

First AMA Race Weekend of 2007!!!

I have been busy getting my new business up and running, www.gotmotoparts.com, and thus have been away from most of the boards for a few months.

I haven't given up on racing, as shown by last weekend's qualifying efforts at the AMA Infineon round in not only Super Stock, but Super Sport this year as well.

I had the opportunity to ride Laguna Seca a couple of months ago with a very select group of riders and made the most of it, but unfortunately not on my "new" 2006 GSXR-600, that happened to run into the front of my truck back in August of last year.

I took the bike from just over 17 miles with a broken front wheel, bent forks, missing right clip-on, and bent right rear set, all the way to a fully AMA Super Sport legal race bike.

Last week started out on a great note as I made my way down to Willow Springs for a Track Daz Monday track day to break in the now 53-miled street transformed into race bike.

After turning the motor over at 16,000 revolutions per minute; knowing that the motor was tested on a local dynamometer, and learning that my stock motor produced 108.5 horsepower at the rear wheel, I was happy to see lap times in the 1:31 time frame.

Since I had never ridden a 600 cubic centimeter motorcycle, ever, I knew that this was the beginning of some special riding adventures.

By the end of that fruitful day of motor, suspension, brakes, and tires use, the once new bike had now just over 240 miles on it almost all at race pace.

I had a smile that crept from my left ear to my right ear, since I was now a middle-weight motorcycle racer, and I was happy with what the bike could do in capable hands.

The next adventure would come just two days later when the newly broken in 2006 GSXR-600 and my 2005 GSXR-1000 AMA Super Stock race bikes would be run at their first AMA event of the 2007 race season.

Last year, I had missed qualifying on my Super Stock bike by just 44/100 of a second, just about the same time it takes for the average human to react, and I planned on rectifying that result with a fully qualifying performance in the same AMA race class.

I also knew that once I had achieved the first of my two goals, qualifying for the Super Stock race, I could easily act on my second goal of also qualifying for the Super Sport class, even though there would be 52 others trying to do the same thing.

Confidence always inspires one to act in ways beyond their natural behavioral traits usually allow them to act to, and this weekend would be the epitome of that last statement for me and my two race bikes.

Wednesday afternoon had me reminiscing of prior race events I had traveled to, with the same anticipation that I was experiencing this fine afternoon, knowing that I would be riding both bikes, the 600 and 1000, to my absolute limits in the AMA.

The drive 4 hours North to Infineon Raceway was filled with all the normal experiences and one new one; bad drivers, bad traffic, low gas mileage in the RV, and anticipatory thoughts of racing a totally new bike on a not so familiar race track.

Luckily, I had the help of a fellow racer, Craig Mason, owner of www.fast50s.com, since I needed 60 feet of pit space for my same as last year's race rig, the 35 foot RV and newly painted 20 foot fully enclosed race trailer.





A very close family friend, Jeremy Harper, who I grew up with since Kindergarten has been a gallery displayed artist for some time, and I requisitioned his artistic talents to hand paint my race trailer. As you can see, his talents are completely over the top in not only quality, but also perfection. He has a web site that has not been updated in a while, www.seajersart.com, but after viewing his talented hand paintings of the Santa Barbara coast line, you will see that even his work from a couple of years ago are just as impressive as his most recent trailer art. Jeremy, THANK YOU for the completely unique and absolutely one of a kind race trailer, and I know it will endure the time of many miles traveled across the great United States of America.

Now to let the cats out of their bags, since I needed to take a small break in writing, due to the throbbing aches in my broken right big toe; not only did I qualify for both classes I was entered in, I also managed to split the frame of my now destroyed, not so new 2006 GSXR-600 during the Super Sport qualifying session.



Thursday was promoter's practice and I signed up for 4 of the 5 practice sessions, which would allow me to ride each of my bikes in the 4 practices, thus having me riding for almost 4 full hours of practice, and scrambling to set up each bike just right for the weekend's races.

I knew I was getting into some serious bike set up and preparation, trying to ride two totally different bikes over the next few days at this level of competition, but I also knew that the rewards could and would be great if all the riding went fairly smoothly.

Each practice session had to be cut a couple laps early, just so I could get back to the pits to ready the next bike by warming up the tires in readiness of decreasing my lap time each time I swapped bikes and started the next practice session.

My plan worked each time I set foot, or should I say set tires on the track, as I continually made strives to decrease my lap times, and the funniest part of all the riding comparisons between the two bikes, big and small, I inevitably went faster on the smaller bike.

By the end of the day, I was exhausted, not only from all the hard work I had put out on the track but also all the hard work I had put in off the track, in my pits while switching between the two Suzuki race bikes. I was happy to see the last session come to end and to recognize that I had finally been able to power slide the smaller bike, even if it was due to the lack of tire life, and not like on the bigger bike, due to a large amount of horsepower spinning the rear tire wildly out from under the rear of the bike.

The rest of the weekend would be a cake walk, or so I thought, now that I had made it through the toughest day of the entire weekend, without running the two back to back Super Stock and Super Sport races yet.

Friday was comprised of two one-hour AMA practices and I knew I needed to make up a few more seconds to put my two race bikes into the main events.

I had started the weekend in the 1:52 lap time range, and by the end of the promoter's practice day I had already dropped three seconds on each bike; achieving a 1:49.6 on the big bike and a 1:49.3 on the smaller one.

I made sure I would improve my lap times on each bike on Friday by just applying the faster riding techniques I had practiced the day prior, and my lap times showed that I had achieved that when I saw 1:47's on both bikes by the end of the each one-hour practice.

I need to thank not only one of my pit mates, Cory Call, but also another pit mate, Jeffrey Tigert, as they both are much faster than I and both gave me insight into getting faster on the Infineon racetrack. THANK YOU both for your tips and shared information, as I not only listened, but also acted on your advice and knowledge.

Saturday morning, Cory, Craig, and I rode our pit bikes along the 11 turns of Infineon, and Craig and I asked Cory to explain in detail each corner, and how he attacked them, going in, through, and out of each turn.

Lines were discussed, acceleration points, turn in points, apexes, and cornering techniques were all talked about and I applied them in the following morning's warm up on each bike.

By Saturday afternoon's qualifying sessions, I was almost used to riding two totally different bikes, and knew I had the skill and tires to perform at the highest level of motorcycle road racing competition in the United States of America.

Luckily, I had a brief half an hour to rest between the two qualifying rounds, first on the GSXR-1000, then on the GSXR-600.

My mind began to race, as I readied for the first of two qualifying rounds on Saturday afternoon.

I made sure my tire warmers were turned on one hour before the qualifying session, since I was running a new technology tire produced by Dunlop which ran an extremely low tire pressure and enjoys a whole lot of heat before use.

I also tried to visualize the 11 turns of Infineon, and use the new techniques I had already practiced that morning in the warm up to decrease my lap time sufficient to qualifying for the Super Stock race of the main event Sunday.

I got the final call for my first qualifying round and made my way down to the track from my pit spot in the large asphalt playground we had turned into a small town over the past couple of days.

I made my first lap around the track at just about a 1:57, and then dropped it to a 1:49.6, which resembled the first day on the track in just two laps.

It took me two more laps to hit a near lowest lap time of 1:46.358, which I backed up on the next lap with a time of 1:46.339, and my lap timer proudly displayed this to me with a great feeling of accomplishment in my own mind, since I had a goal of a 1:46 flat on each bike for the weekend.

After seeing the displayed time, and knowing that there was time left in the qualifying session for a short break, I came into the pits for a brief rest.

Usually I don't react well to a break in my qualifying sessions, or haven't had good luck in the past, but this year would prove to be very different.

I waited patiently for the qualifying timer to hit 5 minutes left, and I took off for just a few more laps to improve my qualifying spot in Super Stock.

I hadn't known that the track announcer was describing my qualifying progress, since I was just a mere 98/1000's of a second outside of actually qualifying for the race the following day, but he was tentatively not listing me as a participant in the main event, since there was only 5 minutes left to drop my lap time to that of just 110% of top qualifier Ben Spies lap time of 1:36.583.

I shot onto the track knowing that my first lap would be a warm up one, the second lap would be my flyer, and the third was just there in case, or in this case since I blew my second attempt at qualifying on the second try.

Since I made a slight mistake on my second lap of the last 5 minutes of qualifying, my lap timer showed a disappointing 1:49.9, but my mind would not let my body give up this time around.

The last lap, and I finished it with just about 20 seconds left on the timer, was a smooth and fast 1:46.139, a full 1/10th of a second inside of the necessary qualifying time set by Ben Spies.

Last year I was always chasing Jason Disalvo, as he usually qualified well ahead of all the other Super Stock riders, but this year we need to compare our riding prowess to the number 1 Yoshimura Suzuki Super Bike rider, in Super Stock.

I am all for competition and relish the chance to compare myself to the best, but be reminded that my bike is almost stock, as I only change the suspension, brakes, exhaust, gearing, and I run race fuel at an average cost of just \$13 a gallon.

This just shows you that the stock bikes are pretty awesome machines and can truly hold their own on the track.

I was so pumped on the fact that I had made the cut for the first of the two classes I was competing in I almost forgot I had to go out just about a half hour later and do it again on the smaller bike.

Since my goal of a 1:46 flat lap time was almost met on the Super Stock bike, and I had been going just a bit faster on the smaller bike, I reevaluated my goal and set the bar a bit higher for the 600, a 1:45 anything.

Was this goal was attainable, yes, did I attain it, NO, as my broken bike and toe have already proven.

The 1000 took me to the low 1:46's and I entered the track with a mentality that I already knew how to go fast, now I just needed to act it out on the 600.

My first lap was fairly slow, a 2:00.7, but just as a warm up lap should be.

The next three laps got my blood pumping with three 1:47 lap times with my best being the last one, a 1:47.358, and I was closing in on what I had planned for, a 1:45 anything.

As I passed the start / finish line on my sixth lap my timer on board my still new 2006 GSXR-600 displayed my best lap time of 1:46.668, which as I look back, was just over 8/10th of a second under the 110% needed to qualify.

Unfortunately, with 53 riders trying to put their bikes on the 44 rider grid, time didn't matter, just that if you wanted to compete on Sunday you would need to be the fastest 44 in Super Sport.

The next few minutes of this qualifying session turned into a lack of upright riding and more of a tumbling and crashing of a perfectly good race bike, rider, leathers, helmets, boots, and gloves.

I knew I needed to turn at least a 1:46 flat to be in the show, and when all was said and done, the 44th rider's time was a 1:46.411, proving my assumption absolutely correct.

Since I didn't make it past the 6th turn on that next lap, due to my front suspension being just a bit too soft to go as fast as I wanted to, and the fact that the front tucked at just about 100-110 miles per hour, I knew my qualifying session was coming to a very abrupt end.

Usually I don't close my eyes during a crash, as I like to know what is transpiring during the oddity of a crash, but this time I knew it was going to be worse than a normal get off mainly due to the high speed, my eyes immediately closed as tight as a sworn silent monk's lips.

After the spill, I made my way slowly up the embankment to the corner worker's station to seek refuse from the other speeding bikes still trying to put their bikes on the grid.

I looked down the hill to see how bad the bike was and it truly didn't look that hideous, until the end of the qualifying session when the workers picked up the bike and it now looked like a chopper, due to the broken frame.

The forks were at about 30° from parallel to the ground and the bike was now about 1-1/2 times its normal overall length, definitely this was its first and last competition.

Needless to say, I didn't ride in either race, but to take the positive away from the weekend, I did ride a bike I had never ever ridden before, the 600, all the way into the 110% lap time needed to qualify for the main event, just not into the fastest 44, as my time was actually 47th fastest, just ¼ of a second away from the fastest 44 rider's time.

I had also qualified 30th for the Super Stock race but due to the injuries I had sustained from the 600 get off, a broken big toe on my right foot, and a strained left ankle, the same one I had badly damaged a couple of years ago qualifying for the Toyota 200 at Willow Springs, I didn't race at all on Sunday.

I did watch the race this Tuesday morning and watched my name scroll on Speed with a blatant DNS (did not start) following my name and 30th placing.

I will go to the Orthopedic Surgeon's office Wednesday afternoon to see if the broken toe bone will require surgery, since it broke at the joint.

I have plans to make the trip again to Utah in a month, I just need to find another bike since my frame is almost useless to compete on, and I need to get confirmation that my right foot will work properly to compete at the highest level necessary in the AMA, which is quite demanding on the human body.

A huge THANK YOU to my family is a must, as they have always been there to support their Dad's / Husband's / Son's / Brother's / In-Law's passion for road racing motorcycles.

Thank you Jodie, Josephine, Sebastian, and Valentino!!!

Next I need to thank all the companies that have continued to help me and my endeavors in the racing and sometimes destruction of motorcycles.

THANK YOU:

Central Coast Mechanics - www.ccmechanics.com

Suzuki of Van Nuys - www.suzukiofvannuys.com

Motul - www.motul.com

Galfer USA - www.galferusa.com

Ohlins - www.ohlins.com

GP Suspension - www.gpsuspension.com

Shoei Helmet Safety Corporation - www.shoei-helmets.com

Lockhart Phillips USA - www.lockhartphillipsusa.com

K & N Engineering - www.knfilters.com

50 Stunt - www.50stunt.com

E-Racings - www.e-racings.com

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VP Racing - www.vpracingfuels.com

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Allan Real Estate Investments - jodie@allanrealestate.com
MDG Racing - www.gotmotoparts.com

Lastly, I want to say thanks to all those that have helped with behind the scenes actions, thoughts, and support.

If all goes well in the next few weeks, I plan on making another appearance in Utah at the Miller Motorsports Park for the AMA races in June.

Thank you for reading and I hope you enjoyed the action and lack of actions along with the pictures.

Marcel Graeber