

Was That A Crack I Heard??? October Crash Report!!!

The weekend didn't start out too great, as I began the process of qualifying for the 3rd Annual Toyota 200, and my second attempt to be in the race.

I made my way out onto the track around 11 a.m. for the first timed qualifying practice of the three day weekend. I made a few warm up passes around the track and then hit a massive amount of traffic. I slowed and let the track clear in front of me. I then began my assault on the clear asphalt. I looked down after what I felt was a fairly quick lap; I saw a mid 1:26 lap time. The first timed practice came to an end with my bike slightly sliding in and out of the 9 corners of Willow Springs International Racetrack.

I made my way back to my pits to eat lunch and possibly change tires for the second timed practice session. Since I had a few sets of tires set aside for this weekend, I made my way to the Dunlop tire vendor's trailer to mount up a new rear tire. A quick change to the rear tire in my pits and the ingestion of a healthy luncheon meat sandwich had me ready to tackle the track again in the afternoon. Since I wanted to conserve my rear tire for the race, I just put in a few quick laps to scrub it in and possibly go a bit faster. The timed practice would split up the 49 field of qualifiers into a fast group and a slow group. My first timed qualifying practice lap got me into the fast qualifying group at 3:05 p.m.

Now came my decision to flip my first practice rear tire to qualify with. I changed the rear tire and made my entrance into the fast qualifying group. My plan was to get a few warm up laps then shoot for two or three flyers. On lap 5 of the 30 minute qualifying session, my buddy Jay Tanner crashed coming out of turn 4.

Unfortunately, I had the same fortune coming out of turn 1 two laps later. I had just turned a 1:26.54 to qualify 30th for the Toyota 200, when I decided to push just a bit harder for the next lap. My plan was going well and I figured two more laps to possibly make a run into the top 20 qualifiers. As I entered turn 1, I knew that I would have to ride a tad harder than the previous lap to make a reality of my expected goal of putting my 2003 GSXR-1000 Super Stock bike into the top 20. Just as I began the drive out of turn 1 I felt the front tire begin its last contact with the ultra-sticky race track surface. I knew the front was losing grip, so I figured a little more throttle might put the front tire and bike, back on track. I didn't receive the expected result and at just about 120 mph I hit the ground. If I had been lucky, as I had been in the past when I rolled around on the ground instead of riding on the ground, I would have slid to a stop with only minor bruises. This time I would learn what a bad crash feels like. After the first tumble, I started to say to myself, "Please stop, and please don't break anything." After about ten more mutterings and ten more log rolls, I finally came to a stop. I also tried a new technique in crashing that involved closing my eyes. Usually, not that I have crashed a tremendous amount of times; I keep my eyes open and am fully aware of my surroundings and the impending doom that a crash can produce. This time I must have known that the crash would be more detrimental to my health; I chose to use the "ignorance is bliss" method of closing my eyes. Needless to say, it definitely didn't help, at all.

I couldn't get up, nor did I want to after my high-speed tumble fest. I also couldn't muster the strength to remove my gloves, glasses, or helmet. After lying on the side of the track and hoping no one would join me in the beautiful Willow Springs landscape, the practice session was halted. We only made it about 1/3 of the way through the session, before the two of us stopped the full out attack on the track for

pole position.

Once I made it back to my pits, I assessed the body damage I had sustained and figured I would be able to race on Sunday, if I could just get another bike. As my body began to come down from its adrenaline high, the true extent of my injuries started to set in. Since my left ankle was now the same size as an official women's softball, I knew time would not be on my side to be healthy enough in the next two days to race competitively. Now I would try to salvage the weekend and at least start the race, guaranteeing me a nice \$1000 for 2 minutes of pain, reward. As the alcohol flowed into my now partially frozen body, the rest of my aches and pains began to surface. The right ankle was a bit sore, also sprained but luckily not fractured as the left one had suffered from the crash. The left buttock, badly bruised, also started its painful release of feeling into my mind. My right elbow had throbbing sensations, and both right and left kidneys showed bruising just a few hours after the wreck. My left thumb didn't bruise up until the next morning, which is when I knew Saturday would be a spectator day for Mr. Graeber.

I planned on racing next month, and made my way to the office to set up carry-overs for this weekend's paid races to next month's races. I also searched out a bike for the Sunday Toyota 200. I now waited for my 2 minutes needed to perform one lap which would signify that I started the Toyota 200. After my completion of one lap, albeit finishing in the hot pit lane, I pulled my borrowed bike back into the pits and watched my fellow motorcycle racing buddies compete in the remaining 79 laps.

I need to thank a few specific people for their generosity and help in my dramatic time of need at the race track.

First, thank you to the EMT's and Crash Truck drivers. They were the first to help me once I needed it.

Second, thank you to Gregg and Kim, for your parental assistance, not only in getting me sauced the night of my incident, but also for making and serving me dinner, keeping my foot on ice, and driving me around.

Third, thank you to Steve and James for helping work on my bike and loading my trailer, and driving me around.

Fourth, thank you to Jack for lending me your bike so I could perform the necessary single lap of glory in the Toyota 200.

Fifth, thank you to Jeff for drinking with me, and keeping my spirits up while I thought of what my injury may do to me mentally.

Lastly, thank you to all that came out to cheer for us racers, even if we only made a single 2.5 mile loop of the 80-lap race. As always, I will thank my wife, and children for their support before and after this small set back. Since I know I still have the potential to race competitively, I will return to the track once my body is healthy enough, hopefully in one month's time.

I also want to thank all of my sponsors that have helped me throughout the year, and look forwards to finishing the season off just as strong as I started it. Although I may have lost a few points to those in all of my classes, I am motivated to come back out for the last two race weekends in November and December and make my mark in WSMC. Thank you sponsors.

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Skill is definitely a necessity when racing, but luck also plays a very important part of the winning equation, and this past weekend I didn't have the best of it. I plan on making up for my loss of luck and put myself in a better position to succeed. I hope to see some of you out there this coming race weekend. Have a great month, until then, think of us gimps.

Marcel