

Motorcycling with John Savage

Weather is unkind as ISB riders have shakedown

The 2007 Irish Superbike champion, Michael Pearson from Ballygowan, was delighted with his lap times, during last Saturday's Irish Superbike Championship practice day, which was staged in far from perfect conditions at Bishops court.

Riding the GS Motor Cycle Club-backed Honda CBR600RR, which Falkirk's Keith Amor took to second position behind Ryan Farquhar in last year's Irish Supersport Road Race Championship, Pearson took to the machine like a duck to water first time out, although at times the track resembled a pond, and early morning rain, coupled with strong winds, made tyre choice a lottery.

Although there was no official timing at the test day, Pearson followed a best Supersport lap of 1min 15.76sec with a 1m 15.36s lap on the Carryduff Forklifts Yamaha R1 superbike, and Michael was pleased with his first time on track this year.

As we arrived and at one point I was for heading back home."

Michael continued: "I really wanted to get a run out on the 600, as I had never ridden it before, and knew that the superbike was the same as we left it last year. It was difficult getting the tyre selection right, but we went for full Dunlop wets on the 600, which were quite awesome. On the superbike we opted for Dunlop intermediate tyres and with a fast drying track it proved the right choice. I felt really at home on both bikes, which should hold me in good stead in the coming weeks and months ahead, but it was a very good exercise, all in all."

Pearson has decided to sit out the opening round of the Irish Superbike Championship at Mondello Park in Co Kildare on March 21/22, and his first races of the year will be as a member of the Northern Ireland team in the inaugural Six Nations Cup at Donington Park in Leicestershire on March 28/29.

Despite the inclement weather, a large contingent of riders braved the conditions, with over 150 taking to the track, from the 125cc, 250cc, Super Twins, Supersport and Superbike classes.

In addition to Pearson, notable participants included, Alastair Seely, Wayne Kirwan, John Burrows, James Redpath, Kirk Jamison, Darren Burns, John Anderton, Denver Robb, Alastair Kirk, Mark Hanna, Kevin Briggs, James McCann and Gerard Kingham.

After he missed most of last season due to injury, John Anderton returns from several years competing in England to challenge for this year's Irish Supersport Championship on Graham Hanna's IFS

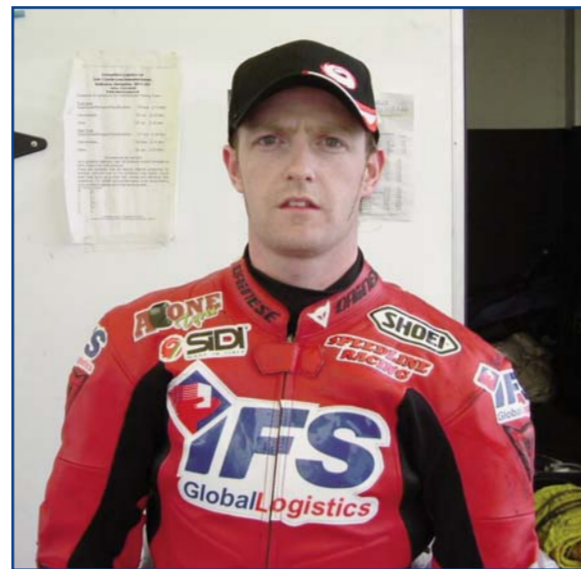
Yamaha R6, the machine raced last year by Steve Plater, and even before a wheel has turned in anger, he starts as one of the pre-season favourites for the title.

Defending Irish Supersport champion, 20 year old Dromara man Alastair Kirk took his first plunge into the Superbike class last Saturday, with Tim Martin's Mar-Train Suzuki GSX-R1000, and Kirk looked every bit as comfortable on the 1000cc machine as he did on his 600.

Ballymena man Denver Robb continues as Kirk's team-mate, and Robb posted good times in the difficult conditions, and both the Mar-Train boys will again be main contenders in the ISB Championships in 2009.

After he acquired a new Honda Fireblade CBR1000RR and Yamaha R6 for last year's Irish Superbike and Supersport Championships, Ardsman Kirk Jamison is targeting both titles this year, aboard the Jim Angus Contracts-backed machines, although he sensibly took it steady in the difficult conditions and hopes to have a private test before the season kickstarts at Mondello Park.

Dungannon rider John Burrows took



John Anderton returns to the Irish Supersport Championship this season.

his ex-TAS Suzuki GSX-R1000 superbike out for its first proper bash of the year, with Burrows impressive on the machine.

16 year old Mark Hanna from Antrim took out the Roy Hanna Motors 250 Honda and the Farlough Garage backed 600 Yamaha and looked very comfortable.

There was a large contingent of RS125 Aprilia riders, with the number of young female riders seemingly growing by the year, and there was a welcome return to the track for Lisburn rider Darren Burns, who took part on both his 250 and 600 machines.



Michael Pearson leads defending Irish Supersport champion Alastair Kirk during the Irish Superbike Championship shakedown at Bishops court last Saturday.

Photo by Derek Clegg

Thompson enthusiastic about Super Twins debut

Cloughey's Scott Thompson is champing at the bit to make his debut in this season's Irish National Super Twins Championship, after he decided to switch to the class, after he finished third in last year's Irish National Pre-97 Championship.

As he looks forward to his third full racing season, Scott is eagerly anticipating moving to the hotly competitive Super Twins series, after two years competing aboard a Honda CBR600 in the Pre-97 series, which was staged at Irish Clubmans' Championship fixtures.

The Super Twins series runs at Irish Superbike Championship meetings, and Scott's race debut will be at Mondello Park in Co Kildare on March 21/22. However, he is not turning his back on the Clubmans' meetings, as he will also be contesting the Irish Classic Championships, aboard a 750cc Triumph twin, alongside his sponsor and mentor, John Monteith from Glasy, who will ride a 750 Triumph triple in the Classic series.

Monteith has again prepared Thompson's machines and all three bikes have been immaculately turned out by Alan Finlay of Nice Bike in the familiar orange and black MTM Racing livery — MTM representing 'Monteith Thompson Monteith' Racing.

Both Scott and John got some invaluable track time at Kirkistown on Monday in a final shakedown before the season commences.

Scott explained: "It lashed with rain for ten minutes after we arrived, which absolutely soaked the circuit. The first hour was really damp, and although the sun and wind was drying the track it was too dry for wets. I had a new set of tyres on the Suzuki, so I wasn't doing



Scott Thompson astride the MTM Racing Suzuki SV650 which he will race in this season's Irish National Super Twins Championship. N18-12-3-09

anything silly.

"I got my time down to 1min 07sec, which would have put me on the second row of the grid for the race at Kirkistown last Easter Monday, but I know I can go a lot harder than that. The bike is totally different from the Honda I raced for the last two years."

Keenly awaiting his Super Twins debut at Mondello Park, Scott said: "Mondello isn't my favourite track, but I am looking forward to getting out in the class to see who else is in it. I'm really looking forward to Good Friday and Easter Saturday at Bishops court, as it is my favourite track, although I like Kirkistown as well. I like Bishops court, because it isn't 'stop start' and the chicanes are quite fast and flowing and you have to get the three of them right to get a good lap."

Brimming with confidence ahead of the new season, Scott, who will celebrate his 21st birthday next month, has set himself the target of finishing in the top ten in every Super Twins race: "Anything better than that would be a bonus, but I'm really

hoping to break into the top six. I can't see any reason why not, as I have good a good enough package."

His baptism in the classic championship last year amounted to little and Scott admits he found the bike hard to ride, because it was quite slow turning and braking. However, he grinned: "I did about six laps on the Triumph at Kirkistown and it is well set up. John Monteith has completely rebuilt the bike over the winter and I would have been happy to ride it all day."

Aside from the help Scott obtains from John and Wendy Monteith, his family play a big role in his racing, particularly his father, Hugh Robert, and his uncle Samuel, while Ian Evans, from Cloughey, is also a pivotal member of the team.

Thompson has continued backing this term from Watsons of Cloughey and Taggart's Chip Shop in Newtownards, plus a host of other sponsors, and he is grateful to them all, including those who took advertisements on his calendar.



Kirk Jamison returned to the track with his Jim Angus Contracts machines at Bishops court last Saturday.



Bangor's Kevin Briggs in action on the Steve Baker Motorcycles Suzuki GSX-R600 at Bishops court last Saturday.

Photo by Roy Adams, Mid Antrim Media

Thundersport is go!

For a number of Ulster riders, the season begins in earnest this weekend, with the opening instalment of the nine rounds Thundersport GB Championships, the Spring Cup and Race of the Year, at Mallory Park in Leicestershire.

Comber's Scott Kelly will be hoping for a good start to the season, as the 20 year old aims to improve on last year's third position in the premier Thundersport GP1 series for superbike riders.

In addition to Holeshott Racing, Eddie Kelly Car Sales of Dunboyne; Eddie Spratt Auto Repairs of Moneyreagh; and Maximuscle; Scott has secured a new backer for this season's campaign, in the shape of Bangorman Glenn Thompson, a field manager with Dixon Bike-It and UTAG, for which the Southampton company are exclusive distributors.

Astride his ex-John Donnan Honda Fireblade CBR1000RR, Scott will concentrate on the Thundersport series, with selected outings in the British Superbike Cup, the series for privateer riders within the British Superbike Championship, which was won last year by John Laverty from Toomebridge on the Buildbase NW200 Ducati.

After he travelled across England and Wales and clinched last year's New Era Club Formula 600 Championship and finished runner-up in the New Era Sound of Thunder Championship on his standard 675cc Triumph Daytona, 19 year old Antrim teenager John Simpson will major on this

season's British Junior Superstock Championship.

The 2006 Irish Clubmans' 125cc champion, who also won the Honda CB500 class in the following year's New Era Club Championship, was testing his new Yamaha R6 at both Mallory Park and Cadwell Park in Lincolnshire this week, will kickstart his season at the Thundersport curtain-raiser, and will compete in Thundersport rounds which do not clash with his British Junior Superstock Championship commitments.

There is considerably increased Irish interest in this year's Thundersport GB Championships, and other regular participants are expected to be former Irish Pre-97 champion Alan Brown, from Ballywalter, in the newly introduced Thundersport GB Super Twins series, plus Bangorman Stephen Titterton, Clifly Hamilton and Peter Newell from Newry, and southern Irishman Rory Clarke.

Qualifying takes place at Mallory Park tomorrow (Friday), with racing on both Saturday and Sunday.

Motors TV will again screen the Thundersport Championships, with a massive 126 hours of coverage. The Mallory Park round will be shown on Monday, March 30, at 7pm and will be repeated up to seven times the following week.

In addition to Mallory Park, this year's Thundersport dates are: King of the Mountain, Cadwell Park, April 12/13; Celtic Cup, Pembrey, May 9/10; Earl of Oulton, June 5/6; Snetterton Race for Aces, July 11/12; British Grand Prix, Donington Park, July 23-26; Brands Hatch Race of the South, August 29/30; Anglesey, Copper Island Trophy, September 12/13; Rockingham, October 17/18.



Randalstown man Nigel Percy ended up with both hands in plaster casts, after he crashed heavily during the Cartagena Pro-Test in southern Spain last Thursday.

The double Irish 125cc champion came off on the opening day of the tests and broke one of his hands and thumb, and smashed his other wrist.

Falkirk's Keith Amor was also in the wars and spent a night in hospital after he tumbled on the first day, however, he was back in action for the next two days, astride the Wilson Craig Honda CBR600RR, and was running close to lap record pace.

After his rookie year in last year's British Supersport Championship, 2007 British Yamaha R6 Cup champion B. J. Toal switches to this season's British Superstock Championship with a Relentless TAS Suzuki GSX-R1000, and the Omagh man impressed at Cartagena, prompting former British Superstock Championship racer Ryan Rainey, from Crumlin, who was wielding the spanners for BJ, to grin: "BJ is well on the pace and settling into the Superstock like a duck to water."

Laverty ninth at Daytona

Toomebridge man Michael Laverty finished ninth in the AMA Pro American Superbike race at Daytona in Florida last Thursday.

Australian ace Mat Mladin led for ten of the 15 laps to win his seventh Pro National Superbike race, after he had set pole position on his Rockstar/Makita Suzuki GSX-R1000.

Former British and World Superbike champion Neil Hodgson (Corona Extra Honda CBR1000RR) took the nod for the runners-up berth in a photo-finish with Mladin's team-mate Tommy Hayden.

In his American debut on the Celtic Racing/Orient Express/T1 Force Suzuki GSX-R1000, having failed to secure a ride in this year's British Superbike Championship, former British Supersport champion Laverty was ninth.

In the 68th Daytona 200 race, which was staged under floodlights for the first time last Friday evening, Ben Bostrom seized the lead from Jason DiSalvo on the 53rd lap of 57 and gave Yamaha its first triumph in the event since Scott Russell's fifth and final victory in 1998.

The race was interrupted by two safety car periods, the first of which came on lap 36, due to a temporary lighting failure on the back straight.

A red flag was displayed a few laps later when Team Graves Yamaha rider Tommy Aquino went down after he was hit from behind when the field closed up behind the safety car.

The race restarted, but the safety car returned a few laps later after Kris Turner came off his Suzuki and the race resumed on lap 49 for a dash to the chequered flag.

Bostrom won by half-a-second on his factory Yamaha YZF-R6, from Josh Herrin on the Team Graves Yamaha R6, with DiSalvo third on the Team M4 Suzuki GSX-R600.

Last year Chaz Davies became the first British rider to win the Daytona 200, in controversial circumstances, and the Welsh former 250cc World Championship grands prix rider finished seventh on his RSV1000R Aprilia.



Scott Kelly commences his Thundersport GB campaign at Mallory Park this weekend.

Photo by Roy Adams, Mid Antrim Media



The MTM Racing team at Kirkistown on Monday. From left: Wendy and John Monteith, Scott Thompson, Scott's father Hugh Robert and Scott's uncle, Samuel Thompson.

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