

Motorcycling with John Savage

Local riders selected for Six Nations Challenge

Local riders figure prominently in the team selected to represent Northern Ireland in the inaugural 'MotoSix, Six Nations Road Race Championship', at Donington Park, on Saturday/Sunday, March 28/29.

Ballygowan's Michael Pearson, the 2007 Irish Superbike champion, and Newtownards man Kirk Jamison, third in last year's Irish Supersport Championship, have been selected for the solo team, while Newtownards sidecar crews Alex Johnston/Kyle Young, the reigning Irish champions, and George Kennedy/Colin Smyth form half of the sidecar team.

Donington Park has joined forces with the governing body of motorcycle sport in England and Wales, the Auto Cycle Union (ACU), to host the MotoSix challenge, which will feature solo and sidecar teams representing Northern Ireland, England, Irish Republic, Isle of Man, Scotland and Wales.

Each nation will select six

Superbike and six Supersport riders, plus four sidecar crews, and the Ulster team is:

Superbike: Carrickfergus man Alastair Seeley, Michael Pearson, Portadown's Marshall Neill, Denver Robb from Ballymena, Ballymoney's Gerard Kingan and Mark Johnston from Coleraine;

Supersport: Kirk Jamison, Marty Nutt from Castlerock, Dromara's Alastair Kirk, Lee Johnston from Fermanagh, Belfastman Nikki Coates and Gary Jeffers from Cookstown;

Sidecar: Alex Johnston/Kyle Young, Belfast pair Scobie Killough/Paddy Marley, Banbridge crew John Clarke/Stuart Graham and George Kennedy/Colin Smyth.

Racing will be staged over the Donington grand prix circuit and qualifying and race positions will count towards the team scores. During qualifying on the Saturday, the team with the lowest aggregate qualifying time, taken from the combined times of the six team riders, will get first choice of grid positions, the second team getting second choice, etc, until the grid is complete.

During Sunday's two races, penalty points will be awarded for race positions: one point for a win, two for second, three for

third, down to 36 points for the last finisher, and the MotoSix crown will go to the team with the lowest points.

Team representatives will be easily identifiable, as they will wear tabard style tops in their national colours.

Ulster team manager, Newtownards man Ivan Davidson, commented: "The MCUI Ulster Centre are delighted to be afforded an opportunity to participate in such an event, which provides a valuable chance for our talented team to display their skills on a major stage in a prestigious event."

"We are confident our team will be a force to reckon with, littered with Irish champions, a British champion, a North West 200 winner and riders who have vast experience of racing at home and at British Championship level. We are sure we can be a match for any of the other nations."

Robert Fearnell, Operations Director at Donington Park, enthused: "This event will be a real festival of motorcycle racing. We plan to make MotoSix not only about the sport, but also the spirit of the sport, harnessing the massive enthusiasm and passion that makes motorcycle sport special.

We are sure this will be an event to remember."

ACU Road Race Committee chairperson Jim Parker is equally enthusiastic. He said: "This is a very important event for British road racing in every sense. It is the first time that we have worked with our friends in Wales, Scotland and Ireland to put on an event like this — an event, I hope, that will have a long and successful future."

He continued: "I believe that MotoSix will offer spectators something different to the normal road racing experience, with the chance to cheer for their country and national team."

There will be a full schedule of support races, including the ACU Suzuki GSX-R Trophy and the ACU 250GP National Championship, and the ACU also plans to run a one-off Women's British Championship race.

Proposals for MotoSix also include television coverage, with a programme planned to cover both days of the event, including rider and team interviews, together with full race coverage.

Billy Nutt of nuttravel.com is intending to run a coach trip to the MotoSix meeting and anyone requiring further information should contact him.



Alastair Kirk celebrates after he clinched the Irish Supersport Championship title at Bishopscourt last October. Photo by Derek Clegg/irishbikeracing.com



Kirk Jamison (left) and Denver Robb will fly the Ulster flag at Donington. Photo by Derek Clegg/irishbikeracing.com

Daytona disappointment for Dunlop

Financial constraints mean that William Dunlop has had to pull the plug on his plans to compete at the Daytona 200 in Florida in March.

Instead the Ballymoney man will attend the Cartagena Pro-Test in southern Spain from March 5-8.

William explained: "Unfortunately a mixture of not having a machine and the tightening of the purse strings has forced me to make a last minute change to my plans."

"I would have liked to have been taking in Daytona, but the cost and current financial difficulties facing everyone has made the trip untenable."

"I have instead decided to travel to Spain in March, where I hope to meet up with Mark Keen of KRP [Keen Race Preparation] and with my own bike, either a 600 or the 250, try and get as much testing as possible."

He explained: "I expect to be away for about two weeks and I will be travelling on my own in my van and using it as my home basically, as I will be sleeping in the van while I am there so the cost is minimal."

William admitted: "It's not the perfect way to do it, but it's the only way I can, as it will cost me about £1,000 on diesel just to get there and back again."

He added: "I have a few other irons in the fire to

look at, but hopefully it pays off before the start of the new season."

William's younger brother Michael could also be at Cartagena to test the rotary engine Norton he is expected to ride at the North West 200 and Isle of Man TT, and the Relentless TAS Suzuki team may also make the trip.

Definitely there will be Michael Rea, younger brother of World Superbike Championship ace Jonathan.

Trip organiser Barry Symmons pointed out: "Michael Rea will take to the Cartagena track where Johnny Rea made his giant leap up the ladder of success, for it was at the Pro-Test that the final selection of the Red Bull Rookies took place and Johnny was chosen to join that illustrious team and the rest, as they say, is history."

Over 65 riders will be taking part in the test, including a large number of Irish riders, amongst them: Marty Nutt, Lee Johnston, Andrew Courtney, Clifly Hamilton, Nikki Coates, Davy Haire, Mark Lunney, Mark Kelly, Matthew and Nigel Percy, Michael Sweeney, Cody Nally and Peter Newell, and also there will be Scotsman Keith Amor.

With his son Jamie also due to take part, Alan Patterson of RPM Performance will be at Cartagena with his full race support package. There will also be a mobile dyno and full back up from Dunlop tyres.



Wilson Lynn with the riders who will carry his Farlough Garage livery this season: 2007 Irish Supersport champion Matthew Percy and Antrim teenager Mark Hanna. Photo by Roy Adams, Mid Antrim Media

Concern mounts after Croft loses appeal

Motorcycle racing, and motorsport in general, was delivered a devastating blow on Monday, when the immensely popular Croft circuit in north Yorkshire lost its court appeal against a legal case, brought by a couple and their daughter, who claimed their lives had been blighted by noise emanating from the track.

The immaculately maintained circuit, near Darlington, is due to host a round of the British Superbike Championship in September, however, the owners now face a legal bill close to £1 million, after losing their appeal.

The verdict sets a legal precedence, which leaves the door open for residents close to race circuits and closed road races to make similar claims, therefore, putting the entire future of motorcycle racing and motorsport in the melting pot.

Last week, we reported that three residents 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 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 appealed against the decision and expected to hear within the next couple of weeks whether they have been successful.

If the appeal was lost, we reported, 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.

On Monday, at the High Court in London, Croft Circuit lost its appeal and was hit with an injunction, restricting 'noisy activities' at the track to just 40 days a year.

Derek and Julia Watson and their daughter Jill Wilson live within some 300 metres of the circuit, and alleged their enjoyment of their homes has been gravely affected by 'loud, intrusive and repetitive noise'.

In an extremely rare decision last April, a High Court judge ruled all three had been victims of 'noise nuisance' and ordered the circuit's tenants, Croft Promo-Sport Ltd, to pay the Watsons £109,600 damages, and Mrs Wilson £40,000.

Croft Promo-Sport Ltd has a leasehold interest in the circuit, which is managed by Croft Classic and Historic Motor Sports Ltd (CCHM), which was set up in 1994 by Jimmy Wilson, who was married to plaintiff Jill Wilson between 1987 and 1994.

Mr Wilson established Croft Promo-Sport Ltd, together with Trevor Chaytor-Norris and his wife Katherine, owner of Croft Motor Circuit.

The injunction will result in a reduction in the residents' damages payouts, which were



Ryuichi Kiyonari and Ulster's Jonathan Rea dispute the lead in a British Superbike Championship race at Croft in August 2007. Close behind is Tom Sykes on Paul Bird's Stobart Honda, while No 36 is Gregorio Lavilla. All four will compete for this year's World Superbike Championship title. Photo by Philip Campbell

largely based on the reduction in value of their homes caused by the noise nuisance.

Nevertheless, Croft Promo-Sport also faces massive legal costs bills. The plaintiffs were represented by a leading QC and their legal costs bills have been estimated at around £700,000.

At London's Appeal Court, Croft Promo-Sport argued the original ruling judge was 'plainly wrong' to rule in favour of the plaintiffs.

Richard Jones QC, for the company, argued that 1963 and 1988 planning permissions granted for the race track — formerly a World War 2 aerodrome and first used for racing in 1949 — had changed the character of the area to such an extent that noise levels were reasonable.

He added that noise and other issues relating to the track had been carefully considered by expert planning inspectors during two public inquiries and a balance struck between the interests of local residents and the public amenity value of the circuit.

The QC said the court decision would have serious implications for the future use of the track and had left Croft Promosport not only exposed to enormous legal costs, but also open to other potential claims by an uncertain number of neighbouring landowners.

However, the Appeal Court judge said he could find no legal flaw in the original court conclusion that the plaintiffs had suffered an 'actionable nuisance'.

Sir Andrew Morritt, sitting with Lord Justice Richards and Lady Justice Hallett, also ruled it was illogical of High Court judge, Mr Justice Simon, to deny the trio an injunction, restricting the number of days to 40 on which 'noisy activities' can take place at the track.

Croft Promosport were refused permission to appeal to the House of Lords and ordered to pay more than £120,000 in legal costs immediately.

In a terse statement issued on Monday, Croft Circuit stated: "Croft Promosport Ltd is extremely disappointed with the Court of Appeal's decision today in relation to the recent High Court judgement, which has serious implications for the circuit and the motor racing industry generally. We are reviewing the position carefully and would not wish to make any further comment at this stage."

The plaintiffs' objection was not to car and motorcycle racing events, which take place on the track on about 45-50 days a

year, but to 'vehicle testing days' and 'track days', when members of the public drive cars around the track 'all day long at high speed'.

In addition to its BSB round, Croft hosts various motor cycle racing 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.

Last week, Kirk staunchly defended 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 residents. 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."

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 original 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 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."

Percy replaces Kinghan in Farlough team

Randalstown rider Matthew Percy has replaced Ballymoney's Gerard Kinghan in Wilson Lynn's highly respected Farlough Garage team, after Kinghan's switch to replace Coleraine man James Dickson in Gerry Kingsbury's Zig Zag outfit.

After a promised Irish Superbike Championship ride fell through at the last moment, personable Percy frustratingly kicked his heels last season, after he won the Irish Supersport Championship the previous year.

Percy, who will be a welcome addition to this year's ISB series, explained: "After I won the Supersport Championship in 2007, I had an offer of a superbike for 2008. To cut a long story short, it didn't happen and I had to sit out last season. By the time we finally found out it was a non-starter it was too late to sort out anything competitive — I wasn't very happy."

Matthew explained: "Right from I started racing in the Clubmans' Championship in 2001 on a 125 Honda, we always had a bit of help from Wilson at the Farlough Garage. There wasn't a lot of thinking to be done when he offered me the bike. I am really happy for the chance to ride the Farlough Suzuki. It's a good bike, and I'm under no pressure, apart, maybe, from what I put on myself. Wilson has just told me to go out and have fun and stay safe."

He admits: "I would like to think that before too long I will be able to finish in the top half dozen on a regular basis. I'm under no illusions that the Superbike class is a whole

different ball game to the Supersport. It's going to be hard, but I'm not going to make up the numbers. I'm up for it."

Matthew will have his first run out on the Farlough Garage Suzuki GSX-R1000 in the Cartagena Pro-Tests in Spain from March 5-8, ahead of the commencement of the Irish Superbike Championship at Mondello Park in Co Kildare on March 21/22.

He enthused: "Having just sat on the bike in the garage, the suspension seems almost solid. There's a lot of bits and pieces to fix on it, and a few bits and pieces to replace, before it can be ridden. It's going to the dyno for a wee check up and then hopefully it'll be set for the start of the season."

He will be accompanied by the Spanish tests by his younger brother Nigel, Irish 125cc short circuit champion for the past two years.

Wilson Lynn outlined: "After Gerard left the team, I looked around to see who was available, or more importantly, who was available that would be capable of giving the bike a good airing. I knew that Matthew was a good 600 rider, and that he was a good, steady wet weather rider. More importantly, he wanted to go Superbike racing. I had a talk to him, and the upshot is that he is riding the bike for me in 2009."

"He's under no pressure, but with Gerard going so well on the bike last year, we know what it can do. It would be great if he could finish the year in the top half dozen, but there's a world of difference in a Supersport bike and a Superbike."

Another young rider who will benefit from backing from Lynn's Farlough Garage team is Antrim teenager Mark Hanna.

Mark has the Roy Hanna Motors TSR250 Honda for this year, but also wanted to have a run out in the Supersport class and a deal was struck between Roy and Wilson, whereby both men bought the bike and will run it as the Farlough Garage/Roy Hanna Motors Yamaha R6.

Mark said: "I am still riding the 250 Honda, but this year, for the first time, I will try a 600. I know they are a lot easier to ride than my 125, or even a 250. Being a four-stroke, they are a bit more forgiving about being in the wrong gear and things like that. I'm looking forward to getting a run out on it. We are running it in standard spec to start with, but even though it's going to a lot slower than the proper Supersport bikes, at the minute I'm after a steady run, other than trying to get onto the podium. I know that's not realistic at the moment."

Roy Hanna commented: "Mark wanted to have a shot at the Supersport class. We were able to buy the R6 in England. It had been raced in the Junior Superstock championship over there. We are going to run it in standard, at least for this year, just to give him a bit of experience on a four-stroke. It's not everybody can ride a two-stroke and a four-stroke. The only way for him to learn is to get on it and ride it."

Aaron McMillan will ride the 125 Honda that Mark raced last year, again in Roy Hanna Motors colours.