

Motorcycling with John Savage

World class performance from Rea



Take a bow! Jonathan Rea acknowledges the Misano crowd after his magnificent victory. Photo by Hannspree Ten Kate Honda Team

If anyone was in any doubt that Jonathan Rea is a world class rider, there can be no lingering misgivings, after the 22 year old Ulsterman scored a phenomenal maiden World Superbike Championship victory in a fabulous race at the San Marino round of the series at Misano on the Adriatic coast on Sunday

Astride his factory-backed Hannspree Ten Kate Honda Fireblade, the Larne-based Ballyclare man brilliantly outwitted and outrode Xerox Ducati duo Michel Fabrizio and Noriyuki Haga to consolidate his fourth position in the championship standings, in his rookie year, after he finished runner-up to his Hannspree Ten Kate team-mate, Australian Andrew Pitt, in his first season in the World Supersport Championship last year.

It was a perfect end to a tumultuous day for Rea, who endured a number of problems in the first of the two races, but rode with dogged determination to finish a fighting seventh.

Rea scored his first ever WSB podium finish with a third place at Kyalami in South Africa and pocketed another third in the American round in Utah, and Jonathan and his vastly more experienced team-mate, Spaniard Carlos Checa, tested at Magny-Cours in France last week, when one of the issues under the spotlight was suspension.

Rea was on the pace at the 2.5 miles Misano circuit from the outset of practice last Friday, when he spent much of the morning's free practice session evaluating Ohlins suspension alongside WP product, which has been used by the Ten Kate team in the past, and he ended the first qualifying session fourth fastest.

Only Czech rider Jakub Smrz (Guandalini Ducati) bettered Rea in last Saturday's Superpole sessions, therefore, Jonathan claimed a front row grid slot for the 24 lap races.

Having topped the timesheets in the preceding free practice and the first two Superpole sessions, Jonathan missed out on his maiden pole position by just one tenth of a second, after the team opted to run with Ohlins suspension.

Afterwards he commented: "I can't thank the crew enough for working so hard this weekend. We got some new hardware to try at Magny-Cours and it's been a bit of a rush to get everything together. In the last couple of sessions we managed to find some times and that's given us a good starting position, which is what we needed and were aiming for. I want to thank the Ten Kate team for the belief they've had in me over the last few races. We're really moving forward now and it's a really buzz. We're not anywhere near the limit with the new suspension yet and there's still a lot more we can do."

To say the first race was eventful for Rea would be a gross understatement.

Jonathan's machine developed a fuel problem on the sighting lap and he was given a ride back to the pit by his Ten Kate team-mate Ryuichi Kiyonari and was then considerably handicapped when he was denied access to the grid on his spare machine, was forced to start the warm-up lap from pit lane, and launched into the race from the back of the grid.

The race began on a wet track, following a torrential downpour, and Rea got a scorching start and was up to tenth by the completion of the opening lap, despite an unfortunate coming together with Kiyonari, which finished the former double British Superbike champion's race with a broken gear lever and left a hole in Jonathan's right foot from the Japanese rider's footpeg.

With admirable grit and composure, Rea hauled his way up to fifth place, but incurred a ride through penalty which dropped him back to 18th.

With the track drying, and Londoner Shane Byrne leading by ten seconds from Smrz, Fabrizio and American ace Ben Spies, Shinya Nakano became the first rider ever to switch bikes in a World Superbike race, when he brought his factory Aprilia into the pits, and swapped to his spare bike, fitted with slick tyres.

Rea made his machine switch on lap 11, but briefly stalled the second bike and rejoined the race in 20th position. However, as more riders pitted to change machines, Rea moved up to 11th and continued his charge up the leaderboard to finish a tremendous seventh, ahead of Huddersfield man Tom Sykes on his factory Yamaha R1.

Sykes' team-mate Spies took the win by eight seconds, forcing Byrne to settle for second on his Sterilgarda Ducati, ahead of home hero Fabrizio, Smrz and championship leader Haga, who got the better of his Japanese pal Yuki Kagayama (Suzuki) to take fifth.

Jonathan recollected: "I needed to start with scrubbed tyres in the wet, but the problem on the sighting lap finished that plan. With the penalties and brand new tyres, and having destroyed my footrest and rear brake in the crash with Kiyoi, it was difficult, so seventh was about as good as we could have hoped for."

Rea started the second race

from his merited qualifying position on the front row of the grid and quickly got down to business. By lap four he was leading Fabrizio and Haga and within a few laps the leading trio broke away from the rest and the scene was set for a riveting race, as no quarter was given or asked by Rea or his Ducati rivals.

Jonathan maintained his slender advantage until Fabrizio slipped past him on the inside at the chicane on lap 16 and a lap later Haga made an identical move on Rea, but Jonathan immediately countered to retake second place.

Rea stalked Fabrizio until he made the crucial move on the final lap, when he dived past the Italian into the first corner, and he rode an impeccable final lap to keep Fabrizio at bay and score a stunning win by 0.063 of a second, as Haga kept a watching brief in third, half-a-second back on Rea, but content to settle for the precious points he got for third, as a frustrated Spies hit problems and dropped back.

Byrne completed his weekend with a good ride to sixth, while Sykes again impressed by placing seventh, both behind Smrz and Checa.

Jonathan beamed: "As soon as I knew I had the pace to match the two Ducatis I was comfortable. I tried a few different lines in the closing laps to probe and find the best way through. When I got past Fabrizio it was pretty straightforward."

"It's really nice to win here in Italy, in Ducati's backyard, where we thought it would be quite hard. But we've come on leaps and bounds recently and hopefully we can fight at the front in every race. It really bodes well for us for the rest of the season."

Ronald ten Kate, manager of the Dutch-based Hannspree Ten Kate team, said: "It's been a very up and down day and a long road to success this season, with some difficult development steps with the CBR1000RR. Although we still have a few more plans and ideas that we want to try, Jonathan's win was a major breakthrough. I'd like to thank him and the other riders, the whole crew, and Honda for staying loyal to us, and a special thank to Andreani Group [Ohlins] for all their hard work this week."

He concluded: "Although the championship may be out of our reach this season, our intentions for the rest of the year are quite clear: winning!"

There is little respite for the World Superbike riders, with the ninth round of the 14 round series at Donington Park on Sunday, where Rea is assured of a hero's welcome and a big 'home' support.

Haga's championship lead over Spies has been marginally reduced to 48 points, while Fabrizio is now just seven points behind Spies, but a comfortable 70 points ahead of Rea, who is 32 points clear of Max Biaggi.

It's close behind Biaggi, with Derbyshire's Leon Haslam just one point behind the Italian, despite disappointing results at Misano on his Steggy Motorsport Honda, and only four points in front of Tom Sykes.



On top of the world! Jonathan Rea celebrates his maiden World Superbike Championship win. Photo by Hannspree Ten Kate Honda Team

Laverty narrowly misses another victory

Eugene Laverty came within fractions of a second of emulating his fellow Ulsterman, Jonathan Rea, by topping the Misano podium, when the Toomebridge man narrowly lost out to his arch rival, Cal Crutchlow, in the eighth round of the 14 rounds World Supersport Championship on Sunday.

Following wins in Qatar, Holland and South Africa in his first full World Supersport Championship campaign, 22 year old Laverty was targeting another victory in Italy, and he came so close, but Coventry man Crutchlow beat him to the chequered flag by just over one fifth of a second.

The track temperature was over 50 degrees during the first practice session last Friday. However, the weather completely changed overnight and rain began to fall at the start of the following day's qualifying, but the track dried throughout the session and Laverty rode intelligently in the difficult conditions to qualify his Parkalgar Honda CBR600RR eighth on the second row of the grid.

In front of his home crowd, Michele Pirro took pole position on his Yamaha, ahead of similarly mounted Crutchlow, another Italian, Massimo Roccoli (Honda), and Japanese veteran Katsuki Fujiwara (Kawasaki).

Laverty reflected: "The weather played havoc and I didn't do anything silly. I was held up on my last fast lap, when I really went for it, but with conditions changing all the time it paid to be cautious."

Eugene didn't get the best getaway in the 22 laps race, as defending champion Andrew Pitt stormed to the front from his third row start, and Laverty completed the first lap in tenth position, but made rapid progress to slot into second.

He inherited the lead when Australian ace Pitt crashed spectacularly from his Hannspree Ten Kate Honda at 130mph and was fortunate to escape with nothing more than a sore neck and shoulder.

Isle of Man-based Pitt shrugged: "There is simply no point running around for fifth and sixth place finishes, which we've had for the last few races. I need to start winning again and that was all that was in my mind today."

"The problem is that we've been testing new suspension and had very little dry track time. Yesterday's qualifying was difficult, but my start was pretty good and I was just pushing for the win and we know what happened."

Aware that Laverty was easing away at the front, Crutchlow got his head down and by lap seven he was right on Eugene's tail, as the leading duo began to drop the pack.

2007 champion, London-based Turk Kenan Sofuoglu, was determined to stay in touch with the front two, but soon after he overtook Fujiwara to move into third on lap eight, he compounded a grim day for the Ten Kate Supersport team, when he lost the front end of his Honda and slid off at the chicane.

Sofuoglu admitted: "I had some problems getting past Fujiwara. When I finally got through, I had to push hard to reach the others and I crashed."

His machine clipped a kerb and dumped oil on the track, which resulted in Pirro and Gianluca Nannelli both sliding off, although the latter

remounted his Triumph, and the race was stopped to prevent further incidents and allow marshals to deal with the oil spillage.

The second part of the race was staged over 14 laps, and Laverty and Crutchlow were again the main protagonists, and both had spells at the front, but in the final analysis, Crutchlow took victory on aggregate time to enhance his championship lead over Laverty.

Laverty — who embarrassing tipped off his Honda while congratulating Crutchlow on the slowing down lap — said: "I am still reasonably happy with second."

"In the first half of the race I sliced through from a bad start and 13th to the lead in just three laps. Then in the delay we made a small change to my Parkalgar Honda and it worked very well. In the second half it was much easier to follow Cal Crutchlow, so much so that when sitting behind him I thought I was being held up, but when I took the lead I couldn't get away."

"He passed me again and I thought I'd go for Plan B, which was to get into the final corner and drive out to challenge Cal at the line. I had deliberately held back at that corner in previous laps, because I was quicker than him there. Then on the last lap I got in well, but got on the gas very early. I may have been too eager and the rear wheel simply spun up."

He concluded: "It was a good race and the lap times at the end were unbelievable. Cal and I are streets ahead of anyone else. I am looking forward to Donington Park next weekend. I'd like to win at home for the team."

Parkalgar Honda team manager Simon Buckmaster was philosophical: "It is a shame to be beaten, but what a fantastic race that was. Eugene and Cal are the two best riders in the championship and one of them will win the title this year. Congratulations to Cal on taking the win, but Eugene is only 14 points behind in the standings, so it is game on with all to play for."

Sofuoglu had barged past both Crutchlow and Laverty to snatch victory on the final lap of the previous round in Utah, and Buckmaster added: "I also think the race is another lesson for Kenan Sofuoglu. Never once did Cal or Eugene touch — at least not until the cool down lap."

'Indi' to 'czech' out Irish road races

Czech rider Michel Dokoupil, who made an impressive Isle of Man TT debut earlier this month, is to race at the Ulster Grand Prix in August.

Gearbox gremlins forced Dokoupil — who is nicknamed 'Indi' — to retire while running an excellent 12th in the Senior TT.

He has been drafted into Billy Smyth's AIR Kawasaki team to deputise for the injured Tim Poole for the remainder of the season and will make his Irish road racing debut at Skerries next weekend.

Michel will also race at Kells and Armoy, before the UGP, which takes place on August 15.

Additionally, Dokoupil will contest both the Cock 'o the North and Gold Cup meetings at the Oliver's Mount parkland circuit in Scarborough.



Eugene Laverty leads Cal Crutchlow at Misano, but the positions were reversed at the finish. Photo by Parkalgar Honda Team

Mondello double for McCormack

Reigning Irish Superbike champion Brian McCormack won both Open races at the Leinster 100 Irish Clubmans' Championship fixture at Mondello Park on Sunday.

The Waterford man, who contested the opening couple of rounds of this season's British Superbike Cup Championship for privateer riders, won both races from his Cork rival Declan Swanton, with Dubliner Paul Byrne twice third.

Few Ulster riders made the trip to Co Kildare, but Jonny Buckley finished fourth in the first Open race, although he failed to finish the second.

Newry youngster Stephen Hadden won both 125GP Newcomers races, while Jason Cash topped the leaderboard in both Bridgestone Irish Senior Clubmans' Championship races and the Bridgestone Irish Supersport Clubmans' Championship honours were shared by Billy Byrne and Andrew Murphy.



Jonathan Rea leads Noriyuki Haga and Michel Fabrizio in their enthralling scrap at Misano. Photo by Hannspree Ten Kate Honda Team

Speed and glamour at Shopping Centre

Ards racer Kirk Jamison brought a touch of speed to Ards Shopping Centre last Saturday, when he had his immaculate Jim Angus Contracts Honda CBR1000RR superbike and Supersport Yamaha R6 machines on display.

Joining Kirk to add a touch of glamour to the day was Danielle Boyd, and together with his race bikes, Kirk had on show a mini moto machine, which is the main source of income for his Supporters' Club this season, having been liveried and presented to the club by Alan Finlay of renowned Nice Bike Paintshop in Carrowdore.

Raffle tickets to win the mini moto, priced £1, are being sold by Kirk and his Supporters' Club members throughout the year, and the winner will be selected at random at the end of season Irish Superbike Championship Sunflower Trophy meeting at Bishopscourt in October.

Kirk is grateful to Shopping Centre manager Ken McGavock for allowing him and his club to use the Centre Mall to promote his racing activities.

Kirk enthused: "This was a fantastic opportunity for us to raise some much needed funds for the club. It provided us with our largest 'sponsors' of the year."

He added: "With almost all my sponsors being local, their target customer area is similar to that of Ards Shopping Centre, so the day provided them with some welcome extra exposure."

Kirk's next race outing will be in the Irish Superbike Championship meeting at Kirkistown on Tuesday, July 14.

