

Hurricane WSMC / Can you say WINDY!!!

Well, this was the weekend to shine, with regards to our fastest laps performed to the recording devices mounted on our bikes. We would enter the racetrack on Friday around lunchtime to get some timed practice for the afternoon Toyota 200 qualifying. The first practice session resulting in my 2003 GSXR-1000 blasting me to a mid 1:26 lap time. I figured later that afternoon I would easily ride to a low to mid 1:25 lap time to put me securely into the fastest 40 qualifying riders in the Toyota 200 field. As I exited the racetrack to fill my belly for the lunch break, I couldn't help but notice the increasing ferocity of the infamous Willow Springs "breeze". This day would find us fighting a losing battle against the almost hurricane level wind.

I am always prepared to justify why my performance on my motorcycle isn't up to par with my high personal standards, but this weekend I can only say I wasn't performing at my best achieved level, with only a slight bit of negative help, mostly physically, but partly psychologically from the nasty collision of high and low atmospheric pressures out in the high desert. Almost everyone was also battling the same elements, but the faster guys still went faster than us slightly slower guys. I unfortunately didn't keep up with most of my buddies that I usually do battle with in the Sunday Open Classes. For instance, John Chen #73, usually runs low 1:25's right along side, #109 Mark Simon, #798 Premek Glinz, and myself in all of our Sunday races. These fine gentlemen all qualified well with a 1:26.100, 1:27.049, and 1:26.221 respectively. I ran a 1:26.841 just a hair faster than Stuart Smith at 1:26.941. The wind was combative to say the least.

There were a few bad incidences that plagued a few of the riders trying to match their personal bests on the asphalt battlefield. Mark and Bob Setbacken had the worst incident on the front straight. Apparently Bob's 748 dramatically lost power and before Mark could slow up his GSXR-1000 he plowed into Bob at about a 50 mph speed differential. Both men walked away just barely limping. The bikes didn't fair so well. Bob's Ducati slid about 400-500 feet and slammed into the starting lights at the end of the pit lane, not before bouncing off the concrete wall first though. The bike had enough momentum to almost remove the stoplight from its concrete mounting into Mother Earth. Mark's bike catapulted him about 100 feet down the track where he proceeded to slide and leave red skid marks for another 200-300 feet. Luckily the leathers were the cause of this red debris and not a result of his body expelling its vital red fluid, blood. I wish them both well and hope to see them back out there soon.

To say I was disappointed after such a lack luster performance would be an understatement, but we all had the same challenges this weekend, and Sunday didn't get any better. Just ask all those that endured the entire day of almost Hurricane level sustained Willow Springs "BREEZE".

At this time I need to make a couple of comments in regards to some disabled buddies. First, Mitch, I am very sad to hear that you have to endure the pain and agony of such a horrific accident. Please keep a positive attitude and you will be up and walking around in not much more time than you can imagine. Stay positive, act positive, and the outcome to your ordeal will be positive.

Second, Mike, I haven't heard how you have been doing, but I wish you the same quick recovery to your injured ankle from last month's final race of the weekend. Hopefully you will also be able to participate in all the "reindeer games" in due time once your ankle recovers.

Saturday was just a mess around day to check gas mileage and waste a set of tires. Both adventures went just as planned, I ran out of gas and found out exactly how many laps my bike will go on one tank and the tires have almost no life left.

Now to the exciting races from Sunday.

Sunday started just as Friday afternoon ended, WINDY!!! We all knew that the races would definitely change, not only in speed but in strategy as well. The wind would play very instrumental in a few of the day's battles.

The first race of the day was Open Super Bike. I was poised to run with the fast guys to try and make up for my poor showing the prior Friday. I was gridded 6th out of 21 racers. As the flagman raised his hands to wave the green flag, two front row combatants jumped the start. They were not only black flagged, but lost a lap also. Note to self, never jump the start!!! I accelerated within the absolute maximum my bike's rear wheel traction would allow, even if I was following the two that jumped the start, I figured I would run with them until I couldn't follow them any farther, then I would use them as the rabbit, as I became the fox on a "wabbit hunt". I managed to drop a couple of spots in the first lap, but my determination was twice that of the wind to push me backwards. I fought with the two guys in front of me, my old buddy Howard, and my stuntman friend John. I made the pass on them both and proceeded to pursue the front-runners. I had to make up too much ground to catch third place, even though I thought I was in about seventh chasing sixth. Since the two riders that jumped the start had to perform a stop and go in the hot pits, and lost a lap, I was able to gain a couple more spots in my finishing position of fourth. Both of the jump starters passed me on the last lap, but for them it was just too little too late. I was happy to get the result I did, even though I still thought I was in 6th.

The second race was Open Modified Production. I started the race in position 3 of 20 in the second wave. The 750 Super Bike first wave usually has an uncanny knack of massively interfering in the front-runner's challenge in the second wave Open Modified Production fight for the top few spots. With the addition of the wind we all thought there would be more contact with the rear of the first wave starters. We were wrong; everyone was dramatically slower now with the winds blowing at about a constant 30 mph up the front straight. This race's start was clean, unlike turn 8 and 9 that were constantly being covered with the high desert sand. By now, you would enter turn 8 at full throttle, then have to roll almost completely off since the wind would take you much faster than you cared to enter the turn, especially with differing conditions each lap. This race had an exact same result as the first, a fourth place finish with my mind not allowing me to go any faster and staying a consistent distance behind third place for about 3 of the six laps. I had to pass the same couple of guys again, but this race made me work a little harder to achieve the same result. Some people weren't as affected as I was with the windy conditions, unfortunately. I was again refreshed to finish 4th without any competition from behind.

The third race was Open Super Stock. I had inherited the pole position, due to Stoney Landers not showing up for the 9th meeting of the year. He is number one in points just in front of me in second. I hope Stoney is doing better than the last time I saw him up at Buttonwillow, where he crashed out of either second or third place. I don't need the competition, as he has about twice as many points as I do, but he does fuel my riding to new levels each time we battle on the 2.5 mile Big Track,

especially in Open Super Stock. Get well #3.

I completely and thoroughly enjoy starting from the front row. There is no replacement for the confidence gained from knowing everyone is behind you before the green flag even waves. Confidence makes you a better rider. I got a great start, but as the entire weekend showed, others had a better start. Noticeably, #73 John Chen. John took off and got a small 10-15-bike length lead over not only myself but also #9, Clinton Whitehouse, and #798, Premek Glinz. All four of us ran away from the field after only about two laps. I was trailing John in first, Premek in second, and Clinton in third. On the third lap I decided it was time to try my best to get around Clinton and shoot my bike straight for the second place rider, Premek. I took a flying leap into turn 1 just under Clinton's front wheel and made the pass stick. I knew he wouldn't let me get away without a fight, and for the next couple of laps, as I rode towards Premek's back wheel, he showed me his front wheel a few times, in various corners. The wind was only a factor as we entered turns 1, 2, 3, 8, 9, and as we traveled down the entire front straight. As I followed Premek, I noticed he would slow more than normally into and out of turn 9 each lap. I made sure to test out my shifting entering turn 9 a few times prior to my last lap, last corner attack. As I found out on the last lap, perfect practice makes perfect, and those who hesitate loose. I managed to mismanage what gear I was in as I rode up the back of Premek into turn 9 on the last lap. I then made the mistake of not deciding quickly enough to downshift one more gear to get the necessary drive onto the front straight. I rode 5th gear to the line, but not only did I not pass Premek for the coveted 2nd place, I was also beat by Clinton in the final 50-100 feet from the finish line to take my third 4th place of the day. I learned a few important factors in this race;

First is to make sure not to hesitate, you will loose,

Secondly, I can out drive most people out of turn 9 when put in the proper position,

Lastly, I can always learn to be a better rider.
I knew the first and third items, but definitely was put to the test on the second item and now know the true outcome. I will make sure not to make the same mistake again, I promise.

The last race of the day was not only in the worst conditions of the day, but also it would be the fastest and longest, Formula 1. Before I forget, I have to thank my buddy James who helped get the two quick and necessary tire changes made between the second and third and third and fourth races of the day. THANK YOU JAMES!!!

Formula 1 was a field of 19 and I was in position 7 at the start of this demented challenge of man and machine against Mother Nature. The start was a bit clustered, and I sorted myself into the top ten out of turn 1. I was then promptly passed by a couple of riders as we went through turn 2. I made my patented move around the outside of some into and through turn 3, again securing a healthy position of 7th or 8th. As the laps began to click off, I could feel my rear tire, the same one I had run for qualifying, start to give way to a little slide here and there. Just as my confidence in the rear tire dropped a bit a couple more riders made their way around me. One rider I would battle to the end of the race was #816 Jason Caldwell. In qualifying I had just barely beaten him with a mere 26/1000ths of a second gap for qualifying spot 12. Immediately after he passed me I tested my rear tire by gassing it to keep in directly in front of me. I followed him for a few laps to find his weaknesses on the 9-turn, 2.5-mile circuit. As we entered turn 1 each lap leading to the penultimate lap, he would dramatically slow. I knew what I had to do on the last lap, keep him extremely close exiting turn 9 and out drive him to turn 1. Then just put my bike in front of his into turn 1. After I performed the previously mentioned actions, I made

sure to use all of the grip, plus some of the slide that my rear tire had left. I managed to stay ahead of Jason for the entire last lap, and held onto a 10th place finish. This added to my prior finishing positions in Formula 1 have gathered me 4 entries into the end of the year give away of a brand new Toyota pick up truck, as well as 4 entries into the give away of a Suzuki dirt bike, also brand new.

As the weekend came to a close I made mention to those that had performed better than I this time that they deserved the good fortune. I also commended them on their great performances under very acclimate conditions. My final shot was to be warned of my revenge next month in the wake of this month's failure to meet my own expectations. They all know to watch for me, just as I know to watch for them. We will do battle again in a few weeks time and I hope to come out victorious as I once had in the past.

I have a few people to thank as I head into the hopefully support filled 2005 Road Racing Season.

Thank you always goes to my family, as their support is of the utmost importance to my continued success in racing motorcycles. Thank you Jodie, Josephine, Sebastian, and Valentino.

Next I will thank all of my 2004 Sponsors, for with their generosity and superior products I continue to move to the front of the pack.

Thank you and I hope to continue our winning ways of mutual support into the 2005 race season.

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Lastly, I want to let you all know that I am again steadily employed. I think I have found a great career this time, as I am working directly in the motorcycle industry. I am part of the Research and Development department of a high performance engine and accessory company that build product specifically for Harley-Davidson, and other custom cruisers.

Thanks for taking the time to read my report and I hope to see some of you out at

Willow Springs on October 17th, 2004, especially if you are part of my pit crew.

Marcel