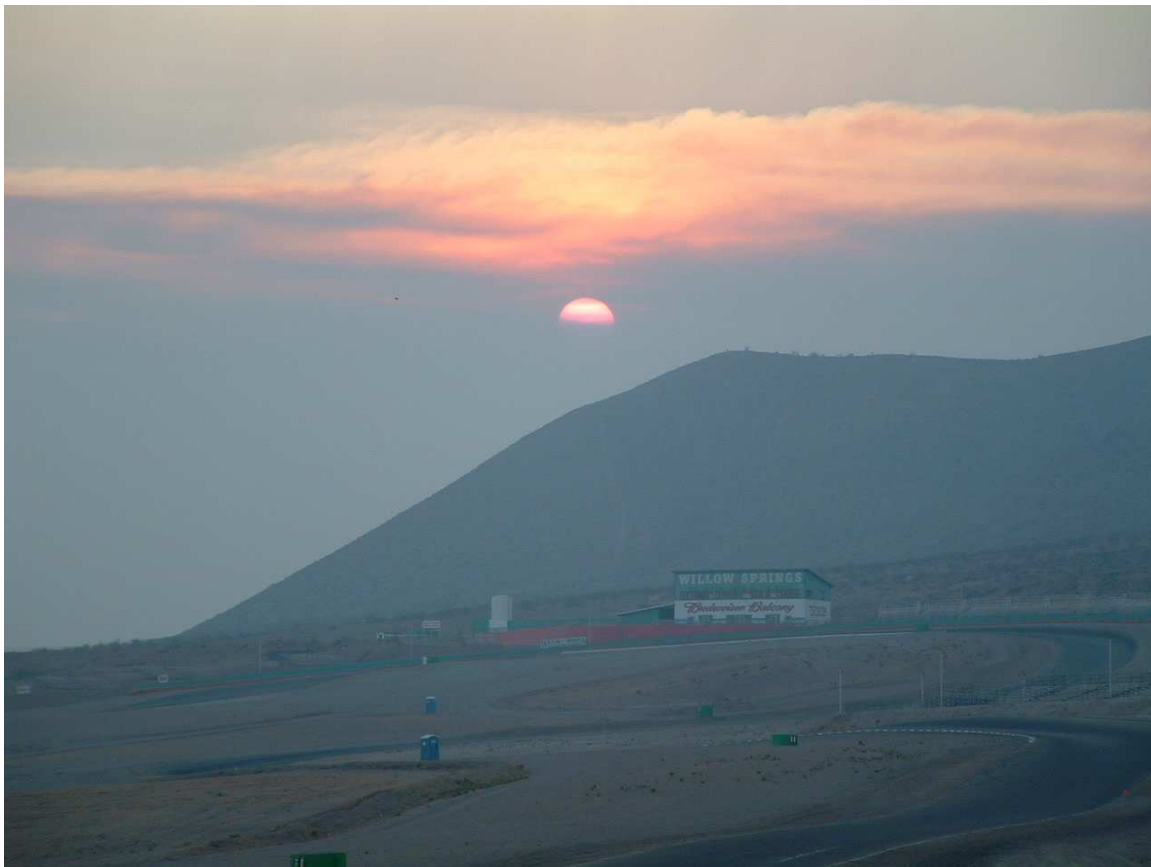


Since I hadn't been to Willow Springs in almost $\frac{3}{4}$ of a year, I drove the three and a half hours contemplating how well I would ride my 2005 GSXR-1000 that had a fresh windscreen and frame slider, THANKS Jason and OFD Racing, due to my slightly less than perfect race in the Miller AMA Super Stock race back in June.

This past weekend was the first round of Willow Spring's Toyota 200 Qualifying, of which last year I had qualified 21st of the fastest 40.

Since I had spent the past half a year racing with the *fast* guys in the AMA Super Sport and Super Stock classes, I knew my experiences riding at that level had prepared me to go faster than I had in the past at Willow Springs this almost inevitably hot weekend in August.

Friday morning, as the blistering heat of the Sun, which was piercing through the smoke filled sky due to the Zaca Lake forest fire, made the racing surface almost too hot to ride above while wearing a full cowhide suit for protection from touching the asphalt.



The first timed qualifying practice session was to go off at 11:00 a.m., and I had small stomach aches as I wondered how I would perform on the track I had spent many laps circulating almost a year ago.

All questions and concerns were to be answered almost immediately, as I looked down after my warm up lap and recognized a wonderfully fast lap time of 1:37.

The very next lap had only accumulated another 88 seconds to my lap timer, and I knew with the minimal effort I was putting out to achieve such quick lap times that this day was to behold some excitement and reward.

Another 86 seconds passed as I came up to speed almost too quickly in this first qualifying session, and my third lap had my mind in a whirl as to why I was going so quick so early with again, almost no thought or conscious effort to navigate the 9 turns of Willow Springs International Raceway.

By the end of the fourth, and my final lap of the first timed practice for the Toyota 200 Qualifying round, I was the 6th fastest rider with a lap time of just under 1:26, with a 1:25.929.

I entered our now Air-Conditioned RV with an enormous smile on my face as to how well I had ridden after being away from my very first racing arena, WSMC.

I looked at my lap timer one last time before heading off to the official timing and scoring room for WSMC, to confirm that my lap timer and the electronic transponder read the same output in lap times.

I was ecstatic to see the official result stating that both times were the same and my performance was as I had thought, a great beginning to the weekend.

I had already swore to my lovely wife, Jodie, that his weekend would not involve any floundering in the dirt, crashing of bikes, breaking of bones or bike parts, or anything less than just riding around on one or both wheels on asphalt, since it was also her 20th High School Reunion on Saturday evening.

Even though I did almost break my promise, that story will be told in the coming paragraphs, I managed to keep my bikes, leathers, and hands clean.

The second practice session was to be held right after lunch at 1 p.m., and my only plan after such an awesome performance in the first practice session was to back up the lap times with similar led readings on my lap timer.

I rode around the 9 turns of Willow Springs for a few laps and my lap timer and the electronic transponder confirmed lap times of just about one second slower than the first sessions time's at 1:27.

Qualifying would be split into two groups, Group 1 would be the faster 16 riders of which my lap time of 1:25.9 put me 6th fastest of the first session, and my 1:27 had me 11th fastest in the second session, for an overall 9th fastest rider of the 34 trying to qualify for the 5th annual Toyota 200.

The second group would be the other 18 riders, and when it was all said and done, everyone that tried to qualify would tentatively be in the show.

This race will have the fastest 40 riders during qualifying being involved in the race, and we are all positive more riders will show up on the second round of qualifying, during which I plan on trying to better my 16th qualifying position.

I will now describe how I slipped so many spots from my top ten practice time of 1:25.9 all the way down to my 16th position time of 1:27.2.

First a picture, that with Jodie's help to point out which mark I left at just about 150 miles per hour with my front tire, will be worth the next 1000 words.



As most of you know, or if you don't, Turn 8 is one of the fastest turns on any track, and most riders take it almost full throttle in 6th gear.

This Friday's Group 1 Qualifying session went off at 3:00 p.m., at which time the heat was just about at the day's maximum, hovering around triple digits, and the wind was now starting to blow from the inside to the outside of turn 8.

My plan was to ride about one second faster than I had in the first practice session and put myself deep into the top 10 of this first round of qualifiers.

As they always say, "The best laid plans", and this was exactly one of those times.

My first couple of laps had my mind reeling to reenact the lap times from earlier in the day, but the heat and wind made it difficult to go as fast as I wanted to.

I knew I would have to put out some effort to ride to my potential, and after a few more laps, I was passed by my riding buddy Stuart Smith #16, who during practice had gone just a few tenths of a second faster than I had.

Again, my plan was to use Stuart as my carrot and push my bike to a bit faster lap time than the 1:25.9 I had attained in practice.

Stuart made his way past me and led me around the track at his pace, but after just ½ a lap, he pulled over to let me by.

I went around him just after exiting Turn 6, as he turned in sharply and rolled off the throttle, with an acknowledging wave.

After getting in front of Stuart, I assumed he would follow me and I could be pushed into the low 1:25 lap time and possibly a high 1:24.

Before I could even start the next lap, as I leaned over to drag my right knee at just over 150 miles per hour entering Turn 8, a small gust of wind hit the right side of my 2005

GSXR-1000 and my front tire started to snow plow and leave the pictured Black skid mark on the track.

I had just mere milliseconds to either react correctly and not crash in the same turn in which just a few months prior, a fellow rider had died, or attempt to recover from falling off my motorcycle at well over double the maximum posted California speed limit. Somehow, with a lot of luck and a little skill, since I did slightly counter-steer to correct the overly turned front wheel, and the wind gust died just enough for me to regain control of the 1000 cc powered beast beneath me.

As shown in the picture, my tire obviously didn't roll properly on the track for that brief moment along that short stretch of race track, but as I stated above, I was able to continue along and finish that ass-puckering adventurous lap.

Not only did I not crash, I pulled out a 1:27.7 on that less than perfectly ridden lap.

I was unable to concentrate going into Turn 8 the next lap, only thinking that the wind would negatively affect me again as I was at full lean and trying to go as fast as my bike, body, and mind would allow.

Each lap after the wind-filled slide I could not get past the fact that I had almost threw it away at the fastest speed since my 130 mile per hour wreck in Vegas, back in 2004, and that fact kept me from going much faster during the remaining 20 minutes of Qualifying.

My decision to come into the pits a couple laps after the slide lap was meant to calm my nerves and collect my thoughts, even though I had thoroughly tested the fact that my front tire was actually working correctly for the next two laps after the slide with a couple more laps in the mid 1:27 lap time.

On lap 14 as shown in the time table below, I mustered a 1:27.289, which put me 16th fastest in the field.

Also, as can be seen in the table, Stuart did a phenomenal lap time of 1:25.3 for 8th fastest, and had I followed him, I could have put in a wonderful top ten qualifying position with a sub 1:26 lap time.

Toyota 200 Qualifying
08/17/2007

Pos	PIC	Class	No.	Name	Laps	Diff	Best Tm	Total Tm
1	1	Toyota 200	919	Jason Curtis	14	-	1:22.471	24:11.413
2	2	Toyota 200	33	Jeff Stern	13	+0.705	1:23.176	30:46.156
3	3	Toyota 200	53	Jason Perez	14	+0.785	1:23.256	30:29.252
4	4	Toyota 200	135	Cesar Meza	12	+1.798	1:24.269	23:39.357
5	5	Toyota 200	6	Robbie Dowie	4	+1.981	1:24.452	12:35.557
6	6	Toyota 200	4	Jack Pfeifer	14	+2.474	1:24.945	30:46.140
7	7	Toyota 200	290	Corey Sarros	8	+2.649	1:25.120	14:26.886
8	8	Toyota 200	16	Stuart Smith	7	+2.829	1:25.300	12:31.219
9	9	Toyota 200	127	Chris Duran	5	+3.038	1:25.509	8:08.048
10	10	Toyota 200	831	Tim Knutson	12	+3.381	1:25.852	57:17.688
11	11	Toyota 200	148	Alex Weathersby	11	+4.175	1:26.646	20:06.041
12	12	Toyota 200	732	Matt Quigley	11	+4.258	1:26.729	1:00:21.490
13	13	Toyota 200	786	John Ryan	3	+4.466	1:26.937	1:48.709
14	14	Toyota 200	3	Mitchell Wissner	15	+4.526	1:26.997	25:43.288
15	15	Toyota 200	219	Raymond Thibedeau	6	+4.721	1:27.192	7:45.050
16	16	Toyota 200	767	Marcel Graeber	14	+4.818	1:27.289	26:29.760
17	17	Toyota 200	817	Fabrice Vilder	15	+4.898	1:27.369	22:48.198
18	18	Toyota 200	353	Terry Heard	17	+5.325	1:27.796	1:03:24.232
19	19	Toyota 200	283	KC Clarke	7	+5.407	1:27.878	9:15.866
20	20	Toyota 200	920	Mauro Deviasio	13	+5.765	1:28.236	53:14.218
21	21	Toyota 200	56	Ken Kramer	18	+6.276	1:28.747	1:00:52.036
22	22	Toyota 200	374	Bruce Prince	12	+6.344	1:28.815	1:00:03.347

23	23	Toyota	200	648	Ryan Regalado	14	+6.378	1:28.849	55:32.394
24	24	Toyota	200	89	Stan Bates	9	+6.691	1:29.162	46:46.466
25	25	Toyota	200	647	Eric Nolan	7	+6.733	1:29.204	9:23.147
26	26	Toyota	200	129	Erick Navarro	16	+7.093	1:29.564	1:03:57.010
27	27	Toyota	200	94	Travis Westermeyer	16	+7.274	1:29.745	59:15.090
28	28	Toyota	200	820	Matt Cardenas	10	+7.552	1:30.023	49:39.331
29	29	Toyota	200	677	Javier Ramirez	18	+7.812	1:30.283	1:04:21.306
30	30	Toyota	200	336	Mike Reitz	9	+7.941	1:30.412	47:19.424
31	31	Toyota	200	115	Kyle Indermuehle	17	+8.8531	1:31.324	59:29.363
32	32	Toyota	200	158	Shandra Crawford	12	+15.045	1:37.516	56:46.059

Since my goal was to qualify and not wreck, both were attained and now I could focus on some 600 practice, since I only had about 4 hours of riding time on my first AMA Super Sport bike, which was totaled 6 days after I first acquired it, and my second 600 cc bike that made it one lap around Miller before I toasted the already blown clutch.

Saturday morning practice began at an early 8:00 a.m. sharp for the middle weight bikes, of which I was now a member of.

This day's goal was to again, not crash, but to also see an 80-something second lap time on my now well used lap timer.

The first practice session ended with a 1:31 lap time, which is exactly what I did all day the first time I brought my first 600 cc bike to Willow to break in the then 17-miled bike. It was easy to ride the bike at that speed, but I was still trying to figure out shift points, trying to figure out corner entry speed, as the 1000 cc bike is faster, but the 600 cc bike can go faster through the corners, and where and how much I needed to hit the brakes.



David, great to see you, meeting your son and crew, and thanks for the compliments and

sharing the pictures.

I debriefed myself immediately upon entering my own personal pits after each of the four practice sessions this Saturday morning, since I knew I only had four sessions to practice before having to head off to Jodie's 20th High School Reunion that evening.

I also knew that I needed to step it up if I wanted to reach my goal on the 600 of attaining an 80-something lap time, which be the end of the half day of practice I did.

As the Sun began to shine brighter and hotter this second day at Willow Springs, I knew my lap timer would show me what I wanted to see, even if I had to work ten times harder than I had the prior day on the big bike.

More speed was added to the second, third, and final practice session just before lunch, and the packing of my race rig, with best lap times in each session of 1:30 in the second, and a handful of 1:27's in the last two sessions.

My best lap time posted on the 600 was reached in the third session just a few 1000^{ths} of a second behind my 1000 cc qualifying effort the day before, with the lap timer reading 1:27.3.

All in all the riding part of my weekend was over, with almost all my goals reached and a few tears, some blood, and a ton of sweat left at the track.

Thank you Jodie, for allowing me to pursue the dream and to accompany me for a completely exciting, action-packed, life-building weekend.

I also need to thank the newly formed Bombay Motorsports, at www.bombaymotorsports.com and Pranav for getting me a new clutch for the 600, for without him, I would not have been able to practice on Saturday, even if it would have been completely okay with Jodie.

Thank you also goes out to all my sponsors, who have helped me in the past, present, and in the very near future Toyota 200 weekend of September 14-16, 2007:

Central Coast Mechanics - www.ccmechanics.com

Bombay Motorsports - www.bombaymotorsports.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

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Suzuki of Van Nuys - www.suzukiofvannuys.com
MDG Racing – www.gotmotoparts.com

I hope to see some of you at the track next month for the 80-lap endurance race in which I have plans to finish in the top 5, so just look for the newly painted and sponsor sticker covered trailer.



Thank you all for reading, and look for more written adventures next month.

Marcel Graeber