

Another Podium / Only Took 8 Months!!!

Well, as most of you know, The Graeber Family has reached full capacity at the pentagonal quantity of 5!!! Valentino Codie Graeber was pulled from Jodie's belly at 7:54 a.m. on Wednesday March 10th. He weighed in at 7 pounds 13 ounces and measured 20 inches long. We are extremely proud parents of a third and final healthy child, which make the count MEN = 3, WOMEN = 2!!! Now comes 18 years of growing older, watching our kids grow older, and loving the enjoyment from both activities.

Part of enjoying life at the present is going to the racetrack, daddy races, mommy and the kids play and watch racing, and the entire family enjoys a full weekend of each others company. This past weekend was only made better by the inclusion of our newest family member at the ripe old age of 1-1/2 weeks old. I only needed to discuss the option of going racing with Jodie for a mere moment before she knew it was predestined to happen only a few brief hours after the birthing of Valentino. The weekend was set.

We traveled to the track on our normal Friday night schedule, only adding a few more infant diapers and a ton more baby wipes. Josephine and Sebastian were just as excited as they always are, but this trip was just a little more special, since their new baby brother was coming along, outside of mommy's tummy this time.

Saturday morning was a tad bit different as I got much less sleep than I normally got. Up to this point, Valentino was doing spectacularly at breast feeding, he would wake up after a two to three hour nap, breast feed for about a half hour, take a small poop, usually one before eating and one after eating, then go back to sleep. 1:30 a.m. Saturday morning was a bit different. Valentino was being fussy, and Jodie was using her extremely large patience and stubbornness to conflict with Valentino's not wanting to breast-feed. At this moment, the baby and the mommy had their first enormous meeting of the minds. 2-1/2 hours later, Valentino fell asleep, slightly hungry. I on the other hand, was now partially awake, enough not to be able to fall asleep as soundly as I had anticipated.

Saturday morning practice came too early after the last night's adventure in fussy baby versus mommy stubbornness, but I rolled out of bed to the enticement of riding my new 2003 GSXR-1000 for only the third time this year on the FASTEST TARCK IN THE WEST!!!

I knew it would be a great weekend after exiting the track after the first practice session. I looked at my lap timer and knew that the posted 1:28.17 lap time was a great success. In my previous two attempts to go fast on my new bike, I had only managed a 1:27.75. Ironically, in my second practice, that is the exact lap time I achieved. Albeit, my bike last month was not equipped with the newly acquired sponsorship parts from K & N Engineering, a high flow air filter, my Yoshimura Race Exhaust, or my 44 tooth rear sprocket. My fastest lap last month was done during a race, which is usually 2 seconds faster than my practice laps, and this month I was attaining the same race pace in practice. Good things were definitely going to follow.

Saturday's practice was awesome. I decimated a rear Dunlop 208 GPA tire, and managed to keep the bike on both wheels, well you know what I mean. Towards the end of the day, the night before's events weighed heavily on my mind, and body. I ended the day with a great meal and an early retirement in bed.

Saturday night proved to be just what I needed, Valentino only getting up twice to feed, and only being awake for the scant 20 minutes needed to eat all of momma's food. I slept like bear in the middle of his winter hibernation.

Sunday morning had me awaking to the bright desert sun at around 6 a.m. I only needed to scrub in my one race used Dunlop race DOT's, since Open Super Stock would be my first race of the day. I didn't even look at the lap timer for the first and only practice this morning, feeling extremely confident that a mid 1:25 lap time was entirely possible during this race day.

Open Super stock has me in fourth place in the point's race, which translated into a grid position of outside front row. The confidence that a front row start inspires in me can only be talked about with a beaming smile on my face. I hadn't tried to launch too hard during the prior days practice, and with the new gearing it would have been a great idea, but you can't live in the past, and I planned on getting a great start no matter what. I let the clutch fly as the green flag waved and hammered the throttle to full wide open as fast as I could. The new gearing, as well as the substantial increase in intake, as well as exhaust air flow, made my newly bought and paid for rocket shoot for the sun. I repositioned my body more over the front wheel to placate the bike's tendency to want to flip me over backwards. I stayed on the gas and noticed that my flying start had me positioned exactly in the same place I had started when entering turn 1, fourth.

We made our way around the track but before we could complete 2 laps, someone crashed badly and that brought out the red flag. We re-gridded in the same order and were now given the news that this first race would be a 4 lap sprint race. I knew that my start would be even more critical if I wanted to do well, so I focused on doing the same actions one more time.

My actions were similar, but not exactly the same, and thus, as we exited turn 1 I was positioned in about 6th place. I thought hard about how well I wanted to do in this, my favorite class, and decided to pass everyone that was in front of me. I knew it wouldn't happen in one lap, but I also knew I had only 4 laps to surpass those in front of me. During the first lap, in turn 2, I made my way from 6th to 4th by passing two riders on the outside, using all of my tires and the confidence that I knew what the hell I was doing on my new 2003 GSXR-1000 race bike. The next lap had me following the footsteps, or should I say the sliding tire marks of my fellow Open Super Stock competitor, #114 Anthony Lanzara. I waited for the opportunity to strike, like a tiger waiting for the weakest gazelle, and when he made that minute mistake in turn 8, I pounced. Now with two laps to go, I had #52 Dan Lebson in my sights. I had a similar experience drafting Dan into turn 8, and when he briefly slowed, mainly due to not racing the past couple of months, I pushed my 1000 past his with a light flick of my right wrist.

Second place in Open Super Stock wasn't what I wanted to settle for, but since I had to fight with four other racers to get into second place, the number position was easily slipping away in the not so far distance ahead of me. I held my lines and drove to point 10 feet past the finish line to complete one of my 2004 racing goals, finish in a podium place in an expert race. Not only did I do that, but I glanced at my lap timer and noticed an unfamiliar lap time of 1:25 something. The reason I don't recall the exact number will become apparent in the following sentences. Please read on.

Next would be the Open Super Bike race. I am in the 9th position on the grid, but full

of adrenaline from the past race result. I now know exactly how great my bike can be, will I be able to ride it as well this race??? The variables changed for the second race, since I can run slicks for the next three races of the day. Being a Mechanical Engineer doesn't always mean you are smart, sometimes the little details foil your grand plans. Open Super Bike proved this theory well, but as plans change, the best person able to adapt usually comes out on top.

The race starts and I immediately jump to the front of the pack. I am sitting in a comfortable 9th place, with what I soon find out, huge gap back to 10th place. Apparently, my 44 tooth sprocket and 195-70-17 Dunlop slick are spewing blue smoke out the back of my bike. The Engineer didn't think that since he had changed gearing that a bigger tire might not fit in the same space as was previously occupied by the same tire and smaller sprocket. College can prepare you for some things but obviously not all things. Luckily or better said, unluckily, someone crashed badly on the second lap and brought out the red flag. I came to a stop on the front straight and had the starter waiving me forwards to go meet him at the start/finish line. He yells at me that my bike is smoking, and we observe the now apparent interference of my rear tire and swing arm.

I rush to my pits to change the rear slick for my now 12 race lap used DOT. I change only the rear tire and head back to the hot pits for our warm up lap on a bike that now runs a front slick and rear DOT. We are gridded with the knowledge that our 6 lap race is now shortened to a 4 lapper. I forget about my tire situation and proceed to ride the rubber off of both the front and rear wheels of my bike. I make my way forwards in the slightly smaller pack and find myself keeping pace with the really fast guys. I have now fully understood why I kept trying to go faster on the track, to keep up with the fast guys. After two of the four remaining laps, I am forced wide in turn 1, well to put it more precisely; I have to take the corner really late. Stuart had talked to me the month before about my inadequacies in turn 1 and this was my moment to reflect and act on our conversation. Thank you Stuart, for with your conversation stuck in my mind, and the actions of my buddy John #74, I was forced to take turn 1 the correct way. I threw my bike into turn 1 way later than I had ever previously done, and found myself driving out of turn 1 with a velocity 10 times that of John, who had taken my old line through turn 1. Thanks John.

As I proceeded to enter turn 2 that lap, I just poured on the gas and let my DOT slide the way it is meant to, and I then became aware of just how much faster I could now go around at least those two turns. I made my way to the next turn and used my higher initial speed to exit turn 3 and enter turn 4 at a much high velocity than I had ever ridden those turns. Now to complete the fastest lap with a solid drive through my favorite turn, number 8, and finally race to the waving white flag. Needless to say, I didn't win that race, instead finishing a respectable 9th. The greatest reward of that race was that I had now achieved a new fastest lap around the Big Track at Willow, a 1:24.70!!!

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To some, this time is just a route marker to the fastest lap of all times on a bike at Willow, a 1:19 something, but to me it is the culmination of 11 months of hard learned lessons, blood, sweat, tears, and a shit-load of money!!! I have aspirations of riding faster, but for now, this month, I will bask in my own achievement of entering the 24's.

The funniest part of the whole fastest lap to me is that I did it on a slick front and a DOT rear and stock suspension. Imagine if I had left the slick rear on, could I have gone faster??? What about when I get my suspension dialed in??? Next month will hopefully prove the fact that I can go faster.

After completing the Open Super Bike race, I knew I would have to run the slick rear in Formula 1 and Open Modified Production, so I changed tires again. This time, to avoid the contact of tire and swing arm, I installed my 42 tooth stock sprocket back on the slick wheel. The stock gearing is not ideal for the track, as it really doesn't allow for the same drive out of the corners or acceleration off the line as the 44 does, but I had no other alternative. I figured I would run my bike as a 5-speed and just use every last rpm the motor had.

Formula 1 was a tough race, but as I have always said and always try to do, I rode as best as my abilities would allow. I started 13th out of 27 riders. My mind was concentrating on the need to keep the RPMs up to utilize the stock gearing to it's maximum potential. Off the line the bike bogged and I exited turn 1 in about 20th place. I charged hard to the front of the middle of the pack, but just as I started to figure out my new shift points and the intricacies of riding a 5-speed Super Stock machine a red flag stopped us after only 2 of the 12 laps.

The restart made me consider higher RPMs at the drop of the green flag and thus I produced a miraculous second start. Unfortunately, another red flag dropped two laps later and I would get to practice starting with the insufficient gearing one last time.

The final start to the Formula 1 race, which had been shortened to an 8 lap sprint, had me propelling my 2003 GSXR-1000 to the middle of the front pack. I sat in 10th place for two laps until my buddy Anthony Lanzara crashed right in front of me exiting turn 5. He was ok, no red flag, and I continued in 9th place the entire last 6 laps. It was the most demanding 12 laps I had raced up to this point in my racing career, but also the most rewarding. I accomplished another 2004 racing goal of finishing top ten in Formula 1, with a solid 9th place. My lap times chasing the lead group around Willow for 8 straight laps were very consistent low 1:25 lap times. I was having a phenomenal day and it would end just as great.

The last race of the day would prove to be the best cat and dog fight I have had with my old street riding buddy "Snappy" #89. Rick "Snappy" Spampinato had got a new 2003 GSXR-1000 at the start of this race season also, but he had already been dipping into the 25's on his old bike. We raced for 4th and 5th 4 of the 6 laps Open Modified Production race. On the 5th lap, Rick made a miniature mistake as he exited turn 5 and I took the opportunity to pass him and try to hold him off for the final lap and a half. I assumed I had broken him with the pass, but he stuck to my back tire like the buggers do after you ride down pit lane after a race. He was waiting for me to make a mistake, which I almost never do, and he got his wish. I made a similar mistake coming over the hill in turn 6, he passed me, and then proceeded to pull a small gap as we headed down to turns 7 and 8. Because my bike was geared wrong, I could only run it to red line in 5th, he made a great pass on me when I made a small mistake and I couldn't catch him at the line. I was about two to three bikes lengths behind him when we hit the white line. "Next time, or the month after that" he said as I complimented him in the pits after the race. I will make sure it is I that passes him at the end of our next meeting on the track; as I never try to make the same mistake twice.

My first Thank You is always to my family, but this month my wife Jodie gets an extra special THANK YOU, for her complete understanding of just how addicted I am to racing. Jodie, I LOVE YOU AS MUCH AS YOU KNOW I DO!!! I also want to thank Valentino for entering the world a few days early so Daddy could race this weekend. Josephine and Sebastian, I love you both very much and appreciate the undeniable love that is returned.

I also have to thank Manager Pranav, for his tiresome help in getting me any and everything I need to compete with the best riders at WSMC.

Thanks to Stuart for all the instruction and never ending questions about my own riding. Without questions there would be no answers, and without answers there would be no improvement of our riding.

Thanks to those people that came out to watch us race and cheer for us.

Finally, thank you to all of my sponsors, for without their help, I wouldn't be participating in the races at all. Thank You!!!

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Lastly, I would like to invite any and all out to the April 17th-18th event at Willow Springs to not only watch some great racing but also to meet our newest family member, Valentino. Hope to see some of you soon. Thanks for reading.

Marcel