

Motorcycling with John Savage

RIDERS BRING NEW LEASE OF LIFE TO ISB

For the first time ever, the Irish Superbike Championship (ISB) was given an official media launch last Thursday, organised and hosted by the ISB Riders' Group, with the backing of the Ulster Centre of the Motor Cycle Union of Ireland.

Representatives of Ulster Centre Clubs which promote ISB rounds were present at the launch, in Belfast's Ramada Hotel, together with a healthy representation of riders and other guests, including Fergus Brennan, representing the Mondello Park circuit in Co Kildare, and Bishops court circuit owner Jim O'Brien, together with circuit director, Wilson McKibbin.

Officials from Southern Centre Clubs were unable to attend, but sent their best wishes, as did representatives of Kirkistown racing circuit, who were also unable to be there.

The last British rider to win a world championship grand prix, Ballyclare's Jeremy McWilliams, turned up to show his support for the riders, who are also being backed by former multi-Irish champion Michael Swann, who was unable to attend due to family commitments.

Ulster riders filled three of the top four positions in last season's enthralling Irish Superbike Championship, which Moneyreagh's Michael Pearson won in the final race of the series at Bishops court, to clinch the title by 1.5 points from Waterford man Brian McCormack.

During the 20 races, there were no fewer than eight winners, with runner-up McCormack topping the podium on the most occasions — four times, compared to three by Pearson, while Australian Cameron Donald also notched a hat-trick of wins.

At the start of this year, Pearson, together with Coleraine's James Dickson and Newtownards rider Kirk Jamison, who respectively placed third and fourth in last year's ISB Championship, teamed up with ISB newcomer Scott Kelly, from Comber, to discuss how they could improve and enhance the image of the ISB series.

As a consequence, the quartet were invited to meet senior officials of the Ulster Centre of the Motor Cycle Union of Ireland (MCUI), the governing body of the sport in the province, together with representatives of some of the clubs which will promote ISB rounds this year.

A comprehensive and affable meeting between the riders and officials took place and contact between the competitors and the governing body has been maintained and fostered, culminating in the Ulster Centre agreeing to underwrite the cost of last week's media launch by the riders.

Jamison, who has been acting as spokesperson for the riders, explained: "There has been a lot of mischief making during recent weeks, after the riders decided to get together to launch this year's championship, with some individuals — who should know better — deciding to knock what we are doing and even suggest we are being rebellious!

"That is not what we are about. We want to work with the MCUI, both Ulster and Southern Centres, to help to promote what is essentially the riders' championships and to see them flourish and gain the media and public credibility they deserve.

"If we can enhance the profile of ISB, we can attract sponsors, both for ourselves as riders and to the individual championships,

and the fact we are in a position tonight to reveal some sponsors is a substantial achievement for us."

Jamison added: "Motorcycle racing in Ireland is tantamount to a religion. I remember the late Davy Wood saying there are three religions in Ireland and the most important is motorbike racing!

"From our point of view, as riders, we are acutely aware that road racing is the premier motorcycle sport in Ireland. Many of us enjoy and love road racing, some of us compete between the hedges, but we feel the time is right for us to showcase just how exciting and professional short circuit racing is."

Ulster Centre secretary Alan Drysdale chaired the launch, after Jamison made the introductions and welcomed the guests.

During his introduction, Kirk enthused: "This is an exciting time for short circuit racing in Ireland, with renewed ambition for promotion, ultra competitive racing, and a massive injection of cash for all our southern rounds at Mondello Park.

Kirk continued: "For too long, short circuit racing in Ireland has been a very well kept secret. This was the result of a number of unfortunate circumstances over a number of years, most importantly though, this is a thing of the past.

"For 2008 there is a renewed initiative to publicise the championship and all its events, renewed enthusiasm and drive to acquire funding and improve efficiencies within the sport. It is clear that everyone within the sport has the same goal, to catapult the ISB series into the limelight and give the competitors their just rewards for the financial commitment undertaken to compete, their dedication, and, of course, talent.

"Whilst nothing can ever be achieved overnight, it is encouraging that everyone is now working together, and I believe that tonight's announcements prove that we have already taken massive steps in the right direction."

Since the prohibition of tobacco sponsorship and the consequent loss of the massive cash injection over a long period of years by Imperial Tobacco, largely due to the efforts of Davy Wood, the MCUI hasn't managed to attract sponsorship for any Irish National Short Circuit Championship, and has never staged an ISB launch.

However, the ISB Riders' Group are still working to attract a title sponsor for the ISB Championship, and Jamison announced that backing has been obtained from *Irish Racer Magazine* and the series will be called the ISB Championship, in association with *Irish Racer Magazine*.

Launched in 1999, *Irish Racer Magazine* is the largest selling motorcycling publication in Ireland and the flagship title of Careva Publishing, which also produces *Dirt MX* magazine, together with the programmes for the Kennedy International North West 200 and the Ulster Grand Prix.

Careva Publishing has designed a new logo for this season's ISB Championship and trophies to the top three finishers in the series will be presented at the annual *Irish Racer Magazine* gala awards next January, now acknowledged as the most prestigious motorcycle awards staged in the UK, while the MCUI medal to the 2008 ISB Championship winner will be presented by the MCUI at its annual awards evening.

Speaking on behalf of the Ulster Centre, Alan Drysdale admitted the move by leading riders to get more involved in the promotion and public relations



Some of the top Irish riders who turned up at last Thursday's Irish Superbike Championship launch. From left: Alastair Seeley, Declan Swanton, Denvir Robb, James Dickson, Alistair Kirk, former grands prix ace Jeremy McWilliams, Gerard Kinghan, Michael Pearson and Kirk Jamison. Adding some glamour to the occasion are ISB girls Lauren Fell (left) and Aime Hamilton.

Photo by Stephen Davidson, Pacemaker Press International

aspects of the ISB series had met with a 'mixed reaction' from within the Centre, promoting clubs, and also from other riders in both the ISB and Clubmans' series.

He quipped: "That's not surprising, as opinions are not something we are ever short of in motorcycling."

Drysdale went on: "It's no secret that since I returned as Ulster Centre secretary last year, after a gap of 18 years, that I been stressing the need to build for the future. That's why I view the move by the ISB riders as a very positive one and look forward to working with them and other interested parties to take our sport to the next level."

Alan added: "It's also true that the Ulster Centre is short of people with the necessary skills, and more importantly time, to seek out and bring new sponsors into our sport. We are currently looking at options to address this and hope to be able to appoint a full-time development officer for 2009 to concentrate on this and the associated public relations activities."

Ulster Centre Chair, Chris Blair, who competes in short circuit racing, also addressed the launch.

Support for the riders' efforts was evidenced by the turn-out of competitors: Declan Swanton travelled all the way from Cork to join the 'top table' line up of Kirk Jamison, defending ISB champion Michael Pearson, James Dickson, Denvir Robb

and Gerard Kingsbury — Scott Kelly was unable to attend as he was en route to test at Mallory Park in Leicestershire.

Also present were 2006 Irish Superbike and Irish Supersport champion Alastair Seeley; reigning Irish 250cc champion Chris McAloran; and several Supersport competitors, including Alistair Kirk — the Percy brothers, Matthew and Nigel, reigning Supersport and 125cc champions respectively, were unable to be there, as they were testing in Spain, while Brian McCormack also apologised for his non-attendance, due to other commitments.

That demonstrated that the efforts of the ISB Riders' Group has support north and south of the border, and also across various classes of racing in the ISB Championship.

If last season is a barometer, the 2008 Irish Superbike Championship, in association with *Irish Racer Magazine*, promises to be one of the most exciting in the recent history of short circuit racing in Ireland.

In addition to the established contenders expected to be vying for prominence at the head of affairs, the series will welcome an influx of promoted Clubmans' Championship runners, and the prospect of a number of riders, who have been plying their trade in British championships, returning to race more regularly on domestic tarmac.

Within the Irish Superbike and Irish Supersport Championships,

there will again be the Irish Superbike and Irish Supersport Cups, which are open to riders who were promoted to national status, as a result of their performances during last season's Bridgestone Irish Clubmans' Championships, and also riders who didn't pick up an award in the Cup classes last season.

An additional attraction this year is the introduction by Mondello Park and Motorcycling Ireland of the Mondello Masters series, to be staged as a successor to the Birrane Cup at all three ISB rounds at the Co Kildare circuit.

Riders are also eagerly looking forward to the first ever ISB rounds to be staged outside Ireland, with the exciting Anglesey circuit in Wales to host rounds of the Irish Superbike and Supersport Championships in September.

And there may be another circuit to visit for the first time, closer to home, as the Coleraine Club is investigating the possibility of staging an ISB round for all classes, at Ballykelly in Co Londonderry, as an alternative to their normal venue of Aghadowey, where major track problems were unfortunately encountered last year.

There's an exciting and intriguing year ahead and it all kickstarts with the traditional Easter double header at Bishops court on March 22 and Kirkistown on Easter Monday.

Hectic weekend for Kelly

Comber teenager Scott Kelly had a hectic, and ultimately frustrating, schedule last weekend, when he undertook his first pre-season tests of the year in England, and closer to home at Kirkistown.

The 19 year old was at Mallory Park in Leicestershire last Friday for the official test session and launch of this season's Thundersport GB Superbike (GP1) Championship, and then endured a frustrating wait to return from Stranraer to Belfast, as the HSS was unable to sail due to adverse weather conditions.

He eventually returned home last Saturday and was back on track the following day, at a Kirkistown track day.

Kelly will contest the newly introduced nine rounds Thundersport GP1 series astride the ex-John Donnan Honda Fireblade CBR1000RR acquired last year by Kelly Racing, and has also added an ex-Ian Lougher Superstock-specification Fireblade to the team's formidable stable.

The Thundersport GP1 Championship will be staged between March and October at a number of top British circuits: Mallory Park, Oulton Park, Cadwell Park, Brands Hatch, Snetterton, Pembrey, Anglesey and Donington Park.

The series kicks into action with the Mallory Park Spring Cup on March 16, so Kelly will miss the Dundrod Club's Irish short circuit racing non-championship curtain raiser at Bishops court on Saturday, March 15, but he will be in action at home in the opening two rounds of the Irish Superbike



Scottie checks out his laptop before making adjustments to his Honda Fireblade at Kirkistown — mum and dad Yvonne and Billy are in the background. Photo by Roy Adams, Mid Antrim Media

Championship, in association with *Irish Racer Magazine*, at Bishops court on Easter Saturday and at Kirkistown on Easter Monday.

Scott explained: "I got three 20 minute sessions at Mallory Park last Friday — two sessions on the superbike and then I took the Superstocker out for the last session.

"We had planned to test at Mallory, get home in time for Bishops court, and then do Kirkistown on Sunday, but we got a call from the travel agent to tell us the HSS had been cancelled, but they said that the 7.50pm sailing was still on and we took eight hours to get to Stranraer to discover the 7.50 was off and ended up having to sit for 16 hours on the boat."

With the Bishops court test a 'no go', Scott was back on both his bikes at Kirkistown on Sunday, and overall he was happy with the progress made over the weekend.

His target for this season is to finish in the top five in the Irish Superbike Championship, in association with *Irish Racer Magazine*, and to bag a few podium finishes during the season, while he is aiming for

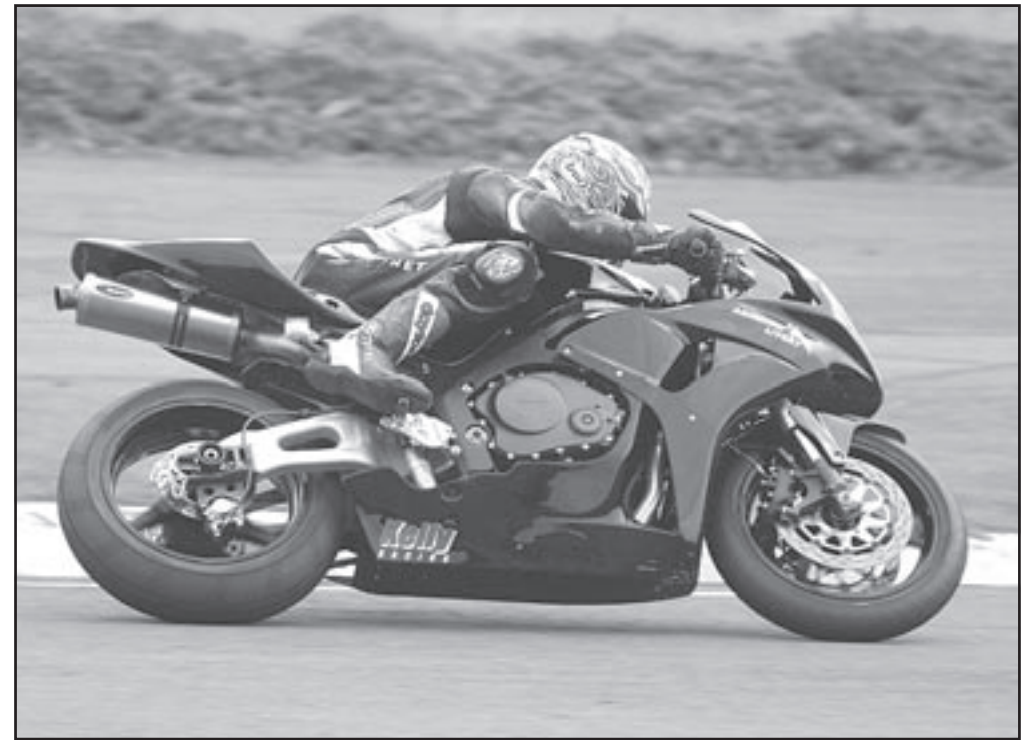
similar results in the Thundersport GP1 series, although he admits at this stage he has no idea who the opposition will be, and what they will serve up.

Kelly won't be the only Ulster rider contesting the Thundersport GP1 series, as his Banbridge mate Marty Lennon will also be on the grid, astride a Yamaha R1.

Principally sponsored by his parents, Billy and Yvonne, Scott recently signed with AKR Promotions, an Ards-based PR company, which manages the publicity for British ice skating champions, Jenna McCorkell and Karla Quinn.

Having started racing in 2001, Scott has considerable experience, having previously contested the British RS125 Aprilia Superteens Championship and the Virgin Mobile Yamaha R6 Cup, then a support class at British Superbike Championship events, together with the Irish Supersport Clubmans' Championship, before he switched to the Superbike class.

Scott's new website was launched this week — check out www.scottkellyracing.com



Scott Kelly testing one of his Honda Fireblades at Kirkistown on Sunday. Photo by Roy Adams, Mid Antrim Media

Last minute panic for Jamison

Fourth in last season's Irish Superbike Championship, after he finished runner-up the previous season, Newtownards man Kirk Jamison has his sights set on again challenging for the elusive title this year, although he admits he is currently in the midst of 'a last minute panic'.

Jamison is switching from Suzuki to Honda tackle for his assault on this year's ISB Championship, with a new Honda Fireblade CBR1000RR, and Kirk and dad Norman head off to England this weekend to pick up his new machines.

But he shrugged: "There is a last minute panic for all competitors who have chosen to

ride the all new Honda Fireblade this season, with parts almost impossible to acquire so early in the year, but fingers crossed."

Ironically, with the backing of his recently formed supporters' club, based in Greyabbey's Wildflower Inn, Kirk has the best support at the start of a season, since he began his racing career — following in the tyre tracks of dad

Norman, and his uncles David and Brian, all of whom are former Irish motorcycle racing champions.

For the forthcoming season, Kirk will have the Honda Fireblade, astride which he will contest the Irish Superbike Championship, in association with *Irish Racer Magazine*, plus the Irish Supersport Championship, aboard a new Yamaha YZF-R6.

Kirk explained: "2008 is set to be a massive year for me. Never before have I made a two pronged attack and never before have I had the latest machinery with which to do it. I am lucky in that I am in the best position I have ever been in regarding support."

He outlined: "I have retained support from Jim Angus Contracts, Feckin Irish Whiskey, Nice Bike Paintshop, Stephen Baillie Estate Agents, Rodney Brown Gardening Services, Sew-Biz, Pressford Shutters and H&J Martin, and I have been lucky to acquire two new sponsors, both local businesses who I have known for a number of years: Hugh Ritchie & Sons Oil Distributors and A b a c u s Printing."

Once again the Jamison Racing effort will be very much a family affair, with Kirk's father Norman his chief mechanic, assisted by Jim Angus, and Kirk's uncle Jim, and for the first time by Kirk's brother, Cliff.

Kirk beamed: "A further

addition to this year's team is the Supporters' Club, which has had a phenomenal first five months. I couldn't have hoped for a team of more dedicated people to support me, and the response to our fund-raisers has been fantastic."

Jamison's new bikes are being prepared by ex-racer Clive Padgett in the famous Padgetts of Batley workshops in Yorkshire, and Kirk and Norman set off on Sunday to collect their new machinery, which Kirk will take to the track for the first time at Oulton Park in Cheshire on Tuesday.

Kirk's first competitive outings of the season will be at the Dundrod Club's non-championship meeting at Bishops court on Saturday, May 15, but he acknowledged: "That may be also more of a test than a race, but I can guarantee that I will be 100% ready come Easter, and the start of the Irish Championships."

To his credit, during recent months, Jamison has been at the forefront of the campaign to attract sponsorship to, and enhance the profile of, the Irish Superbike Championship.

He confirmed: "I will be challenging for both the Irish Superbike and Irish Supersport Championships. Both are going to be very tough to win, with increased publicity around the series this year, additional prize money, and few clashes with British Superbike Championship rounds attracting a lot of top class entrants."

He added: "I am confident that I have the machinery to do it, and will be giving it my all."

In addition to the ISB Championship, Kirk will take in a couple of Scottish Championship rounds and will return to Croft in Yorkshire to defend the Laird of Croft title he won last year, and attempt to regain the Ken Redfern Trophy he won in 2006 — the only other Irish rider to win that particular piece of silverware was Joey Dunlop.

Things are looking up for Jamison, who will also have a new 'Kirkavan' in the paddocks this season!

Careva adds UGP programme to portfolio

Ireland's leading motorsport publisher, Dundonald-based Careva Publishing, has secured a two year contract to produce the official programme for the Ulster Grand Prix.

As publishers of the hugely successful *Irish Racer Magazine* and *Dirt MX* titles, publishing editor Paul Lindsay is delighted to have secured yet another top motorcycling event contract.

Paul said: "Having recently signed a three year contract for the official North West 200 programme, we are now delighted to announce a deal with the promoting Dundrod and District Motorcycle Club to produce the official Ulster Grand Prix programme for the next two years.

"These two events, in terms of motorsport entertainment value, have no peers on this island, so for Careva Publishing to have secured both is very pleasing indeed. Our portfolio is not about quantity, it's about quality, and that's something we can guarantee both events in 2008 and beyond."

Ulster Grand Prix clerk of the course, Noel Johnston, added: "We have made a number of changes for 2008, one of which was to bring in some fresh ideas for our programme.

"Careva Publishing has proved their pedigree in this market, not only with their monthly title *Irish Racer*, but also with the North West 200 programme over the past five or six years.

"We at Dundrod and District Motorcycle Club are looking forward to working with Paul and his team for the next two years — hopefully they can bring us some good weather to complement our new programme!"

Last week, Careva Publishing announced that *Irish Racer Magazine* would be an associate sponsor of this year's Irish Superbike Championship — see separate report.



Paul Lindsay, publishing editor of *Irish Racer Magazine* and *Dirt MX*, with Cara Montgomery, sales manager of Careva Publishing, and Ulster Grand Prix Clerk of the Course, Noel Johnston.

Agnews sponsor Mini Twins Championship

This year's Irish Mini Twins National Short Circuit Championship, formerly the Irish Lightweight Supersport Championship, will be sponsored by Mallusk-based Volkswagen retailer Issac Agnew Van Centre and will be known as the Issac Agnew Van Centre Mini Twins Championship.

Issac Agnew Van Centre has secured a one year deal to sponsor the series, with an option for a further two years.

Together with the Supersport, 250cc, 125cc and Sidecar classes, the Mini Twins Championship will run as a support class at all rounds of this year's Irish Superbike Championship.

The Issac Agnew Van Centre sponsorship was announced at the Irish Superbike Championship media launch in Belfast's Ramada Hotel last Thursday evening, and speaking on behalf of the company, Darren Gilpin said: "We have recognised, through our involvement with motorcycling in the past number of years, that it is an excellent marketing tool for our business which, like any other business, we are keen to see expand."

Gilpin, who competes in the Lightweight Supersport/Mini Twins class, explained: "By sponsoring this ISB Championship class, and through our involvement with the MCUI (UC), we can make this possible, but more importantly support our customers and support the sport of motorcycling in Ireland, which has such a dedicated following, across all religious and political divides."

Issac Agnew Van Centre will also supply the MCUI (UC) medical team with two Volkswagen Kombi vans, valued at £50,000, for use at all motorcycling events in 2008.



Kirk Jamison and his father Norman (right), with some of the silverware he picked up last season, thanks to the support of Jim Angus (left). Photo by Nigel Williamson, Newtownards Chronicle