

Mechanical Engineer for Hire / July Wera Race Write-Up!!!

Well, as most of you don't know, I was laid off from my fourth professional job as a Manufacturing Engineer for Easton Sports a week and half ago. Previously I had been laid off from my first job out of college, and then left my second, and my third job was a six-month contract position. I am now on the hunt for the next life adventure. I have one possibility of buying and selling motorcycles with a wholesaler's license, another avenue would be to continue my professional path of Mechanical Design Engineer, and the third option is to have my wife support our three kids and me by working three or four jobs. J I personally like the last option. J

Since I had a lot to think about without concentrating on riding only, my racing suffered a bit. I had to be concerned about not getting hurt, crashing the bike, or all the things needed to support my wife and kids. A lot to think about, but again, I enjoy a challenge.

I would run a full track day at Buttonwillow on Saturday, to learn the course, and then two races on Sunday, A Super Stock and Formula 1.

Saturday was a blast. Learning a new track is always fun. I tried to put all the monetary issues in the back part of my mind to tackle the immediate task at hand of riding fast and being smooth. My first couple of laps on the #13 configuration in the Clockwise direction had me turning 2:15 lap times down to a 2:10 fast lap. If you can call 2:10 fast.

The night before, I had met Brian, the 600 lap record holder, at a phenomenally fast 1:49.8 lap time. I then knew what fast was, just as at Big Willow, a fastest lap of almost 1:19 flat is considered fast. With this knowledge I climbed on my bike to attack the extremely corner filled track configuration.

The second attempt at the track with all the fastest riders had my times dropping rapidly towards the 2:00 time zone. I achieved a best lap time of 2:05 in my second assault on the track. For those of you who have not been to Buttonwillow, I will try to describe a lap at my Saturday ending best lap time of just over 2:00 at a solid 2:01.2.

Turn one is called "Sunrise", a typical 90° left-hander. A little bumpy on the entrance, but it opens up on the exit for increased speed into the chicane just before an extremely slow increasing radius right, called "Off-ramp". You down shift once just before the chicane, then throw your bike to the left to set up outside for the slow entrance right-hander. As you feed the gas until the rear tire is just about to break free from power, at almost full lean, you can let the bike drift to the outside of this corner, as the track opens up to shoot you towards the small hump between "Off-ramp" and "Cotton Corners".

Brakes are applied generously for the very bumpy turns, one right, one left, and then a right hand turn at the top of a small hill. The turn at the top of the hill has your throttle hand wanting to twist the throttle all the way open, but due to the drop back down on the other side of the small hill, you are forced to be gentle rolling on the gas. You will be dragging knees through this three corner section, while hitting some hard bumps, avoiding rumble strips, and flicking the bike right, left, and then, right again. After you drop down into the set up area for the next right hand turn, "Grapevine", you look towards the next little wheelie hump between "Grapevine" and

"Club Corner". You let the bike sail skyward until you see the inside of "Club Corner", a slightly rubber covered rumble strip. You accelerate through the "Bus Stop" area while getting ready to brake, downshift, and throw your bike into the tight left hand exit of the "Bus Stop" series of two left turns. As you exit the "Bus Stop", being careful not to overshoot the exit and blow over the edge of the rumble strip on the outside of the corner, you up shift twice for the big right hand sweeper, called "Riverside". Staying to the outside of the corner at the entrance until about half way through the corner, you set up to hit the exit apex and head for the left hand turn at full speed just before entering "Lost Hills". This blind right hand corner on the top of another slight hill is exciting to enter and exit at speed, once you know what to expect on the down side of the hill. You need to down shift once and set up late for the blind, over the hill apex and small left hand straightening out turn that puts you onto the "Drag Strip". As you go over "Lost Hills" the rear will drift out and the front will get a bit light, all fun when things go right, because as you go down the other side of the turn, your rear wheel hooks up and you do a slight wheelie, while turning the bike for the left onto the "Drag Strip". One more up shift to get maximum drive into the "Sweeper" at the end of the "Drag Strip". Luckily, I was able to follow my buddy Cory through this corner once or twice in the first couple of sessions and saw the optimal line through the exit of the "Sweeper". Cory was turning 1:55's on his 1000 and 1:53's on his 600. A great guy to follow to get the right lines from. The "Sweeper" is a right hand decreasing radius turn that spits you out into a 6-corner set of esses, appropriately named "Esses". When you come shooting out of the "Sweeper" with you right knee puck just over the inside rumble strip and feeding the gas gingerly on the exit, you can go full throttle once you see the "Esses".

The "Esses" are right, left, right, left, right, and then the left that puts you on a fairly long straight to the final turn, "Sunset". Gassing it through the "Esses" is fun, just as long as you don't ride up the fairly steep banked rumble strips that line the track at each slight bend in the track. Just as you exit the last left-hander, before you have shifted for the last time going through the "Esses", you drag a left knee and drive hard to the final left-hander, staying to the far right of the track. I found later in the day, as I went faster, that downshifting three times got me in a better position to drive out of the last corner and down the front straight. Setting up "Sunset" became fairly difficult in the latter stages of Saturday, since a street rider in our group, group 3, the "fast guys", lost his motor's bottom end and dumped all 4 quarts of premium synthetic oil in that turn.

After an hour and a half of clean up, we were allowed back on track. This corner, forced you to late apex, as it was a sharp left turn that didn't really open up much on the exit. A good drive was needed to make a last ditch drag race to the finish. The oil was quickly forgotten about and no one else had incident in that turn for the remainder of the weekend. A few did run wide on the exit of "Sunset", but it was not the cause of any other carnage.

Sunday's races were preceded by two morning practice sessions. I had not had to do that much shifting at any of the previous tracks I had ridden and Sunday morning had my left wrist and hand badly cramped. I took four Advil's, which calmed the swelling and pain, and allowed me to turn four quick practice laps. I just wanted to be assured my body would be up to the challenge of the two races, one 8 lap Super Stock race and one 12 lap Formula 1 race.

The first race had me gridded 4th in a field of 10 very fast racers. The reason all the fast guys came out was the over abundance of Suzuki contingency money. The race

began fast as any I had been in. The first turn sorted out most of the field and I as the thoughts of going my pace crept into my mind. I thought too much about not having medical insurance, the prospect of finding a new job, and not wanting to crash. Not the way you want to enter the track, but after the previous days' fun, today's races would be just as fun. Don't crash, have fun, and live to race another day. All achievements I strived to attain at the end of the day, and I did get rewarded by finishing the first race in 6th place. Just out of the money spot, but all in all, I had fun, and that was my goal. I didn't go faster than the day before, but due to a red flag incident at 4 and a half laps into the race, I also didn't crash. The race was called, and I was happy to do as well as I had in my first adventure on the new track.

The second race was Formula 1 and I was placed 5th out of 15 even faster competitors. Again turn one was a spot to sort out the really fast guys and myself, a newbie to the Buttonwillow course. I followed John, a fellow WSMC racer and Wera Official, for the first few laps, but his pace was a just a bit faster than my mind would allow me to travel at. I can't believe how much the mental aspect of racing would hamper my ability to go faster. I raced as fast as my mind would allow and tried to be smooth and ride consistent lines through all of the corners each lap. After about 9 laps, the leaders passed me. Later I found out I was turning 2:02 and 2:03 lap times, while the leaders were traveling a bit faster in the 1:49 – 1:50 time frame. I watched the two leading bikes take a couple of corners ahead of me and then they ran away from my now recurring sore shifting wrist and me. I stayed at the same pace until the final lap and was passed by two Novice riders on the second to the last lap, as a blue flag with a yellow strip waved to me that the leaders were coming up from behind. I lost even more concentration to the waving flag, and made a critical error in the tight right hand turn, "Off-ramp". As I watched the flag for a brief instant, I didn't turn right soon enough and the two Novice riders, who were turning 1:59 lap times, passed me. I stayed calm and continued at my previous pace and finished 7th. I entered the pits and headed for my RV to get out of the now extremely hot weather.

The weekend was as fun as it could have been, but without my family there, the loss of my job just the week prior, and not riding to my true potential, I felt just a bit down. Then my attentions were turned toward a pit mate that had to return to his truck in the back of the crash truck and my weekend was put into a more positive perspective. Hopefully work will find its way to my family and I, and the next time I spend at the track can be devoted solely to racing.

Thanks go out to my family first, as always, even though they chose not to attend this event, their support has always been there. Thank you Jodie, Josephine, Sebastian, and Valentino.

Secondly, thank you to my sponsors:

Suzuki of Van Nuys - www.suzukiofvannuys.com
Simi Valley Cycles - www.simivalleycycle.com
Motul - www.motul.com
Galfer USA - www.galferusa.com
Lockhart Phillips USA - www.lockhartphillipsusa.com
K & N Engineering Inc. - www.knfilters.com
Fuel Cel - www.eti-fuelcel.com
Air Tech - www.motorcyclebodywork.com

Engineered Racing Products - www.engineeredracingproducts.com
Race Tech - www.race-tech.com
HyperCycle - www.hypercycle.com
Suzuki - www.suzuki.com
Dunlop - www.dunloptire.com
WSMC - www.race-wsmc.com
WERA WEST - www.wera.com
Performance Unlimited - www.kellybakers.com
Puig Screens - www.cyclescreens.com
Graeber Engineering and Consulting

Lastly, if I haven't mentioned it enough, since I lost my job a week and a half ago, please send any and all job prospects my way if you know of any. I have almost 10 years experience as a Mechanical Engineer, designing components to entire machines. I have worked in the high tech industry of Silica, used for semiconductor material for computer chip production, to the design of CNC machines and components.

Thanks for reading, and if all goes well, I will have another report in a couple of weeks after the August Willow Springs races.

Marcel