

As most of you know, this past weekend, I raced at Willow Springs in the Toyota 200.

Well, my intention was to race at the annual WSMC event, as last year I had a slight off track excursion that left me in an air cast and not walking just right for a few weeks.

My lap time qualifying for the 2004 Toyota 200 was a mere .010 of a second slower than this year's qualifying time of bike and rider #767.

The difference between last year and this year was about 30 horsepower, and a very dry riding period of about 4 months.

Let me back up a few months, when I had this strange, unexplainable pain in my left forearm.

The pain was shown to be a bone spur on my 6th vertebra, and a slightly bulging disk, between the 6th and 7th vertebra, pushing on my spinal cord.

After a brief, 2-1/2 hour surgery, performed almost flawlessly by Dr. Grossman, I was put to rest in a hospital bed for 24 hours.

The next thing I knew, the hospital was shoving me out into the street to find my own bed at home in Simi Valley as my recuperating area for the coming two weeks.

Usually, I say my thank yous at the end of my race write-ups, but this time they will come first, as they are extremely important and must be shared with everyone concerned right off the bat.

Jodie, Josephine, Sebastian, and Valentino: as always, you, my family, are my guiding light, shining stars, and complete reason for living and working.

Thank you for your never-ending unlimited support.

Next, I need to thank my wonderful in-laws, Joe and Joann.

For without your support, our family would be out on the street fending for ourselves, and probably not doing as well as we are with you in our family's life.

Thank you for everything, in the past, now, and in the future.

Next would be the thanks for my well paid Doctor of Orthopedic Surgery of the Neck and Spine: Dr. Brian Grossman.

Your masterful, yet costly experienced hands have made the reality of racing in the very near future a pure act of pleasure for my body and me.

I can't begin to thank you and the entire Los Robles Hospital Staff, for the tender care you all performed while practicing, or should I say exercising medicine on the very sensitive part of my failing body, my neck and spinal cord.

Thank you for taking the time to try to heal my body in a more time conducive healing manner than fusing bone and titanium inside of my upper torso.

I am quite positive that the short 2 weeks for me to return to my life passion of riding motorcycles was completely easier on my mind than waiting for the drawn out time frame of three months that was expected if we had bolted the 6th and 7th vertebra together with hardware.

Since it is obvious by now that I qualified and raced in the Toyota 200 this fine 2005 year, and I must take the time to thank those that helped me prior to, during, and after the BIG race.

Thank you to Chris Thorsen, of Thorsen Motorsports, who had helped in the expedient race preparation needed to get my bike on the racetrack.

Thank you also to Cary Andrews and staff at Hyper Cycle, for putting in the effort they did to start my 2005 GSXR-1000's transformation from street squid vehicle to race track warrior.

Thank you to all of my present and hopefully future sponsors, who also had their

hands in the massive effort to get my bike ready to attack the cold, and sometimes hot Willow Springs asphalt.

Suzuki of Van Nuys - www.suzukiofvannuys.com
Simi Valley Cycles - www.simivalleycycle.net
Motul - www.motul.com
Galfer USA - www.galferusa.com
Shoei Helmet Safety Corporation - www.shoei-helmets.com
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I now know that next year will bring about wonderful positive strides in not only my riding, but also the support I receive because of my riding.
Thank you one and all.

The next group I need to congratulate would be the tirelessly, unyielding to pressure, able to perform even if they weren't prepared to at the time, MDG Racing Pit Crew.

Since my racing endeavors were kept fairly low key on the radar for the past few months, I knew I would need to call on some very special athletes to compliment my ambitious effort to race 80 laps, and 200 miles in the now infamous 2005 Toyota 200.

Ryan, Gregg, Duane, Ron, Matt, and myself made up the illustrious team of MDG Racing for 2005.

I cannot describe the extraordinary performances acted by these gentlemen, but without their help, I would have been dead last for a second year in a row.

I will leave the specifics of their duties for the latter part of this write-up, but for now, let's just say Speed Channel would have televised these guys on any pit crew challenge show, without hesitation.

Lastly, I definitely don't want to forget the awesome presence of all the fans that spent their hard earned dollars, and very precious time cheering for us racers. It has been said many times before, and I will repeat it, that racers would still come out and compete without fans, but the added bonus of having spectators cheering for, supporting, and in some instances, helping racers, makes the experience soar to a totally different level of competition.

To all the fans, and my friends, thank you for making our time spent battling on the track a spectacle for all involved.

I only hope the joy we felt as racers, was felt as deeply by you in the stands, as we

circumnavigated the 2.5 mile road racing course of Willow Springs over almost 80 times.

As we, the Graeber's, headed from our new hometown of Nipomo, California to the old stomping grounds of Turn 1 at Willow Springs, we had an extra amount of time to think of the wonderful sites and sounds we had missed over the past 4 months of not traveling to the racetrack.

Since we now live over 3 hours from the Fastest Track in the West, we got to experience a new road between home and the track.

The past few months have been filled with packing an entire house full of memories into boxes and putting them into a couple of storage units, taking care of our recovering DAD after he had neck surgery, changing schools, changing jobs, starting a new business, and finally returning to a routine, that includes road racing motorcycles.

I know we have all had tough days in the past, and there will be tough days ahead as well, but the cool part of returning to a set routine is that it is comfortable.

Friday was to be the only day in which I would have a chance to show off my true talents as a motorcycle racer, as I had not thrown a leg over a racing bike in just about 4 months.

On top of the fact that I had also recovered from neck surgery performed just 3 months prior, and riding a bike for the first time on the track at Willow or anywhere for that matter, just added fuel to the fire I had burning in my gut to make up for last year's short coming.

It was great to qualify last year in 30th position, only to crash on the next lap and not get to do but 1 lap of the 80-lap Toyota 200, but this year I vowed to do better. Ironically, after the day's qualifying rounds were over, I had again qualified 30th in the field of 40.

Also, interesting to note, was that even after the brief hiatus from racing, I qualified with a time of just a bit faster lap time at 1:26.49X.

While compared to last year's qualifying time of 1:26.5XX, I put my best foot forwards and rode the new race bike to my full potential, body and mind wise.

Qualifying went fairly well for me, compared to others who had the misfortune of crashing, and sustaining fairly life altering crash damage to not only their bodies, but bikes as well.

I would like to wish the best to our racing buddy Robbie Dowie, who crashed on Friday and sustained some major injuries to his brain and neck.

We wish you a full, speedy, and hopefully a less painful recovery than your injuries appear to necessitate.

Also, we want to wish Ruben Rodriguez the same well wishes, as he had a major get-off on Saturday during the club races and also delivered a massive blow to the back of his head.

Ruben, please recover fully, without complications, and hopefully speedily, as we all want those that have fallen to get up as soon as possible, without lasting bodily damage.

Lastly, to Clayton Backhaus, my pit mate for the past couple of years, we want to wish your broken bones, and bruised body a quick return to proper form as soon as possible, without surgery.

Since I spent most of Saturday at the hospital, making sure Clayton's broken bones were set correctly, I missed the races.

No highlights, other than the one's we heard of while waiting in the hospital, from relatives of those that had fallen.

Friday qualifying started with 2 timed practice sessions to split the 42 attempters into a fast qualifying group and a slower qualifying group.

I made my way onto the track with my newly race readied 2005 GSXR-1000 after my long hibernation from riding and immediately felt comfortable throwing around the beast beneath me.

Although the bike puts out almost 170 horsepower to the rear wheel, and can lift the front tire at just about any speed in any gear, I knew this bike would make me look good after such a long time away from riding.

After the first timed practice, I went to see how my lap timer times compared to those spit out by the very exact transponder system WSMC uses.

To my amazement, my lap timer and the recorded times were very close, at just under a 1:28 lap time.

I knew that with just a few more laps under my belt, and a little more bonding with the newly acquired GSXR-1000, I could improve my lap times to a Toyota 200 qualifying position in no time flat.

The second timed practice had me shedding another second off my lap times and I was now traveling at a pace closer to my expectations for qualifying, 1:27 flat.

Finally, I was given the opportunity to qualify, but unfortunately for me, I made the wrong tire choice.

Tires are very important, and I found out that even the smallest error in tire choice could be hazardous to performing at your best.

I rode around the track with a couple of 1:29 lap times, a couple of 1:28 lap times, a 1:27, and finally two mid 1:26 lap times, with my final qualifying lap time of 1:26.486.

Since I knew my tires weren't going to give my majorly rested body a better shot at qualifying, I took the fastest lap they did and it put me 31st out of the 42 qualifying attempts.

I would be in the show come Sunday.

One good thing that has come from running practices at WSMC with worn tires is the knowledge of what my bikes will feel like when the adhesion of the rubber and asphalt goes completely away.

Being that my qualifying efforts didn't last long, due to improper tire choice, I would already know how to "ride the slide" as my tires lost grip.

My fastest qualifying lap was the 5th lap of 9, but even after I stopped in the pits, I was able to slide my way to a high 1:28 lap time, as I tried to do my best impression of Troy Corser on his World Super Bike.

As I made mention of above, Saturday was fairly uneventful, since we spent most of the day tending to Clayton's broken body.

Looks like he will be enduring a small hand surgical procedure to pin his left thumb, and after a brief stint off the bike, his collarbone should be as good as new.

Good luck with the whole recovery thing Clayton, as you know I have empathy.

Sunday, Sunday, Sunday!!!

The morning of the big race was upon us bright and early, with the smell of rain looming on the horizon, foreshadowing the coming day's events that would unfold in just mere hours.

As I proceeded to set up my pit space, directly next to Moto GP bike #202, straight out of Cary Andrews shop, I couldn't believe the fame I was encountering. Since my pit was right next to the loudest, unmuffled, fully built motored bike entered into the Toyota 200, I was receiving a flood of visitors, mainly those wanting to get a closer look at Cary's handy work.

I made sure people could see my wares as well, but the colorful, candy stripped 2005 GSXR-1000 was no match to the obnoxiously loud bike in the stall next to mine.

Unfortunately, time would be the motor's test, and it failed near the end of the race day, and Cary's bike didn't see the end of the race.

Something to be said about running a stock internal 1000 cc motor.

Somehow, between the time I checked my grid position, 30th, and the end of the warm-up lap, my new grid position was now 34th.

I shrugged off the small inconvenience, as I knew 80 laps would decide the race, not the 3 positions I had just lost due to a typographical error of grid positions.

The weather this Sunday had been quite indecisive.

After three 15 minute delays, mostly due to the officials trying to outwit or out dry the wetness coming from the sky, we were given a final call at 2:15 p.m.

I had made the decision to wait until the last possible moment to choose a tire set-up for the beginning of the race, and my mind was made up just moments before the last of the rain stopped falling on us in the pits at around 2:14 p.m.

Full slicks it would be!!!

I looked around me in the pits to see what others had chosen as their tire set-up, but just as the weather was indecisive, so were my fellow competitors.

I saw full slicks, cut slicks, intermediate wet, and full wet tires on the 39 other bikes. This race was going to be interesting, if not because of the strategy of the 80 laps with pit stops, then also due to the random nature of some rider's tire choices at the start of the slightly damp race.

After all 40 of the Toyota 200 contestants gingerly made their way around the 9 turns and 2-1/2 miles of damp track, I made the conscientious decision to push my bike and tires until I felt I had reached the tire's adhesion limit, which meant I had slid in, during, or exiting a corner.

I anxiously awaited the waving green flag from the starter, and as the exuberantly waved green flag replaced the #1 board, I noticed something fairly strange about the riders in front of me.

Normally a waving green flag has bikes and riders reaching near terminal race speeds in a mere few seconds, but today was definitely different.

It was as if all the riders were taking pity on the gimpy guy on bike #767, knowing that I hadn't cracked a throttle to its fully wide-open position in just about 4 months. I didn't need to be asked twice, I made my move to pass as many riders in as short of period of time as was permitted by the riders in front of me would allow.

After the first gingerly ridden lap around the still wet track on full slicks, I noticed that there were maybe about 10 bikes in front of me, and no one was passing me, or even showing me a wheel.

Since I knew a great start would definitely help my racing cause, I didn't back down with generous helpings of more throttle, as my mind and body waited for the non-treaded tires to slide even just a little.

Laps 2, 3, 4, and 5 produced a dry line through most of the turns on the racetrack, but still no one contested my now known 12th position in the 2005 Toyota 200. As I made my way through each corner, on each successive lap, my confidence grew as the track dried more and more.

After about lap 20, remember I had to circumnavigate the raceway 80 times this day, and counting laps would not be even remotely something I had planned on doing, I had full confidence that I could run a fairly fast pace for the entire race. At about this same time, my right big toe started to catch on fire. Mentally, I knew I could ride through the perceived pain, but I also knew that the race had only just begun, so my mental toughness would need to shine this day, and it did. My lap timer showed lap times consistently in the 1:29-1:30 range, still with no competition for my coveted top 15 spot.

I had thought earlier that I would run 1:27-1:28 lap times throughout the entire race, but weather conditions and my barely race ready body only allowed the slower pace to be run for the first half of the race.

Before I made my first pit stop, I had already encountered a few small glitches in my race plan.

First, I had the nagging big toe to contend with.

Second, I watched a few minor off track excursions, with Kenny Kopecky's, #27, being the biggest in the turn 3 area.

I had seen one incident unfold just in front of me in turn 5 as the rider lost the bike underneath him in the very lightly damp conditions at the beginning of the race.

Kenny's off track ride was a bit wilder, but I only got to see the beginning of it, as I made the left hand turn and he rode straight off.

I assume he hesitated just a bit on the brakes, then second guessed the dryness of the track as he tried to turn left, and finally he straightened the bike up to run off the outside of turn 3.

He did a good job holding on to the bike, as later in the race he passed me for position, and ended up officially in 13th place.

Our pit strategy was very simple: I would ride the bike until my gas light came on, then signal the guys at the pit wall that I needed gas by pointing at my tank as I came flying down the front straight at about 160 M.P.H.

Once they saw my signal, I would then go another couple (2) laps and pit for refueling.

I had hoped to make it half way and also do a rear tire change along with the gas stop, but my mind told me not to run out of gas, even though the rear tire still felt solid and held its grip quite well, and I pitted after I had completed 35 laps.

When I came shooting down hot pit lane, at about 100 m.p.h., something we usually don't get to do at the normal monthly WSMC event weekends, I began to look for my almost professional looking, red MDG Racing Team shirt wearing pit crew.

Unfortunately, it was tougher than I had thought it would be, especially since we hadn't practiced at all, and I had to slow down a bit more than anticipated to locate my pit area.

I stopped the bike, forgetting to take the bike out of gear, and almost forgetting to unlock the gas tank for Gregg's job of refueling, but managed to remove the key

from the ignition, insert it into the tank cap, and open the gas tank for Gregg.

Right after doing my pit stop duties, I was informed of my heroic charge to the front of the race, and my stupendous 12th or 13th place so far in the race by Ryan. As he yelled my position to me, I remember my dumb-founded response of, "Are you F-ing kidding me!!!"

I meant it in the best possible context, as I knew what type of effort I had put on my start compared to others gridded around and in front of me.

Before I could even get a small drink of anything, I was being yelled at to return to my riding position and readied to return to the action on track from a flying run out of hot pit lane.

Just before I departed the MDG Racing pit area, I yelled to Ryan that I would try to put in 10 more laps on this rear tire before returning to the pits to change it, at around lap number 45, thus giving me less than half the race on a new rear tire.

I made my way out of pit lane and back onto the now completely dry racetrack, almost without losing any places in the race due to a phenomenal pit stop performed by my entire crew.

THANKS GUYS, YOU ALL KICKED ASS!!!

Now it was time to test my practiced skill of "riding the slide".

I made it around the track just a few more times before the rear tire slid heavily coming out of turn 2, a place I had once made the mistake of riding the slide right off the track and luckily not crashing.

My first inclination was to stay the course as I had exclaimed to Ryan in the pits, but then I remembered last year's race results and made my way straight into the pits for a refuel and rear tire change.

Since I had deviated from the plan, my always-ready pit crew wasn't.

I take full responsibility for the badly executed pit strategy, but I wanted to finish the race this year, so I aired on the side of caution.

Too bad it was just a lap prior to the half way point.

Again the guys, even though they had no warning that I was coming in, were more than ready to change a rear tire, and refuel the bike.

I again forgot to take the bike out of gear, and this time I actually dismounted the bike to get a drink.

Matt, thank you for the quick thinking and acting to get me a water bottle in our very brief second and final pit stop.

Ryan, after raising my bike onto the rear stand, told me I had only completed a couple of laps after I had told him I would do 10 more before coming in, and then gave me the information that on the first pit stop, my bike only took about 4 gallons of fuel.

The fuel tank on my bike has approximately a 4.8 gallon capacity, so when the light came on, I still had about $\frac{3}{4}$ of a gallon of gas before running out.

All of this information was valuable for next year's attack of the 200-mile race, but poor planning this year just meant I would learn more for next year.

Since I again forgot to take the bike out of gear upon entering the pit area, Duane had to change the tire, and shift the bike into neutral to mount the new rear wheel. To all of our amazement, we still had a sub 1-minute pit stop, with absolutely no practice whatsoever.

Again, I have to say, my pit crew kicked some major ass!!!
Thanks guys.

As the laps passed, and my foot continued to burn, I made small body movements to alleviate the pain.

The winds began to howl a bit in the later stages of the race, and I would have to tuck under the windscreen coming out of turn 2, since the wind would slow me down otherwise.

The transition from turn 6 to 7 was also filled with bike shifting gusts.

As you would crest turn 6 and set up to shoot towards turn 7, the wind would push you into the center of the racetrack, thus making you lean harder to the left to compensate for the wind and to correct your line into turn 7.

Slowly the lap count began to increase and my mind began to think of the end.

I patiently waited for my fuel light to come on, knowing that it would indicate the end was near.

I had told my crew to alert me of my position with about 10 laps to go, so I would know whether to push hard to climb a position, or just hang tough.

As I accelerated past the start / finish line at one point, I saw my ghetto sign, a piece of cardboard box top I had borrowed from the guys at Catalyst, and it read clear as day, the number 20.

I pushed hard for the next couple of laps, but no one was in sight.

My fuel light lit a couple of laps later.

As I streaked past the start / finish line, I indicated the need for fuel.

I didn't want to run out and not finish the race, so I awaited a pit signal from the mechanics wall.

The next trip by, I saw a hand held up with all five fingers displayed.

I knew I wasn't in 5th place, but my mind was working a bit slow to figure out there were 5 more laps to go.

I again signaled that I needed fuel.

The next time by, the ghetto sign had a 76 displayed on it.

I assumed they were cheering for me, and didn't have space for the other 7 of my race number.

Once my mind cleared to take the correct action to enter turn 1, it also put 2 and 2 together: the first indicator, five fingers, meant five laps to go, and the second sign meant 76 laps in the books.

Since I knew I had enough gas to finish, as I had been lapped at least a couple of times by the leader, and only need to complete about 74-78 laps, I pressed on with the amber blinking light flashing before me.

I saw the checked flag waving as I exited turn 9 this final lap and knew I only needed to cross the finish line to complete the race, and fuel didn't matter at that exact moment.

As my body felt the pleasure of finishing the race, it also felt the pain of finishing the race.

I made my way to visit the Turn-4-nicators, for a little post race celebration, and in doing so, I realized how tired I had gotten.

I stopped atop the turn 4B corner to perform a small Rossi-like burnout for the fan base on the hill, and almost fell over.

Then I mustered up the strength to hold in the front brake lever while cranking up

the throttle and dumping the clutch in first gear.
Smoke poured off my rear tire, and the crowd went wild, or at least that is what I thought in my heavily race drained mind.
This race was done!!!

My one-year turn around was complete, and I had a minor monkey off my back, as I had qualified and successfully completed a Toyota 200.

Unofficially I finished in 14th place, but now timing and scoring has put me in 21st place.

My goal was a top 20 position before I had any inclination that I was going to be receiving neck surgery, so now that I have finished the race and placed 21st, I consider my goal reached.

I want to again thank each and every person that "helped" me reach my goals this year.

Thank you one and all.

Now we begin the next phase of life, as Jodie, the kids, and I have moved from Simi Valley to our old Central Coast stomping grounds of Nipomo.

Jodie is selling real estate for our old friend Dennis Allen, and will hopefully become the next sponsor of MDG Racing.

The kids, well Josephine and Sebastian anyway, are in their new Elementary School, and loving their new hometown, as is Valentino, since he gets to spend tons of time with his grand parents.

And I, the racer who plans on racing the entire 2006 AMA Super Stock Series next year will start my new business very soon, buying and selling salvaged motorcycles and their parts Worldwide!!!

I look forwards to seeing some of you in the near future, reading from others of you in the near future, and hopefully keeping in touch with all of you, as I share my family and my life adventures.

Thank you for reading a year's worth of redemption, and look for my next adventure racing at Daytona in March.

Thank you,

Marcel