

As most race weekend's go, there is usually a little drama before the actual races commence and sometimes also during the races, and this past weekend at Utah's Miller Motorsports Park was a prime example of this fact.

Since most of you know what I did to my previous 2006 GSXR-600 last month up at Infineon, snapping the frame in two, as well as shattering my right big toe in the process of crashing, I needed to replace that bike to be able to compete this last weekend.

My body had been diagnosed as almost ready to ride with, by my awesome Orthopedic Surgeon, Dr. Laird, and my now two piece race bike frame had been sold, I was ready to get another bike prepared for the track.

As luck would have it, I found a bike in Texas ready to meet my standards for another AMA Super Sport racer; "Thanks Toby and Dave of G & S Suzuki", just one week before I was to head off East to Utah.

I paid for the bike and set up the shipper to have the bike delivered the Friday before the Tuesday I would leave for the track, since I usually drive the just under 900 miles from California to Salt Lake City on Tuesday and Wednesday of the race weekend.

We have a promoter's practice day on Thursday prior to the AMA race weekend to come up to race speed a bit quicker than just riding the 1-1/2 hour given for AMA practice on Friday and Saturday morning, before Saturday's afternoon qualifying for Sunday's races.

Well, plans change, especially when your bike that needs about 12 hours of work to be transformed from a mild-mannered street 600 cc machine:



into a full-blown AMA Super Sport race bike, and it isn't delivered to your shop until late on Monday night.



Yes, the tank is being reused from last month's bike, but as you can see, the plastics are all new.



Once Monday night became Tuesday morning, and I hadn't even finished half the work, I headed home wearily to get a few hours of needed sleep.

Just before the bike was loaded into the trailer, at about 4:30 p.m. Tuesday afternoon, I made sure to ride the bike a few tenths of a mile to confirm that it worked good enough to be raced in just a couple of days time at Miller Motorsports Park, another 12 hours of driving time away.

Tuesday after the bike was finished, the trailer and RV loaded, and my belly full enough to drive most of the night, I headed off towards my final destination of Tooele, Utah.

The past 24 hours had been filled with many small obstacles in my way to readying the newly acquired 2006 Suzuki GSXR-600 for the track, but now that I was actually hauling the 600 and 1000 to the track, those were just faint memories.

Wednesday evening as I made my way into the main entrance of the track in Utah, and the outside temperature registered just a hair under 100°, while the inside of the RV hovered around

the low to mid 70's, I knew this weekend would test my physical and mental riding strengths and abilities.

Thursday morning's promoter's practice began at an early 8:40 a.m., and with the time change, that was really only 7:30 a.m. California time.

This would be the very first wheel turned on the track with the new 600.

Unfortunately, the first was damn near the only, as I only got 1 lap around the just over 3 mile lap at Miller Motorsports Park before the bike's slipper clutch would be completely useless.

I exited the last corner on my first lap, a 180° left hand turn that shoots you onto the 3500 foot front straight, and as I hammered the right handle bar's control, and opened the throttle to it's fully open position, I noticed the non-responsiveness of the motor and transmission.

The tachometer showed almost a fully revving motor at just under 16,000 r.p.m.s, but the speedometer only barely changed from its present speed output, thus starting the demise of the clutch's drive and driven plates.

I immediately knew there was an issue with the slipper clutch, as it should only slip when being shifted into a lower gear at speed, until it and the output shaft of the motor synchronize on revolutions per minute, then the clutch engages and the motor's power can be applied to the chain to drive the rear wheel.

During my first lap escapade, I was experiencing an abnormally slippery clutch, which was now starting to disintegrate the longer I tried to get it to work properly.

I shifted gears after letting the revs come down and after the clutch started to engage the motor's power into forward motion, but as I applied more throttle to get the motorcycle to launch forward with more than just average velocity, the same occurrence reared its head, a very slippery slipper clutch.

I limped the bike all the way around the 3 mile lap and as I made my way into hot pit lane started to wonder what was wrong with my "new" bike.

My first thought was that I had got the clutch a bit too hot on the warm up lap and figured I would let it cool for a bit then try to launch it down pit lane, but it just slipped all the way through first gear, so I didn't even take it back on the track.

I made my way to my pits, which just happened to be next to my old racing buddy from WSMC (Willow Springs Motorcycle Club), Will Eikenberry, who is the head mechanic for Keith Code's California Super Bike School, and Earl Hayden, yes that is Nicky's, Tommy's, and Roger Lee's dad's team coach, Allen Taylor, who happened to coach Ben Spies as well.

With those two gentlemen as pit mates, I figured we could solve any motorcycle problems, especially one as simple as a slippery slipper clutch.

Since I knew I had a few minutes, well almost 80 minutes to be exact, before my 1000 practice this Thursday morning, I figured I would start the arduous task of solving the clutch problem right there and then.

I pulled the bike's clutch cover off and proceeded to pull apart the clutch basket as well.

As soon as we got the clutch basket off, I made my way through the pits to try and locate a service manual for the 2006-2007 GSXR-600 I was now elbow deep into trying to diagnosis a failing clutch on.

Thanks to C.R. Gittere, the Geiko rider, as he made the task of working on my “new” bike almost too easy, since he had the all important service manual and was willing to share it with me and my now impromptu pit crew here in Utah.

Before checking the condition of the clutch drive and driven plates, we tried to check the engaging adjustment screws for the slipper clutch.

Immediately we found that the suggested .008”-.016” gap that was supposed to be set for the slipper clutch screws were in fact at a gap of nearly 5 times that at .040”, thus causing my clutch to almost continuously slip as opposed to allowing the clutch to actually transmit power during any motorcycle use, let alone racing conditions.

We manually changed the adjustment screws to the correct measurement, but since I had already fried the clutch plates, which we found out later, after completely disassembling the clutch plate assembly, even the correct settings wouldn’t solve my now not so new race bike.

I put the 600 off to the side of the now almost ready to hit the track 1000, and figured I could solve the clutch problem later that evening after I practiced all day on the big bike by just finding another racer at the track with an extra stock 2006-2007 Suzuki GSXR-600 clutch plate assembly.

Last year’s race at Miller Motorsports Park had me flailing in the dirt after making a small braking error going into turn 5 during qualifying with a lap time of 2 minutes 2 seconds and change, which was good enough to qualify me 43rd by over 1 second to Mr. Bostrom’s best 1:52 lap time.

So, as I circulated the track this warm Thursday morning in June of 2007, I realized I would have a little easier time qualifying, since I had already done a 2:04 lap time in my first practice session.

Usually I am able to drop between 3 to 6 seconds over a full weekend at any given track, and I figured I would need somewhere between a 2:00 flat and a 2:01.5 to race on the big bike, due to the fact that the Number 1 plate holder from Super Bike would race with me in Super Stock all year, Mr. Ben Spies.

To my and many other’s amazement, Ben Spies was almost a full second and a half slower than his lap record from last year with a lap time of just 1:50.441 in Super Bike, which is how we gauge how fast we need to go to qualify in Super Stock, as if we can qualify at 110% of the Super Bike fastest lap, Super Stock is usually a bit slower.

In Super Stock practice, Ben Spies went 1:51.224, and then qualified with a 1:50.647, thus creating a qualifying cut off of 2:01.712.

My first lap of qualifying for the Super Stock race started off fairly bad, as my lap timer read a bleak 6 seconds and 59/100ths continuously as I lead the qualifying group of riders for the initial lap.

Since I knew I would be qualifying without the feedback from my lap timer I needed to make up my mind quickly to push myself, or pit and wait to follow someone, as we were only given 25 minutes of qualifying, which would equate to just about 12 total laps.

Luckily, on the second lap, two of my fellow competitors, Chris Weiss #666, and Eric Haugo #9, who I ended up dicing with all of last year’s race at Miller Motorsports Park, and finally

finishing in 29th place behind him when it was all over, passed me and aided my qualifying session, as they were the carrots and I was the rabbit.

Both Chris and Eric were lapping the track at just about two seconds faster than I was per every 3.06 miles, and I used that fact to my advantage, since I knew I would not have any assistance from my electronic lap timer.

The only problem with following others is that if they happen to have a bad qualifying session, it may translate into a less than stellar session for me as well.

After pacing myself behind the two “vegetables” for about 16 minutes, I came into the hot pit lane to see what I had been able to achieve in the lap time frame.

One of my pit mates, Sahar Zvik #161 had brought his buddy Roger to help out for the weekend and I immediately asked for feed back since there are timing and scoring monitors all over the pits, and was pleased to hear the good news; I had put my 2005 GSXR-1000 on the grid by just a mere .164 seconds, with a final qualifying lap time of 2:01.548 compared to the 110% cut off time of 2:01.712.

I knew the next hour or so would also involve more drama, as the 600 bike was to be tested after my Friday late night clutch replacement.

After I spent the entire promoter’s practice Thursday riding my 1000, the 600 needed some new, or at least different clutch plates to replace the burnt up set that existed in the bike after the one lap, not very enjoyable ride that morning.

I asked everyone I could think would have replacement parts for my bike in the pits, and even asked those that knew of anyone that could help, but came up empty after a few hours of searching.

Knowing that Friday morning would only involve 1 hour of Super Stock practice and a brief ½ hour rider’s meeting around lunch time, I asked another pit mate, Oscar Covarrubias #444 to drive me to the only local Suzuki shop in Salt Lake City, Honda and Suzuki of Salt Lake. I was helped by Steve, a guy I had met last year while watching the races on Saturday, as to how to find the shop, after being helped by another very helpful Miller Motorsports Park employee, since I had met up with Steve again this past Friday at the track.

When we entered the over 50,000 square foot Suzuki shop, I was almost certain that I would be leaving there with a new set of clutch plates, but luck would not be on my side at that very moment.

Just as I thought I had no chance of riding the 600 more than the one and only lap at less than full speed, an engaging, slightly damaged woman that had been eaves dropping on my clutch plate search spoke up.

She enlightened the kid behind the counter that I should call a local Salt Lake City racer that might be able to help me, since Tom Lee raced a 2006 Suzuki GSXR-600, and probably would help out a lowly AMA privateer such as myself.

Not only did we get to speak with Tom, but we also spoke to his mechanic, since Tom’s bike was at Ted’s house, in the garage.

After just a few minutes of conversation, which later turned out to include a bit of miscommunication, I had not only Tom’s word I would be possessing a used 600 set of clutch plates for \$100, but Ted would also ride the parts to the track for me that night.

The miscommunication turned out to be that I was only paying Ted \$100 for his time to remove the parts, all of 3 minutes, but that I would also be buying Tom a new set of clutch plates, which the shop had quoted at a cost of \$234.

I need to compliment not only Tom Lee, but also Ted Kalakus, for their willingness to give up their time, parts, and the want to help out a fellow racer, even if the two racers had a slight miscommunication during the price negotiation process.

I appreciate both of your very generous acts of sharing parts, and time with me.

THANK YOU TOM and TED!!!

Once I had the parts to replace the completely useless clutch plates from my bike, I got to work, but not for very long, to repair my bike's drive train.

Adjusting the three slipper clutch bolts gaps for the newer clutch plates thicker dimension, took just a little more time than the total time to replace the entire clutch plate assembly; all in all a 20 minute job.

The bike was test ridden mere seconds after the clutch plates were installed and the bike ran as it should with a properly adjusted clutch and newer, not toasted clutch plates.

I knew the following day would only allow for a brief 25 minute morning practice to try to come up to the extremely fast field of 60 rider's previous practice times, and then I would need to drop multiple seconds in those fleeting moments of the morning practice by the early afternoon's qualifying session.

As I awoke for the Saturday morning Super Sport practice session, I made my way to the front of the pack, as I needed the absolute maximum amount of time on the track, as I was short changed on the Thursday and Friday prior to this morning's practice, due to not having a fully functioning clutch.

By the time the 25 minute practice session had finished, I had ridden for almost the entire time and managed to turn a best lap time of 2:05.322, which was just .084 of a second inside the 110% cut off time of Jamie Hacking's 1:54.005 practice time.

Since there were 60 of us trying to qualify for the top 44 spots I knew I would need to ride a bit faster if I wanted a chance to race on Sunday in the Super Sport race as well, and during practice that meant I needed to run better than a 2:01.972.

Since I knew I only had another 25 minutes during qualifying to drop my times almost 3-1/2 seconds, my mind tried to think of the best places to increase my speeds and thus decrease my lap times, and I had a bit of confidence from last month's qualifying in which I dropped a couple of seconds.

After qualifying the 1000 that Saturday afternoon, I felt it would be possible to do the same on the 600, with just a bit of effort, and enlarged scrotal usage.

Again, just as the lap timer on my 1000 hadn't worked during the Super Stock qualifying ride, so to did the lap timer on my 600 not perform to the utmost of my hopes.

The display showed a constant 14 minutes and change during the entire qualifying session, but this time, I chose to just ride my ride and put forth the best effort I could riding solo.

“IF” is one of the largest words in many sports, but I knew realistically, 25 minutes of practice and 25 minutes to qualify at this level of racing was going to be a tall order to fill, and the best lap time I could turn was a tad bit faster than my practice time, a 2:05.104.

The cut off time of 2:04.994 didn't mean anything, since the 44th fastest rider turned in a 2:01.371, which put me just under 3-3/4 seconds outside of qualifying for the race, and .110 of a second outside of the actual cut off qualifying time.

Since I now knew I would be racing in the Super Stock race, but not in the Super Sport race, I needed to wrangle up an umbrella girl, because even though I was the 33rd qualifier in a field of 33, I needed to show up in the right frame of mind with the proper racing façade.

My many thanks go out to the Wired girls, my umbrella girl Amanda, and Sahar's umbrella girl Jordan, as they shielded us perfectly from the radiant rays of the hot Summer Utah sun not only on the first race start, but also in the hot pit lane after the second lap Red flag, and then once again on the restart.

THANK YOU AMANDA and JORDAN, we hope to see you again in about a year's time.

I know most readers want to see pictures of the racing action, and girls ☺, and if they show up in the following days, I will make sure to include them once I have them.



Now for the race highlights.

The second race start is pictured above, and as you can see, one spot on the front row is not filled due to Jake Holden's second lap crash and thus a Red flag, due to his body and bike remaining on the outside edge of turn two.

Hopefully he will recover fully soon, as he looked to be writhing in pain as we passed him after the completed first lap.

My first race start was pretty good, as I just needed to concentrate on one bike for the rest of the weekend.

I saw the Green light change from Red as the count down reached the number one on the starting board, and I immediately hammered the throttle and released my fully functioning clutch on my big bike.

The bike shot forward and my adrenaline shot up just as fast, anticipating the next 13 laps of tires abusing, \$11 a gallon race fuel consumption, heat stroke avoiding, professional AMA Super Stock race.

We made the first 15 turns of lap one fly behind us in just a couple of minutes, and as we entered the second corner of the second lap, we came up on Jake's battered bike and body laying on the track, and I immediately knew it would only be moments before we would see a waving Red flag due to the crash.

One more turn, and there it was, a waving Red flag notifying us to head back to the hot pit lane.

Ironically, on the first lap of the actual race, my lap timer was working perfectly, as I had hoped for during qualifying, and now I was just cruising back to the hot pit lane with a properly functioning lap timer.

Our race had started at just about 1:00 p.m. on this cooler than the rest of the weekend's Sunday, but was now halted due to the wreck on the second lap, so out came our beautiful umbrella girls to protect our delicate bodies and machines from the sun's harmful UV rays.

It was just a short recess from the activities of man and machine against each other before we proceeded back onto the track for another warm up lap, and the second start of the race.

My second attempt at starting this race went even better than the first one, as I made my way around a few riders that weren't being as aggressive off the line, and into the first turn of this second start.

I made a couple of passes around the outside of other riders, just as I had learned from the start of the many races I had entered previously out at Willow Springs, and as the group of us riders made our way around the first lap of the restart, we sorted ourselves out by speed.

Another rider, Joshua Ellingson #166, had qualified just .009 of a second faster over the 3.06 mile lap than I had, and we would battle all race long, due to our almost equal lap times.

Joshua was pitted across from us, and had actually traveled a few hours farther to be at this race than I had, since he was from Washington State, and had been on the road for just about 19 hours, compared to my measly 12 hours of driving.

I had spent a few minutes talking with Joshua before the Sunday race, as he was pitted next to Will and the California Super Bike School rig, and he had a pretty cool paint job on his bike, it was painted as if it was on fire.

He had shown us a Dynamometer sheet from his bike with an impressive 188 Horse Power at the rear wheel, but at elevation it was just a bit more powerful than my stock bike making around 165 Horse Power, since my bike was tuned at this elevation last year.

As we raced around the Miller Motorsports Park complex for almost the entire nearly 12 laps of the 13 lap race, Joshua was leading me, but as shown in the picture below, my start had him seeing my rear wheel at the beginning of our battle.



I tried my best to make a late in the race pass on him going into the 13th, for obvious reasons a favorite turn of mine, corner, but my over exuberant application of the throttle landed me in a fairly disheartening position of tumbling in the dirt, while my bike did its best impression of a ghost ridden vehicle.

Since last month, at Infineon, I had shattered my right big toe; my immediate concern was to protect that still injured part of my body.

So, after sliding the rear tire out on the 90° left hand turn, with more than the normal amount of generously applied throttle, and after initially passing Joshua on his outside due to his early turn in for the corner, as well as his more than needed braking for the third from the last turn on the track, my bike tried to spit me high side.

Now, since I have been racing, my first race was in April of 2003, I have yet experienced the undeniable feeling of being catapulted over the high side of the bike during a wreck, mine have always been low sides, where I just tuck the front or slide the rear out from under myself.

I have told many people that I never plan on attempting to wreck in that manner, as it is usually the most violent way in which to crash, even though I have had some pretty bad wrecks that started out as low sides, this wreck had all the makings of my first high side.

Once the bike tried to spit me over the bars, and just after my chest plowed into the windscreen, as I flew towards the sky after my slight throttle application mistake, I thought to myself how I was going to prevent the act of wrecking due to a high side.

I grabbed tightly onto the bars with both hands and amazingly to not only myself but probably the hundreds of fans watching the last few turns from their seats in the grandstands, I almost saved it.

The busted windscreen, now not even a slight synapses between two of my brain cells, barely fazed me as I had to try to negotiate a right hand U-turn that they called turn 14 while hanging off the left side of the bike completely, all still traveling forward, slightly off line and heading for the dirt at about 50 miles per hour.

Usually, counter-steering is done while on the bike and is fairly easily used to negotiate any turn at just about any speed, but for a rider dragging himself off one side of a bike and trying to turn the opposite way, was going to be too much for this rider to achieve.

In a brief moment of highly-educated decision making, I chose to let go of the bike and hope for the best, again realizing that I needed to protect an already vulnerable destroyed part of my body, the shattered right big toe.

I fell to the ground and relied on my suit of armor, my leathers, to protect me to the best of their ability, which they did almost perfectly, minus some small bruises, a burnt right thumb, caused by sliding on the asphalt at 50 miles per hour with gloves that had previously seen the ground at over 100 a month earlier, and a lightly tweaked left ankle, the already bad one.

I then tumbled a bit in the dirt and watched my rider-less bike travel along its predetermined track through the dirt, then split two other riders, as it made the right hand U-turn almost perfectly due to the turn's banking, and finally come to a rest after doing a 360° on the track at the apex of turn 14, just inside the rumble strip.

Realizing that I had just almost pulled it off, saving the near sweet pass then crashing, and finally walking away barely hurt, I got off the track and waited for the warm down lap to finish before I went to pick up and ride my bike back into the pits.

Since I crashed on the last lap, three turns from the end of the race, but just after the leader, Ben Spies had crossed the finish line, I scored myself another 29th place in the second annual AMA Super Stock race at Miller Motorsports Park.

As I assessed the bent rear brake lever, slightly scratched plastics, broken windscreen, and bent right frame slider, I knew I would probably be worse off than my bike this time.

Not the consolation I was looking for, but to qualify with and race against the best, sometimes you come out better than you went in, and sometimes you fair worse.

This time I was placed in the latter, but I still was out there and was trying my best to achieve my personal goals, even if it was matching last year's performance.

Motorcycle road racing has been a passion of mine for some time now and each time I throw a leg over either of my race bikes, the smile that can be seen under my helmet is the pure joy I am experiencing due to the fact that the two-wheeled sport has stolen my heart completely.

I need to thank all of the people that have shared my passion and joy over the past few years, and have supported my complete devotion to the sport, my family has always been the first ones to help out, be it taking me to the doctor, or allowing me to work at the shop, not to make money but to prepare my bikes for the track.

THANK YOU!!! Jodie, Josephine, Sebastian, and Valentino.

I also need to thank my in-laws, the Dominic's, Joe and JoAnn, as they have been phenomenal family supporters daily as well, THANK YOU Joe and JoAnn.

My sponsors have also been there as expected, and I truly appreciate all of your help to keep my race program moving forwards.

THANK YOU:

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Special thanks have to go out to an old friend, new business owner, and long time MDG Racing supporter, Pranav Mulani.

He not only gave up a 15 year career position as Service Manager at Suzuki of Van Nuys to open his own shop just short of a month ago, www.bombaymotorsports.com, but he also took some of his not yet profits to get me a new helmet and have it shipped to me directly at the track by Friday afternoon.

PRANAV, YOU ARE THE MAN, THANKS!!!

By the way, money is on its way for the new clutch plates for my race bike.

I know a few of the racers traveled and stayed with me at the track, as well as shared their knowledge and expertise with my race endeavors, and to them I also say thanks.

Some of you may know of the 1000 cc motor I loaned a racer, Lance Williams #118 last year at the Miller Motorsports Park event, due to my crash during qualifying and his almost blown motor during the same time frame, well this year was no different.

Because I had crashed last month at Infineon, and my Israeli (Jewish) racing buddy from Super Sport and Super Stock, Sahar Zvik #161 had blown his 600 motor the race weekend prior to this week's event, I was the donator of another motor this year as well.

Sahar had a few issues with regards to coming up to speed on his 600, as he qualified 53rd fastest with a lap time of 2:03.922, but if you ask him, I am sure he was more than happy to at least have a bike to ride with the assistance of my ex-race bike's donor motor.

Lastly, the pictures in this write up and those that will follow are courtesy of a couple of ex-co-workers of mine when I was still practicing my Mechanical Engineering profession at Easton Sports as a Manufacturing Engineer, Michael Bowman and his boss Dennis Steinert, both IT professionals for that company.

THANK YOU both for not only riding out the track but also spending your time documenting the race events in the electronic media for all to see and hopefully hear in video form as well.

Sorry to hear that you had to drive the bikes part way home due to one the bikes failing to make the complete trip home from Utah to Southern California.

I guess you know who to contact when you are ready to get the next ride. ☺

I hope to see some of you at the next race event, and am counting on a few of you to help on my pit crew for the Toyota 200 in September as well.

Thank you for reading, and I hope to entertain you again real soon.