCormack was fourth, ahead of Damien Byrne and last year's Irish Senior Clubmans' short circuit champion David Craig, from Moira.

**Birrane Cup**

The Birrane Cup series is held exclusively at Mondello Park and is open to the fastest riders at each meeting at the track — although he qualified 11th, Jamison opted to sit out both Saturday and Sunday races due to his back problems.

The same trio of riders finished in the top three places in both races.

On Saturday, Jack Kennedy completed the six laps on his TAG Racing Honda with four seconds cushion over Declan Swanton, with Brian McCormack a distant third.

In Sunday's race, Kennedy finished with a two seconds advantage over Swanton, with McCormack a further eight seconds in arrears.

**Irish Supersport 600 Championship**

Jack Kennedy also dominated the Irish Supersport 600 Championship races.

He won Saturday's race by a commanding 11 seconds, from Randalstown man Matthew Percy, with James Dickson, from Portstewart, a further two seconds behind in third.

Percy cut Kennedy's winning margin to eight seconds on Sunday, with Gary Robinson improving from eighth the previous day to take third, ahead of Peter Newell, from Cookstown, and Dickson — Newell had been sixth in Saturday's race.

**Irish 250cc Championship**  
The Irish 250cc Short Circuit Championship made a welcome return to the calendar, with a healthy entry, and honours were evenly shared between northern and southern rivals.

Southern duo Ronan Shanahan and Thomas Lawlor, both 250cc specialists, fought out a tremendous duel in Saturday's race, in which Shanahan grabbed the win in a photo-finish, with Ballymoney's William Dunlop 11 seconds back in third, just ahead of Bangor man Gary Ferguson, who posted the fastest lap of the race.

Dunlop got the bit between his teeth to win Sunday's race, in which Lawlor clocked the fastest lap and turned the tables on Shanahan by taking second, with David Craig fourth, as Ferguson had to settle for seventh.

**Irish 125cc Championship**  
Cousins Paul Robinson and William Dunlop shared the spoils in the opening two rounds of the Irish 125cc Championship, although it was Michael Dunlop who pushed Robinson hardest in Saturday's race.

Robinson won by half-a-second, as Michael Dunlop took third, a couple of seconds ahead of Nigel Percy, from Randalstown, with William Dunlop not far behind in fourth.

William was in top form in

Sunday's race, which he won by four seconds from Paul Jordan, as James Maguire did well to hold off Robinson for third, ahead of Percy.

Former Irish 125cc Clubmans' champion, Ardsman Stephen Kelly, improved from ninth in Saturday's race, to sixth the following day, one place ahead of Michael Dunlop.

**Irish Lightweight Supersport Championship**

Ballyclare's Lee Hill won both Irish Lightweight Supersport Championship races, ahead of Antrim's Alan Glasgow, with Augher's Kieron Egerton twice third, and Newtownards man Alan Brown, posting two fourth places.

After he won Saturday's race at a canter, by 18 seconds, Glasgow trimmed Hill's victory on Sunday to less than half-a-second, while Egerton had an even narrower margin over Brown.

**Irish Pre-97 Championship**

Alan Brown had mixed fortunes in the Pre-97 races.

He won Saturday's race by ten seconds from John Byrne, but slipped to 13th on Sunday, as Seamus Meally made amends for a first lap retirement the previous day, by taking victory over Cyril Traynor, with Byrne third.

**Irish Sidecar Championship**

Dublin duo Dylan Lynch/Aaron Galligan opened the defence of their Irish Sidecar Championship title in copybook fashion, with a brace of wins.

**Results**

**Superbike Championship, Saturday:** 1, L. Wilson; 2, M. Pearson; 3, B. McCormack; 4, M. Weldon; 5, D. Swanton; 6, K. Jamison; 7, J. Dickson; 8, D. Craig; 9, D. Byrne; 10, C. Lynch. Fastest lap: McCormack. Sunday: 1, Jamison; 2, Pearson; 3, Swanton; 4, McCormack; 5, Byrne; 6, Craig; 7, R. McCartney; 8, R. Woods; 9, Dickson; 10, G. Robinson. Fastest lap: Jamison. Championship positions: 1, Pearson 20 points; 2, Jamison 17.5; 3, Swanton 13.5; 4, Wilson 12.5; 5, Craig and Byrne 9.

**Birrane Cup, Sat:** 1, J. Kennedy; 2, D. Swanton; 3, B. McCormack; 4, M. Weldon; 5, C. Lynch; 6, M. Pearson; 7, E. Hughes; 8, J. Dickson; 9, R. Ryan; 10, R. Woods. Fastest lap: Kennedy. Sun: 1, Kennedy; 2, Swanton; 3, McCormack; 4, Dickson; 5, P. Gartland; 6, Ryan; 7, P. Greaney; 8, M. Gillan; 9, M. Fitzpatrick; 10, Hughes. Fastest lap: Kennedy.

**Irish Supersport 600 Championship, Sat:** 1, J. Kennedy; 2, M. Percy; 3, J. Dickson; 4, R. Ryan; 5, A. Kirk; 6, P. Newell; 7, L. Morrissey; 8, G. Robinson; 9, A. J. Hutchinson; 10, P. Conway. Fastest lap: Kennedy. Sun: 1, Kennedy; 2, Percy; 3, Robinson; 4, Newell; 5, Dickson; 6, E. Hughes; 7, Ryan; 8, M. Cassells; 9, Hutchinson; 10, Kirk. Fastest lap: Kennedy. Championship positions: 1, Kennedy 50; 2, Percy 40; 3, Dickson 27; 4, Robinson 24; 5, Newell 23; 6, Ryan 22.

**Irish 250cc Championship, Sat:** 1, R. Shanahan; 2, T. Lawlor; 3, W. Dunlop; 4, G. Ferguson; 5, K. Egerton; 6, C. McAloran; 7, M. McEvoy; 8, B. Ryan; 9, G. Clarke; 10, P. Minahan. Fastest lap: Ferguson. Sun: 1, Dunlop; 2, Lawlor; 3, Shanahan; 4, D. Craig; 5, McAloran; 6, Egerton; 7, Ferguson; 8, Ryan; 9, Clarke; 10, Minahan. Fastest lap: Lawlor. Championship positions: 1, Dunlop and Shanahan 41; 3, Lawlor 40; 4, Ferguson 22; 5, Egerton and McAloran 21.

**Irish 125cc Championship, Sat:** 1, P. Robinson; 2, M. Dunlop; 3, N. Percy; 4, W. Dunlop; 5, P. Graham; 6, G. Donnelly; 7, M. Hanna; 8, C. Donnelly; 9, S. Kelly; 10, J. Johnston. Fastest lap: Robinson. Sun: 1, W. Dunlop; 2, P. Jordan; 3, J. Maguire; 4, Robinson; 5, Percy; 6, Kelly; 7, M. Dunlop; 8, Hanna; 9, Johnston; 10, C. Donnelly. Fastest lap: Jordan. Championship positions: 1, W. Dunlop and Robinson 38; 3, M. Dunlop 29; 4,

N. Percy 27; 5, Hanna and Kelly 17.

**Irish Lightweight Supersport Championship, Sat:** 1, L. Hill; 2, A. Glasgow; 3, K. Egerton; 4, A. Brown; 5, D. Walsh; 6, M. McKinley; 7, K. Meere; 8, D. Casey; 9, J. Byrne; 10, G. Daniel. Fastest lap: Hill. Sun: 1, Hill; 2, Glasgow; 3, Egerton; 4, Brown; 5, T. Callahan; 6, J. Fuller; 7, Casey; 8, McKinley; 9, Daniel; 10, D. Gilpin. Fastest lap: Glasgow. Championship positions: 1, Hill 50; 2, Glasgow 40; 3, Egerton 32; 4, Brown 26; 5, McKinley 18; 6, Casey 17.

**Irish Pre-97 Championship, Sat:** 1, A. Brown; 2, J. Byrne; 3, D. Fagan; 4, E. Delaney; 5, K. Trill; 6, C. Traynor; 7, A. Heaving; 8, J. Murphy; 9, A. Maher; 10, D. Devine. Sun: 1, S. Meally; 2, Traynor; 3, Byrne; 4, P. Campbell; 5, Trill; 6, Delaney; 7, Devine; 8, T. Whitmore; 9, Murphy; 10, Fagan. Fastest lap: Byrne. Championship positions: 1, Byrne 36; 2, Traynor 30; 3, Brown 28; 4, Meally 25; 5, Fagan 24; 6, Delaney 23.

**Irish Sidecar Championship, Sat:** 1, D. Lynch/A. Galligan; 2, A. Johnston/K. Young; 3, J. Farragher/C. Fahey; 4, K. & S. Mullen; 5, G. Kennedy/S. Smith; 6, C. May/D. Byrne; 7, S. Killough/P. Marley. Fastest lap: Lynch/Galligan. Sun: 1, Lynch/Galligan; 2, Farragher/Fahey; 3, May/Byrne; 4, Johnston/Young; 5, Killough/Marley; 6, Mullen/Mullen; 7, M. Delaney/C. Reintna; 8, P. May/B. Kierton. Fastest lap: Farragher/Fahey. Championship positions: 1, Lynch/Galligan 50; 2, Farragher/Fahey 36; 3, Johnston/Young 33; 4, May/Byrne 26; 5, Mullen/Mullen 23; 6, Killough/Marley 20.

## Mondello BSB tickets on sale

**Mondello Park's preparations for the return of the Bennetts British Superbike Championship got underway this week, with the commencement of ticket sales for the event.**

This season sees the 'Faite Ireland' supported BSB meeting move from its traditional May date to the weekend of Friday—Sunday, June 15—17.

Intending spectators can save themselves money by booking in advance. Tickets are available in packages for all three days, for Saturday and Sunday, or for Sunday only, either with or without paddock passes. Bookings can be made on [www.ticketlord.com](http://www.ticketlord.com) or by phone from Northern Ireland on 0870 0112 166.

Following the cancellation of last year's race day, due to flooding at the Co Kildare track, all 2006 ticket holders are entitled to a half price ticket for this year's event. 2006 spectators, who can provide proof of ticket purchase, will be offered a 50% discount off a corresponding 2007 ticket, while grandstand ticket holders will also be offered first refusal on grandstand seats for this year's event, prior to the seats going on general sale.

Anyone wishing to avail of the half price ticket offer must make contact directly with the Mondello Park office, prior to June 15.

Mondello Park Managing Director John Morris said: "There has been a good demand for tickets already and our offer to 2006 ticket holders has been well received. All the indications are that the tremendous crowds we've seen in past years will continue to support the only overseas round of this prestigious championship".

# Ulster riders poised to challenge for British titles

Following confirmation that former grands prix rider Paul Smart has signed to ride for Hawk Kawasaki in this season's British Superbike Championship, the line-up for the series is complete.

30 year old Smart scored Vivaldi Suzuki's first and only BSB victory at soaking wet Donington Park last year, and rejoined Hawk Kawasaki, for whom he scored three BSB victories and finished fourth overall in 2004.

He joins rising star, 19 year old Peter Hickman, in the Leicestershire-based team, and Smart will also contest the World Endurance Championship with Kawasaki.

Ballyclare's Jonathan Rea heads up the Ulster challenge, teaming up with defending champion Ryuichi Kiyonari in the factory HM Plant Honda team, after finishing fourth in last year's series for the satellite Red Bull Honda equipe.

19 year old Rea replaces former double British Supersport champion Karl Harris, who has moved to Hydrex Honda, while two other former British Supersport champions make their BSB debuts: 2005 champ Leon Camier on a factory-supported Honda and last year's champ, Cal Crutchlow, who joins former World Superbike Championship rider Chris Walker in the all-new Rizla Suzuki team.

Last season's runner-up Leon Haslam and third place finisher, 2005 champion Gregorio Lavilla, continue with Airwaves Ducati, and the pair were fastest overall during a three day test at Albacete in Spain last weekend, when Lavilla topped the leaderboard, ahead of Haslam, Walker, Crutchlow, Harris and Michael Rutter, who rides for MSS Discovery Kawasaki this term.

Last Tuesday, at the Croft circuit in north Yorkshire, Rob McElnea's Virgin Mobile Yamaha UK team was launched under a new banner — Virgin Media Optima Loans Yamaha.

James Haydon and Tommy Hill will fly the flag for the team in BSB, with Billy McConnell and last year's Virgin Mobile R6 Cup champion Tom Grant contesting the British Supersport Championship.

Following the departure of Michael Laverty and Michael Rutter from Stobart Honda, Paul Bird has recruited Shane Byrne and last year's British Supersport Championship runner-up Tom Sykes, who earned a big Ulster following during his time with the Moneyreagh-based TAS Suzuki GB team.

Other notable BSB runners include last year's double North West 200 hero Steve Plater (AIM Yamaha) and Sean Emmett (PR Branston Honda).

A total of 32 riders are included in the BSB Permanent Entry List, with nine of them registered for the Privateers' Cup series, which is staged in conjunction with the main championship.

Castlerock's Marty Nutt will again run under his father Billy's nutravel.com banner in the Privateers' Cup, this time with one of last season's factory-supported Yamaha R1s.

Also in the Privateers' Cup, Dungannon man Ryan Farquhar will ride the Mark John Motors Honda Fireblade, previously campaigned by Nutt; last year's British Powerbike champion, Dubliner Paul Barron, has a Yamaha R1 at his disposal; and Ulster-based Australian Cameron Donald is entered by Donegal man Uel Duncan on his Robinson Concrete-backed Honda Fireblade.

**British Supersport Championship**

Toomebridge man Michael Laverty returns to the British Supersport Championship with father and son Hector and Philip Neill's Ulster-based TAS Relentless Suzuki GB team, and he starts amongst the favourites to take the title.

After two years with Stobart Honda in BSB, Laverty has his sights firmly set on the Supersport crown, and if he can pull it off, the smart money is on the talented 25 year old returning to BSB next year with TAS Suzuki.

Michael raced in the British Supersport Championship in 2004, when his association with Paul Bird initially began, and he finished fourth in the series and scored two race wins, aboard Bird's Monsternob Ducati, having been third the previous year, when he notched three race victories.

He finished ninth in last year's British Superbike Championship, one place better than the previous year, when he mounted the podium three times.

Despite last season being a development year for the new Suzuki GSX-R600, Tom Sykes finished runner-up to Cal Crutchlow in the British Supersport Championship, and finished on the podium eight times, so much is expected from Laverty.

Lisburn's Ian Lowry continues with TAS Suzuki for a second season and will be expected to be at least a podium finisher this year, after an excellent 'learning' season last year.

The Supersport Privateers' Cup continues within the main championship and the top Irish rider could be Dubliner Jack Kennedy (TAG Honda). Other Irish entrants are: Robert Kennedy from Monaghan (PMD Honda); former 125cc racer, Jamie Hamilton, from Ballyclare (Longshot/KGR Yamaha); Dubliner Conor O'Brien (Arkwood Honda); and Corkman Alan O'Connor (MFC Honda).

Ulster interest in the Supersport Championship will also focus on road race ace John McGuinness (Padgetts Honda), Ian Hutchinson (Honda UK) and Guy Martin (Hydrex Honda).

**National Superstock Championship**

Hopes for Ulster success in the National Superstock Championship are high, with John Laverty, Adrian Coates, Alastair Seeley and Marshall Neill heading the 'home' challenge.

24 year old Laverty, from Toomebridge, finished fifth in last year's Superstock Championship, astride a Buildbase Suzuki GSX-R1000, but the team has switched to the new V-twin Ducati 1098 for the forthcoming season, and pre-season testing has apparently proved promising.

Portadown man Neill will again be astride a Suzuki GSX-R1000, as will Crumlin's Stephen Thompson, who again rides in T&R Motorsport livery.

Adrian Coates has the distinction of being the last Irish rider to win a British title, and the former 250cc champion will be making one last effort to become the first Irish rider to claim British titles in two different classes. Injury thwarted his ambitions last season, but he returns astride the Dyer Crossgills Racing Yamaha.

Carrickfergus man Alastair Seeley has vast experience. Irish Superbike champion for the past two seasons, and Irish Supersport 600 champion last year, Seeley did more than impress in last year's AMA Formula Xtreme Championship in the USA, before his relationship with backers Celtic Performance Racing soured.

Seeley joins New Zealander Hayden Fitzgerald in the new NCT/Vanfit team, aboard Yamaha R1s, and could be a front-runner.

A newcomer to the National Superstock Championship is Fermanagh man Lee Johnston, who was extremely impressive in last season's Irish Supersport 600 Championship — the young Maguirebride man rides a Suzuki.

Denver Robb, from Ballymena, also flies the flag for Ulster, again with a Mar-Train-backed Suzuki, and back from injury will be talented Nuts Corner rider Ryan Rainey, backed by TMR/Tillston Motorcycles on a Yamaha R1.

Only one Irish rider is included in the entry list for the National Superstock Cup series, Steve Henegan, from Galway.

**British 125cc Championship**

15 year old Omagh girl Nicole McAleer is the only confirmed Ulster entrant in the hotly competitive British 125cc Championship.

Nicole made history last season when she became the first Irish female rider to score points in a British Championship event and earlier this year received the coveted *Irish Racer Magazine* Short Circuit Merit Award.

**Virgin Media Cup**

The Virgin Mobile Yamaha R6 Cup has been re-branded as the Virgin Media Cup for 2007, and this year's champion will have a factory Yamaha ride in next season's British Supersport Championship.

After his excellent performances during the second half of last season, Omagh's B. J. Toal will be amongst the favourites to take the title, astride his JB Plant-backed Yamaha R6.

Jonny Buckley, from Dunadry, entered the championship at the halfway stage last season and did enough to underline his potential, and a hat-trick of wins at Kirkistown last Saturday set him up well for the forthcoming season.

Lisburn's David Haire, Grant Molloy from Enniskillen, and Monaghan's Liam Redhead will also contest this year's hotly competitive R6 Cup series, for which 28 riders are registered.

**BSB tests**  
The official British Superbike Championship tests, for all classes except Virgin Media Cup, begin at Snetterton, in Norfolk, tomorrow (Friday) and continue on Saturday and Sunday. Full coverage next week.

# Ilmor pulls the plug

Ulster's grands prix veteran Jeremy McWilliams could be out of a job, before he even made his racing debut for the Northamptonshire-based Ilmor GP team, after the team made the shock announcement last Thursday that it was 'postponing' its race programme.

42 year old McWilliams fractured his left femur, broke a collarbone, and lost part of a little finger in a high speed crash, while testing the 800cc Ilmor X3 SRT, at Jerez in Spain, last November, and he underwent surgery on several occasions to be fit for the start of this season.

A practice crash at Losail in Qatar meant Jeremy had to sit out the opening grand prix, and his Australian team-mate Andrew Pitt was an early retiree in the race.

Nevertheless, it had been expected McWilliams and Pitt would return on the Ilmors, when the world championship resumes at Jerez on Sunday.

On Monday night, Jeremy told me: "The announcement came completely out of the blue. To be honest, I am a bit shell-shocked."

Although Jeremy wouldn't be drawn on the subject, speculation is that Ilmor had a sponsor in place, once the European rounds of the world championship began, but the deal fell through at the last moment.

McWilliams and Pitt remained in contact with the team this week, and Jeremy told me: "All I've been told is, 'Wait until something happens'. I am still waiting for them to put things in place and I have been told to 'sit tight and hold fire'."

But Jeremy signalled that unless Ilmor sorts its problems soon, he could be on the move: "I don't want to be testing for the rest of the year, even though



Jeremy McWilliams: 'I should be racing this weekend'.

testing is a main part of it. I want to be racing."

Jeremy admits his injured leg isn't yet 100% fit, but he ruefully added: "A wee bit of rest is going to do the leg a wee bit of good, but I should have been racing this weekend."

Last Thursday, Team Principal Mario Illien issued the shock announcement that the team's 'race attendance' has been suspended for the immediate future, although engine development will continue and Illien expects the team to return, as soon as key financial partners have been secured.

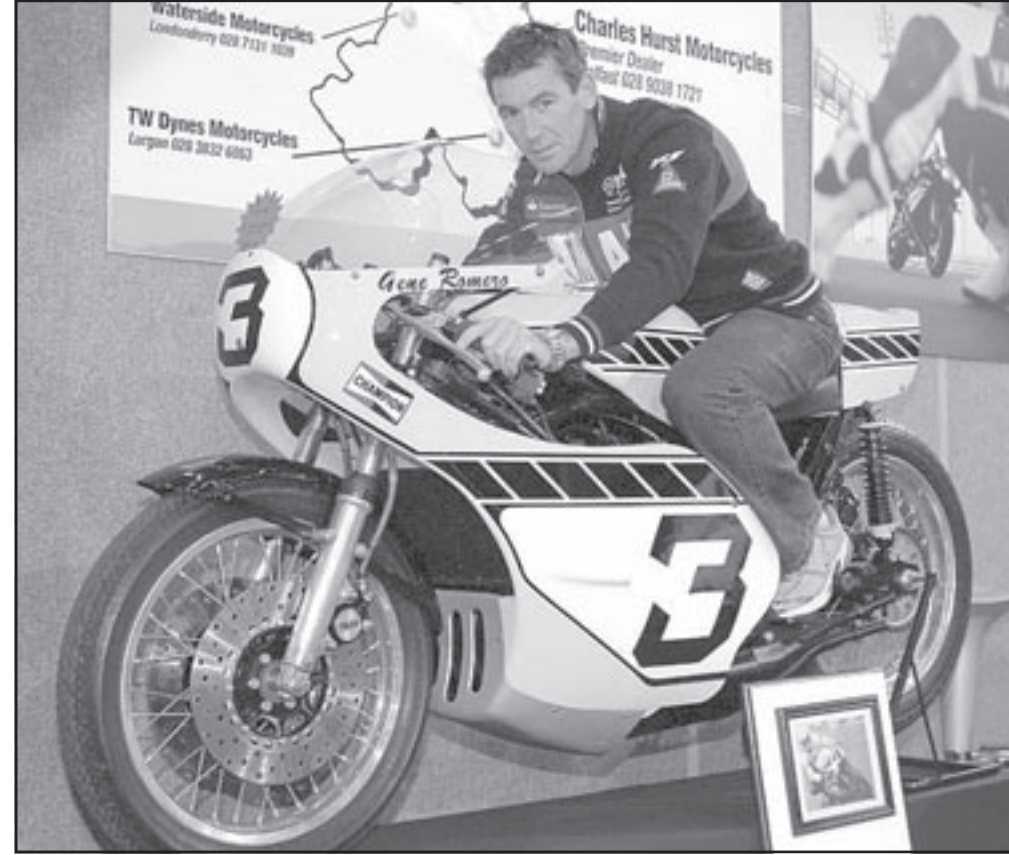
Ilmor's media contact, Liz Brooks, explained: "At this early stage in the project, racing and developing the engine and chassis has proved extremely costly for Ilmor's owners. Since the team launched last year in Estoril [Portugal], at the penultimate round of the MotoGP Championship, good progress has been made, but further development is needed to become fully competitive on track."

Mario Illien revealed: "We discussed the situation in great detail internally and obviously it was

an extremely difficult decision for us to make. However, once we went through all the options, we decided that the best course of action, for the sake of the project as a whole, would be to put the racing side of things on hold and continue developing".

He added: "My heart is still very much in the team. We have had fantastic support from the public and the media, with some great coverage worldwide. I would also like to say how enormously proud I am of what we managed to achieve in a short space of time. We have a good group of people, who have worked incredibly hard over the past few months. Both riders have given their best during a difficult development time. I couldn't have asked for more than that."

Illien concluded: "We have important meetings and discussions over the next few weeks, which will help us to establish the future of the project and the team. I am determined to explore all opportunities available to us and I'm hopeful that there will be a positive outcome".



Double World Superbike champion Troy Corser officially opened the Northern Ireland Motorcycle Festival in the King's Hall, Belfast, last Friday, during which the Australian got to grips with the Yamaha aboard which legendary American rider Gene Romero won the 1975 Daytona 200. Corser is contesting this season's World Superbike Championship for the factory-backed Italia Yamaha team.