

## 2006 Toyota 200 / 10th Place Hurts!!!

Since most of you don't know what my body went through this past weekend, I thought I would share what 200 miles of high speed racing at Willow Springs International Raceway felt like.

I had the misfortune of tearing my left calf muscle, where it attaches to the Achilles' Tendon, just a few weeks prior to the second Friday qualifying session for the Toyota 200 on Friday September 15th, 2006.

I met with a local Orthopedic Surgeon last Monday to confirm that my leg would not hamper my ability to race in and finish the 80-lap race on Sunday September 17th. Since I had stayed off my left leg for about 2 weeks, breaking out my old dusty crutches from 2 years ago, when I damaged both ankles qualifying for this very same race, I knew my muscle had at least a few weeks to recover enough to be useful over the 200 miles I planned to race.

The last few weeks had me pushing my left leg calf muscle's healing process to a maximum, by using it as if it was only slightly torn.

By the time I had to ride on Friday for the first timed practice session of the weekend, just before noon, I made one last self diagnosis of my left calf muscle by stretching it gently past its normal riding position.

All seemed fine, just a small twitch as the muscle started to contract after being put into the difficulty of abnormal use.

I rode well in the first timed practice, posting up a best lap of just over a 1:27.

Since I hadn't been on the bike since last June when I raced in the 109 degree heat summer races, I only knew what I was able to achieve of lap times then, a 1:25.7.

Since I knew I could go fairly quickly in the heat, and this month the weather was now in the mid 80's, I assumed I could just a bit quicker this month.

Only problem with my logic was the ever present Willow "BREEZE", this Friday a constant low pressure to high pressure gradient of just about 40 - 45 miles per hour. Just imagine sticking your head out of the sunroof of an almost highway speed vehicle, then gassing it to up to just under 200 miles per hour, all while turning left with your right knee bouncing along the warm desert asphalt of the Willow Springs Racetrack.

That is just about how it felt as we tried to push our machines to the fastest lap time possible, for a great grid position in the race the following Sunday.

The second timed practice came after lunch, and what they were now calling "WIND" had increased just a tad bit.

Most of the other competitors, as well as me, had all wished we had tried to qualify last month, since the conditions were much more favorable for a lower lap time.

If it had not been for my calf muscle tearing, and almost immobilizing my complete body, I would have been on the track back in August to try my hand at setting a fast lap in the first qualifying session for the Toyota 200.

Instead, I endured the almost hurricane-like winds to set a fast lap to get my bike and I on the grid for the 4th annual Toyota 200.

My first outing trying to race this awesome 200-mile endurance event had me missing qualifying by less than 3/10ths of a second.

My second try had me fracturing my left fibula at the ankle, and racking up my right ankles' tendons, but I rode one lap to get paid the minimum for at least qualifying 30th out the fastest 40.

Last year I qualified 30th again but I finished the sort of electrically challenged race

in position 21 of 40.

At the end of Friday's qualifying round, of which I had put myself in the faster qualifying group 1 by running another almost 1:27 flat lap time, I had positioned myself in grid position 21 of 40, with a fastest lap of 1:26.6 and backing it up with a 1:26.8.

I looked immediately at the last months' qualifiers times and figured I would be right around the top 20, which was my goal for finishing last year.

Once the slower group finished their qualifying round, I knew my goal of a top 18 finish would be a bit easier than the previous year, since I was only starting the race a few positions away from where I planned to finish.

I got to start the race from the same position I finished the race last year, and now began to plan for an even better finishing position than the 18th I had and perused the list of all qualifiers to see who was truly faster than I was on a consistent basis. My assumption was that if I rode my ride I could put the number 767 machine in about spot 12 or my lucky 13 position.

Once pit spots were beginning to be handed out, I chose my favorite number 13, as I figured no one else would want it, due to most people's assumption that 13 is unlucky, but for me, it is a great number.

Saturday was a day of rest as I got to enjoy watching a full day of club races.

I performed all the necessary preparations to my machine, like getting a set of race tires mounted and another set ready for my one stop race strategy to fill gas and change a rear tire only once during the 200-mile 80-lap race.

Last year taught me a few valuable lessons that I would translate into a much better performance this year, such as how much fuel I would actually need to race the entire race only filling my tank once after starting the race with an almost overflowing fuel load.

I also learned that at a fairly brisk pace, 1:27 and 1:28 lap times, that I could make it on one front tire, but this year I planned on going a bit faster and still figured with the right tires that one front would go the distance.

Lastly, I learned that just dropping my lap times one or two seconds for a few laps would make fuel and tires go a lot longer than trying to do more pit stops, which would take much more time than just slowing down for a few laps.

After filling the gas tank all the way to the rim, mounting newly tired rims on the bike I planned to ride to the finish line, and making sure all the last needed adjustments were made to the bike, I relaxed to watch a few of the club races.

Sunday morning was filled with excitement and anticipation of the start of the next grueling 2 hours of racing adventures you are about to read about.

The first four races had to be finished before we, the racers of the 2006 Toyota 200, would do battle on the now less wind filled racing tundra of Willow Springs.

Since this year things were being done a bit different, the three Novice races would be held in the morning, then just before lunch, the 250 GP 50 mile race would be run, and finally, at around 1:30 p.m. we would enter the racing fray to push our machines and bodies for almost 2 hours and 200 miles on the track.

One of our pit mates, Heavyweight Novice racer Jason Walden #942, was making his return after crashing out of 6th place two months prior.

His race was exciting to say the least, as Jason not only finished this race, but also managed to place 6th in a highly battled contest between himself and another couple of Novice racers.

Jason got lucky with one of the racers in front of him crashing out in turn 1, with his bike flipping and tumbling in a grand manner right in plain view out of our front row RV spot.

Also crashing out behind Jason, while challenging for the position was the 7th place rider, since Jason was running a now fastest personal lap time of 1:31.

Unfortunately, this weekend would endure one more major crash that most don't want to realize as a possible reality whenever we enter the track to do machinery battle on two wheels, the loss of a racer's life.

During the last lap of the race just prior to the Toyota 200, on the last corner, three racers crashed and during the bikes fall to the ground, one of the racers was run over.

We want to send our condolences to the family of Jesus Amezcua, as he will be forever remembered and never forgotten in our thoughts.

Since the crash that took the life of a fellow racer occurred at the very end of the race preceding the Toyota 200, there was going to be a very long delay between the end of their race and the beginning of our race.

Knowing that another racer has lost his life just minutes before you will head out onto the same racetrack a death occurred on is extremely difficult to put into words of how one feels, let alone when there is a major crash with injuries.

Since this was the first time I had ever even heard of someone dying at the track, let alone actually being there when it happened was definitely surreal.

After a few hours for the local police and coroner to process the scene, and have Jesus moved from the track, and announcement was made that the 200 was about to start.

Now was the time to see who could ride through the tragic event of a rider passing at the track and perform at the highest level on two very powerful wheels, one of which would be squirming and sliding all over the warm September asphalt.

As I made my way to the newly acquired grid position of that little silver number 21 on the inside of the 6th row, I thought of what I was about to embark on, a full body torture that would take just about 2 hours to completely drain all mental and physical strength from my fairly fit but aging body.



The next thing I know, the flag drops green and Rich Oliver, on a GP 250 in front of me is just a sitting duck, not moving as I quickly approach the rear of his now motionless bike.





*Toyota 200 - Willow Springs, 2006*

I swerve the right of his fully stopped bike and head for the first turn of this 80-lap



endurance race hoping to stay the front group of faster riders.

As we all cram our high powered, agile bikes into turn 1, I keep an eye open on the back of my head, just in case there is a need to avoid being plowed into by an over-anxious back of the pack starter.

There are a few riders trying to all get to the inside line, even though none of us are up to racing speed yet, so I chose the path of least resistance and follow the centipede like train into and out of turn 1.

My first thought right after watching the front 15 or so riders go through turn 1 and head for turn 2 was that I needed to head after them at a reasonably expedient pace as not to be dropped too far back into the middle of the field, especially if I wanted to meet my personal goal of finishing in the top 18.

After we snaked along the first few corners, rider number 403, Eric Pinson crashed coming out of turn 4B.



As the race circulated another lap or two, the rider pitting to my North-West had an incident going into turn 3, where his bike's motor decided it didn't want to go any farther in the race.

His bike was on fire as I went by it on the third lap, and about 1:27.7 later I went by

the burning bike again, and to my amazement the bike was still smoldering. When one enters a race that will push a machine's engine to its ultimate test, sometimes the machine loses, and in this case the engine definitely lost.

I made my way around the 9 turns of the track one more time, and this lap I actually noticed the crash damage to the track where just a few hours earlier Jesus and the other two riders had crashed.

I acknowledged the death momentarily, and immediately thought of the tasks I had to tackle as to not miss the same turn and have my own incident, not that I wouldn't later on in the race, but we will get to that later.

After these brief interruptions to our stretched out concentration to finish an 80-lap, 200-mile race, we all settled into a riding rhythm.

My intentions to perform at a higher level than last year meant that I would need to post up lap times in the 1:26 – 1:27 range, as the previous year I started out in the 1:27 – 1:28 lap times.

I set up my body and mind to keep a constant lap time pace and 1:27 felt great for the first dozen laps, with just one lap dipping into the mid 1:26 lap time on lap number 11.

The very next lap, on lap 12 there was an incident between two faster riders than I, Corey Sarros #901 and Jack Pfeifer #28, in turn 3.

Both riders were down as I came around just after their coming together and I remember one of them writhing around on the ground in pain.

The next time I passed the scene, they were both up and a few corners later I saw a waving red flag, sending the entire field into hot pit lane.





This red flag played tremendously well into my pit strategy, as I had planned to do



one stop with a refuel and rear tire change at roughly the 36 – 40 lap pit window. Since we had the luxury of a red flag at lap 13, I was able to have my crew fill my fuel tank right to the cap which would definitely allow me to make it past the 40-lap half way mark of the race.

Now the only question would be if my rear tire was up to the challenge of the faster, more punishing abuse I would be putting them through to finish higher up the roster this 2006 Toyota 200 race.

We were fairly quickly re-gridded according to the places we were in just the lap prior to the red flag, and to my amazement, I had already made it up to the spot I had as a verbal goal, 18th.

Again the green flag dropped, but instead of having a dead in the water bike located right in front of me on the grid, I had only faster riders taking to the track, aggressively attacking turn 1.

I followed a few faster riders and managed to get up into the 14th spot, where I stayed for a few laps.

As the racers and I negotiated the faster turns of Willow Springs, the race order again sorted itself out, with my bike being located in the 17th spot.

Laps leading up to those that had a pit stop plan of pitting twice had me slowly moving up the roster until I landed at position 13.

Now that you know how that number plays in the scheme of things, funny how I would run the middle part of the race in that position almost until lap 44 when I decided that my mostly 1:26 – 1.27 lap times with just a handful of 1:28 laps would force me to pit to receive a brand spanking new rear tire and more very potent high octane race gas.

Last year my pit crew did an excellent pit stop of roughly 43 seconds to fill 4-1/2 gallons and change a badly worn rear tire, but this year we had a small snafu when the new rear tire was being forced into position.

As the time slowly passed, I noticed things weren't going quite as smooth as last year's pit stop, and I may have yelled a bit at the crew, and for that I apologize. I know that without my crew my race would not have even happened, so I can look past the slight loss of time in the pits, as they did a great job getting me in and out of the pits to the best of their ability.

Thank you to:

Crew Chief: Ryan

Gas Man: Gregg

Rear Tire Changer: Duane

Rear Tire Jack Man: Ron

Front Tire Jack Man: Matt

Fire Extinguisher Man: Jason

And Un-Used Umbrella Woman: Bonnie

I truly appreciate all of your help in getting my bike to finish the race with each of your personal input into my race program, THANK YOU MDG Racing Pit Crew.

A few laps after my only pit stop, I was joined by Michael Beck #60 on an Attack Kawasaki bike from last year, but since his motor was already on its way out to pasture, he ran right along with my now very reliable 1:27 lap time, which for Mr. Beck was about 5 seconds slower than his normal race pace.

He pulled off just as soon as he entered the track and his race was just about over at that point.

I started to think about finishing the race just a few laps later, and by lap 64 I was riding with Jeffrey Tigert #55 through turns 3-6.

Jeffrey was also running about 5 seconds a lap faster than I was at this point in the race but he was on an into the pit stop lap, so he wasn't running much faster than I was into turn 8.

He had already signaled that he would be exiting the track this lap and I initiated an inside pass on him as I headed toward turn 9.

The very next thing I see in front of me is a huge cloud of dust on the outside of turn 9, as Jeffrey said later, he just thought he had more track on the outside of that turn and before he knew it he was tumbling in the desert dirt.

Luckily he walked away fairly unhurt, but for his pride, and a few broken bike parts.

By now I knew I needed to think clearly, since a rider of Jeffrey's caliber made a simple mistake I needed to focus that much more on my own ride to finish this very demanding profession, not only physically but mentally as well.

Unfortunately, I made a mental error on about lap 70, as my lap times show; I dropped a second and a half on one lap.

As I came out of turn 9 I may have thought I had more real estate on the outside of the turn just before the entrance of pit lane, and I was suddenly riding at about 120 miles per hour through my own off road course on my slick shod race bike.

Immediately I thought of not crashing and that I could easily save this brief off track excursion by just turning slightly to the right to reenter the racing surface, and I made a split second decision to turn slightly right and get back on the black stuff, as opposed to the tan-ish dirt surface.

After the race I had a couple of riders and a corner worker compliment my riding and fantastic save from a near disastrous outcome of nearly ending my race a few laps short of the actual finish of the race.

I have had a few great saves so far in my racing career on motorcycles, and I have had some even more spectacular wrecks as well, and I promised myself less of the latter and more of the earlier mentioned saves.

I made an effort to keep my own promise to myself, and I did just that by saving the near rough and tumble dirt ride, that could have been.

Directly after that off track skip across the desert surface, I began to think of the pain that had settled into my right foot, almost immediately after the 30th lap, of which I had to reposition twice each lap from heel to ball of my foot.

Each lap I would use my right foot to negotiate the first few turns of the track and then I would try to rest it from turn 6 until I needed it again to get through turn 9.

Right after the apex of turn 9 I would again rest it all the way down the front straight until I needed it again to navigate the left hand turn 1.

With just about 1-1/2 laps left to go in the race, my buddy Stuart Smith #16, who ended up finishing an awesome 7th place, passed me coming out of turn 1.

We rode one lap together, and I almost kept pace with his blistering end of race pace, and my last lap time showed a drop of over 1.7 seconds.

I congratulated Stuart directly after crossing the line right behind him, as I finished, unbeknown to me at the time, in the final top 10 spot of 10th place.

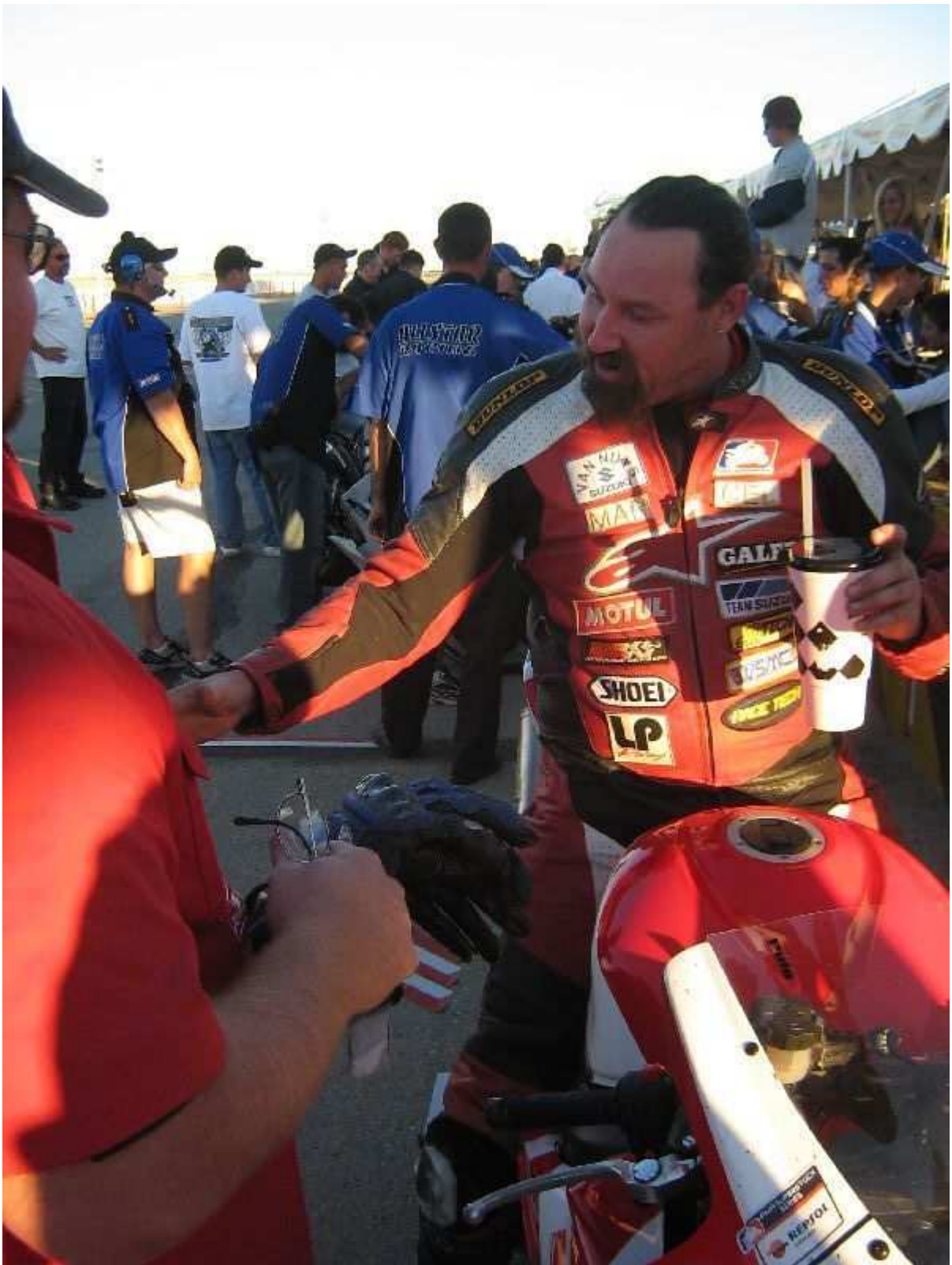
Since my off track excursion took place so close to the end of the race, when the white flag flew, I was almost surprised, since my lap timer displayed lap 62, mainly

because I forgot about the first 13 laps that elapsed before the red flag. Therefore, I had completed 75 of the 80 laps this year, whereas last year I accomplished the feat of completing 72 of the 80 laps. Remembering back a year on the warm down lap, I had a small error in performing my best Valentino Rossi impression for my fan base in turn 4, or the TURN4NICATORS, and I planned on not making the same mistake this year.



As you can see, I didn't fall over from exhaustion just yet, I waited until I entered pit lane and had my bike securely lifted off the tarmac with a rear stand. I couldn't thank my crew quick enough for all their help to get me to the end of this race.





It has been a while since my entire family has made the trip out to the track to

watch Daddy race, and this weekend they came out to support me once again. I have always thanked them for their support and to do so well with them there to help support me this final race of the 2006 race season was the perfect end to my season.

Thank you Jodie, Josephine, Sebastian, and Valentino.

I hope to do well again in the future and to have all of you there to help support me again as well.

I love you all with everything in my heart and mind.

Now I need to thank the companies and people that have helped me throughout the year in all my racing endeavors.

Thank you sponsors of my 2006 race season and hopefully onward to the 2007 race season.

E-Racings - [www.E-Racings.com](http://www.E-Racings.com)

GP Suspension - [www.gpsuspension.com](http://www.gpsuspension.com)

Suzuki of Van Nuys - [www.suzukiofvannuys.com](http://www.suzukiofvannuys.com)

Thorsen Motorsports - [www.thorsenmotorsports.com](http://www.thorsenmotorsports.com)

Motul - [www.motul.com](http://www.motul.com)

Galfer USA - [www.galferusa.com](http://www.galferusa.com)

Sport Tire Services - [www.sporttire.com](http://www.sporttire.com)

Shoei Helmet Safety Corporation - [www.shoei-helmets.com](http://www.shoei-helmets.com)

Lockhart Phillips USA - [www.lockhartphillipsusa.com](http://www.lockhartphillipsusa.com)

VP Racing Fuel - [www.vpracingfuels.com](http://www.vpracingfuels.com)

K & N Engineering - [www.knfilters.com](http://www.knfilters.com)

Fuel Cel - [www.eti-fuelcel.com](http://www.eti-fuelcel.com)

Suzuki - [www.suzuki.com](http://www.suzuki.com)

WSMC - [www.race-wsmc.com](http://www.race-wsmc.com)

OFD Racing - [www.ofdracing.com](http://www.ofdracing.com)

Puig / Cycle Screens - [www.cyclescreens.com](http://www.cyclescreens.com)

Tiffany's Upholstery & Restoration

BVI Apparel USA - [www.bviapparelusa.com](http://www.bviapparelusa.com)

Allan Real Estate Investments - [www.allanrealestate.com](http://www.allanrealestate.com)

Performance Unlimited - [www.kellybakers.com](http://www.kellybakers.com)

MDG Racing

Lastly, I want to thank everyone that came out for the weekend to cheer for us racing warriors that battled the environment and each other for just less than 2 hours this past weekend.

You and I both know we would do it whether people were there to cheer or not, but it sure makes it much more fun when there is a crowd behind our efforts, THANK YOU ALL!!!

I also want to thank those of you that took pictures, like the ones in this write-up. If anyone else has more pictures, please feel free to send them to me via e-mail or if you have too many to send just shoot me a CD. Thanks in advance.

I hope to see more of you next year as I plan to do more AMA races on not only a GSXR-1000 but also a 600 cc race bike as well.

Thank you for reading and I hope to see some of you at the track soon.

Marcel Graeber  
MDG Racing  
AMA / WSMC #767