

Motorcycling with John Savage

Motor Cycle Union of Ireland Inter Centre Conference

Tarmac dates confirmed

Ten rounds have been confirmed for this year's Irish Superbike Championship, including a return to Anglesey, following last year's inaugural ISB meeting at the Welsh circuit, while this season's Mondello Masters mini-series will be staged over two rounds at the Co Kildare circuit, one round less than last term.

The Irish National Short Circuit Championships (ISB), will kickstart at Mondello Park with the opening round of the Mondello Masters on Saturday/Sunday, March 21/22.

The first ISB round north of the border will be at Bishops court on Good Friday/Easter Saturday, April 10/11, when Killinchy and District Motorcycle Club and the Motorcycle Road Racing Club of Ireland will again jointly promote the Enkallon Trophy meeting, which will boast Ireland's biggest short circuit prize fund, apart from the Sunflower Trophy meeting at the same venue, with some £19,000 expected to be up for

grabs.

The ISB Championship will continue with Belfast and District Motor Club's traditional Easter Monday fixture at Kirkistown, and ISB returns to Nutts Corner on Saturday, July 18, with an event promoted by Coleraine and District Motor Club, which last year staged the inaugural motorcycle race at Ballykelly in Co Londonderry.

It's a trip 'across the pond' to Anglesey on Saturday/Sunday, September 19/20, promoted by the Nantwich and Cheshire Club, although the organisers have yet to confirm whether they will run other Irish Short Circuit Championship classes in addition to the Superbike and Supersport races they staged last year.

The penultimate ISB round will incorporate the final round of the Mondello Masters series at the Naas track on Saturday/Sunday, October 3/4, before the series concludes with the Hillsborough Club's Sunflower Trophy meeting at Bishops court on Saturday/Sunday, October 17/18. ISB dates: March 21/22, Mondello Park; April 10/11, Bishops court; April 13, Kirkistown; May 23/24, Mondello Park; June 13, Bishops court; July 18, Nutts Corner; July 25, Bishops court; September 19/20, Anglesey; October 3/4, Mondello Park;

October 17/18, Bishops court.

In addition to the premier Superbike and Supersport classes, this year's Irish National Short Circuit Championships cater for 250cc, Supertwins (formerly Mini Twins), 125cc and Sidecars.

Irish Clubmans' Championships

The Ulster tarmac racing season begins with the opening round of the Irish Clubmans' Championships at Bishops court on Saturday, March 21, while the clubmans' series also makes a welcome return to the re-opened Nutts Corner circuit, and the ten rounds series will conclude at Kirkistown in September.

Clubmans' competitors will make four visits to Mondello Park, which will host three successive rounds, and this year's Clubmans' Championship meetings will again incorporate the Irish National Pre-97 and Classic Bike Championships, while the Clubmans' Championship classes are: Senior, Supersport, 125 Newcomers and North Dublin Motorcycles RS125 Aprilia Challenge.

Dates: March 21, Bishops court; April 4/5, Mondello Park; April 18, Nutts Corner; May 4, Bishops court; June 6, Kirkistown; June 21, Mondello Park; July 5, Mondello Park; August 9, Mondello Park;

August 22, Bishops court; September 5, Kirkistown.

As well as the ISB and Clubmans' meetings, newly formed JC Promotions — under the leadership of Ulster Grand Prix Clerk of the Course Noel Johnston and former racer Raymond Campbell from Ahoghill — will stage a non-championship Open meeting at Bishops court on Saturday, April 4, despite a clash with the two day Clubmans' Championship fixture to be promoted by the Irish Sidecar Racing Club at Mondello Park that weekend, plus Ireland's round of the World Trials Championship at Castlewellan.

Mid Antrim Motor Club also stages a non-championship Open fixture at Nutts Corner on Saturday, March 28, which heralds the return of motor cycle racing to Nutts Corner, although that date clashes with the inaugural MotoSix Six Nations Team Challenge at Donington Park in Leicestershire on March 28/29, which features six rider Superbike and Supersport teams representing Northern Ireland, Irish Republic, England, Scotland, Wales and Isle of Man.

Road Races

As is tradition, the Irish road racing season kickstarts with the Cookstown 100 on Friday/Saturday, April 24/25,

while Ireland's two international road races, the North West 200 and Ulster Grand Prix, take their usual slots in the calendar in May and August respectively.

After a disappointing one year absence, the Mid Antrim 150 returns in August, a week before the inaugural Army road races.

Although Tullyallen road races are listed for the weekend of September 26/27, there is doubt whether the southern event will go ahead.

Dates: April 24/25, Cookstown; May 1/2, Tandragee; May 12/14/16, International North West 200; June 19/20, Bush; June 27/28, Athea; July 3/4, Skerries; July 11/12, Walderstown; July 18/19, Kells; July 25/26, Faughan; July 31/August 1, Mid Antrim; August 7/8, Armoyle; August 12/13/15, International Ulster Grand Prix Bike Week; September 12/13, Killalane; September 26/27, Tullyallen.

With the exception of the North West 200 and Ulster Grand Prix, all events are rounds of the Irish Road Race Championships, while Ulster national road races are rounds of the re-introduced Ulster Road Race Championships and southern road races are rounds of the Southern Irish Road Race Championships.

Croft court ruling could wreck racing

It has been claimed a ruling by an English court could wreck motorcycle racing, and indeed all motorsport, after the landmark verdict threw the future of the popular Croft circuit in north Yorkshire into doubt.

Last Friday, three residents, who live within some 300 metres of the circuit, were awarded £150,000 compensation, after they successfully claimed they had suffered noise nuisance from the track.

The father, son and daughter moved to their new home recently, due to a former relative gaining employment at Croft circuit, although he has since left.

They claimed that excessive noise has inconvenienced them, despite Croft having some of the most stringent noise laws and operating restrictions of any motorsport centre in the British Isles.

The circuit, which first saw race action in 1928, has appealed against the decision and is expected to hear within the next couple of weeks whether they have been successful.

If the appeal is lost, not only could it be disastrous for the Croft complex, but it could have potentially catastrophic ramifications for British motorsport, with a precedent being set for residents to sue their neighbouring race circuit, or any sporting or recreational facility for that matter.

Croft is a venue for a round of the British Superbike Championship, together with various club events, including the Laird of Croft and Ken Redfern Trophy races, both of which have been won by Newtownards rider Kirk Jamison — the latter on two occasions, most recently last August.

Kirk quickly jumped to the defence of the circuit: "I have been racing at Croft since 2005 and ironically it is the highest maintained circuit I have ever been to. There is no disruption to the countryside in the form of eyesore buildings, litter, or anything else. Obviously the only complaint these people could make is about noise, but then anyone could now sue the DoE and ask for their local dual carriageway to be closed, based on the same principles."

He pointed out: "There are noise restrictions at motorsport events — restrictions which are increasing year upon year — so chances are we are no noisier than the local traffic."

Kirk blasted: "The decision of the judge to award compensation to the nearby residents is simply just another example of how ridiculous the laws are in the UK. The circuit was obviously there long before the resident. It is a law as ridiculous as a burglar being able to sue his victim should he injure himself in the process of his crime."

"I mean, where do you stop? If I moved to the country, could I win a court case against a local farmer to give up farming, because I can't stand the smell of cowpats, and get paid for my inconvenience?"

He continued: "If the situation wasn't so serious it would be laughable, but this judge has unfortunately opened the floodgates for idiots all over the UK to jump on the bandwagon and sign the death warrant for motorsport. The only way to close these gates is if Croft wins their appeal. I only hope that commonsense prevails."

Kirk stressed: "Hopefully the appeal is successful and what could potentially be a disastrous moment for UK motorsport will be resigned to a file labelled: 'What the hell were they thinking?' Then I can get back on the boat and go and attempt to win the Ken Redfern Trophy for the third time."

He quipped: "I had better tell my uncle Brian not to sing so loudly this year, as he may end up in the High Court!"

Cumbrian multi-millionaire Paul Bird, whose Paul Bird Motorsport team will run the factory Kawasaki team in this year's World Superbike Championship, hit out at the court ruling.

He fumed: "This cannot be allowed to happen and we will do whatever we can in our power to stop these people. This place was here long before them and if they don't like it, they should move."

Circuit manager Tracey Morley conceded: "Obviously we are very disappointed with the initial decision and are hoping for a judge to overturn another judge's decision. Whether that will happen or not is hard to say, but the future is very uncertain at the moment."

Circuit commentator Larry Carter, who runs public relations company Cartersport, asked: "How can it be that people who have only just moved into the area have the right to close down an historic facility which is so vital to the local economy, as well as the tens of thousands of motorsport enthusiasts who rely on Croft for their recreation?"

"Let's hope commonsense prevails, otherwise the UK could become like Switzerland, where motorsport is banned."

Paul Bird made his scathing criticism of the court decision, after he and his co-driver Ian Windress defied wintry conditions and stiff opposition to win Sunday's Cartersport Jack Frost Stages Rally at Croft.

Darlington and District Motor Club secretary Terry Wright said: "The Cartersport Jack Frost Stages Rally was once again a resounding success and congratulations to Paul Bird and Ian Windress on their victory."

He vowed: "Despite the depressing news we heard last week, we can assure all competitors that the Jack Frost Stages Rally will be back in 2010 and it is our intention to run the event at Croft circuit."



This year's Irish Superbike Championship blasts off at Mondello Park in March, with the first Ulster round of the series at Bishops court over the Easter weekend in April.

Photo by R. P. Watkinson

Superbike vs Superstock debate continues

The debate whether the Irish Senior Road Race Championship should be staged to Superstock specifications from next year was not concluded, at the Inter Centre Conference of the MCUI in Dublin last Saturday.

Discussions on any controversial rule change have been stalled, as MCUI officials continue to be lobbied by team owners and competitors on which direction to take.

There had been a proposal that Superstock regulations should be introduced from next year, however, I understand there is considerable opinion amongst riders and teams that no such change should be implemented without giving three years notice, due to the financial investments which have already been made by many teams and individuals to put bikes into Superbike-spec.

I also understand that some officials have concerns as to how efficiently a Superstock-spec championship could be properly and adequately policed.

BSB ride for McCormack

Irish Superbike champion Brian McCormack has finally secured the ride he has coveted in the British Superbike Championship.

The personable 25 year old from Tramore — also home of 2003 Irish Superbike champion Hilton Hincks — will contest this season's Daily Star British Superbike Cup for privateer riders, which was brilliantly won last year by Toomebridge man John Laverty, aboard the Buildbase/NW200 Ducati.

McCormack has signed for former BSB privateer racer Malcolm Ashley's MAR team, and will be astride a Kawasaki ZX10-R.

It will be his first time aboard a Kawasaki, although he rode for two different teams last year — a brief flirtation with the Ballymoney-based JMF Millsport Yamaha R1 didn't work out and he switched back to James Halligan's TAG Honda team.

Despite only scoring one race win, Brian clinched last year's Irish Superbike Championship by 11 points from Ballymena's Denver Robb, after he lost out by 1.5 points to Ballygowan's Michael Pearson in the series in 2007, during which he racked up



Brian McCormack chases Ian Lowry during the Sunflower Trophy meeting at Bishops court last October, at which McCormack clinched the Irish Superbike Championship title. Both riders will be competing in the British Superbike Championship this year, Lowry with the Moneymore-based Relentless TAS Suzuki team and McCormack in the BSB Cup with Malcolm Ashley's MAR Kawasaki team.

Photo by R. P. Watkinson

seven wins.

McCormack's plans to switch to BSB last year fell through, after he was unable to obtain the necessary sponsorship, however, now the dream is a reality.

Brian enthused: "With the experience of the team and the bikes that are provided, I hope to be a top Superbike Cup challenger."

"I am excited for both myself

and the team and being part of the BSB paddock. After meeting the team it has confirmed my thoughts that they are professional and very well established within the fabric of the BSB paddock."

Malcolm Ashley added: "We are very excited to be signing the current ISB champion, as I have been watching Brian's progress from a distance for a few years. We look forward to some rounds having a three race format, as this will be invaluable to Brian in terms of gaining experience and knowledge of the tracks."

"With our pre-season testing kicking off in February, we have a very busy schedule ahead, which we are very excited about."



The Kirk Jamison Racing Supporters' Club is holding another of its popular pub quizzes at the end of this month.

The venue will be Ards Rangers Football Club, Portaferry Road, Newtownards, on Friday, January 30.

The evening will begin at 8pm, with the quiz commencing at 8.15 and the quiz is open to teams of five, with an admission fee of £10 per team.

The quiz will be followed by music.



Kirk Jamison celebrates winning the Ken Redfern Trophy for the second time at Croft last August with his brother Cliff and his father Norman.

Laverty begins testing

Toomebridge man Eugene Laverty has enjoyed his first pre-season tests, aboard the new Honda CBR600RR on which he will contest this year's World Supersport Championship.

The 21 year old and his Portugese team-mate Miguel Praia had their first shakedown on their Parkalgar Hondas at Almeria in Spain on Monday and Tuesday and Laverty completed a total of 171 laps.

Praia and his then Parkalgar Honda team-mate, the late Craig Jones, also tested at the 4.43km track last year, therefore, the team was equipped with valuable data, which it hoped would ease the transition between the 2008 bike and the new machine.

Prior to departing for Spain, team manager Simon Buckmaster enthused: "We know we have some work to do, fine tuning the bikes and making sure the riders are happy with their basic settings."

"The team as a whole is buzzing — there is a really good vibe and I think we have a big year ahead that hopefully will see us finish with a championship [title]."

Speaking on Tuesday, Buckmaster added: "Eugene is still learning his machine and worked very hard to get through as many settings as possible, which will be useful once the season kicks off."

It was Laverty's second test on a Parkalgar Honda, as he had his first run out for the team at the end of last year, after he walked away from his uncompetitive Blusens Aprilia ride in the 250cc World Championship.

Laverty will be back in action on the Parkalgar Honda in the official World Superbike and World Supersport Championship tests at the team's home circuit of Portimao in Portugal from tomorrow (Friday) until Sunday.

Also testing at Portimao this weekend will be Ballyclare's Larne-based Jonathan Rea, astride the Hannspree Ten Kate Honda Fireblade CBR1000RR, on which he will contest this year's World Superbike series, after he finished runner-up to Australian Andrew Pitt in his rookie season in last year's World Superbike Championship.

The World Superbike and World Supersport Championships begin at Philip Island in Australia on March 1.



Eugene Laverty celebrates his third place in the World Supersport Championship race at Valelunga last September. The Toomebridge man will be hoping for more of the same, and better, when the World Supersport Championship kickstarts in Australia in March.



At the Inter Centre Conference of the Motor Cycle Union of Ireland in Dublin last Saturday, outgoing President Neil Loughrey (right) handed over the chain of office to Ian Forsythe of North Armagh Motorcycle Club.

First Presbyterian Church
Top of High Street, Comber

MOTORCYCLE SHOW

Friday 30th January, 4-9 p.m.
Saturday 31st January, 10 a.m.-5 p.m.
Vintage and Modern Motorbikes
Rare and Historical Films of Races
Stalls - Memorabilia, Parts and Accessories
Admission £3 + Refreshments on Sale

Green light for Norton

The MCUI Inter Centre Conference gave the green light for Norton to return to racing in Ireland. With Ballymoney's Michael Dunlop set to follow in the tyre tracks of his famous, much lamented father, Robert, by racing a Norton at the North West 200 and Isle of Man TT, there was never any doubt the MCUI would grant permission for the famous marque to return to the tarmac scene in Ireland this year.

As expected, the Conference agreed to reinstate the rules for rotary engine machines to a maximum capacity of 1200cc at road race and short circuit events, using an 'equivalency factor' of 1.7, instead of the 'equivalency factor' of 2, as specified by the governing body of motorcycle sport, the Swiss-based Federation de Internationale Motocycliste (FIM).

This means the 588cc rotary Norton will be rated as a 999.6cc machine for all events held within the jurisdiction of the MCUI.