

This was the second to the last race weekend of the year, and it was COLD!!! 🌡️
Well, cold for a Californian. I think when I woke up Saturday morning for practice it was in the mid to high 30's. 🌡️

I was to race my first PRO-Formula 1 race this weekend. 🍷 I had high expectations again for a great finishing position. I wanted a top ten! 🏆

First I would try my luck with a set of 17" slicks for practice on Saturday. Pranav came through again, with a perfect set on Friday evening as I was heading to the track for the weekend. 🍷 Thanks again Bombay, and HAPPY BIRTHDAY, belated!!!

As my breath warmed my hands on Saturday morning, I began the ritual of readying myself to do battle with the BIG track at Willow Springs International Raceway. 🏆

The first few laps were taken at a tentative medium speed, since slicks and a cold track don't mix as well as Vodka and orange juice. 🏆

Also, tentatively increasing my speed was put into perspective as I followed other racers in my very first PRO practice! 🍷 I watched in amazement as the fastest guys on the track were traveling at sub-Novice speeds around most of the tracks 9 corners. After a few warm up laps the pace increased and before we knew it 1:28 second lap times were being posted. Remember, it is the first practice session of the day, with temperatures hanging in the low to mid 40's. Confidence was soon all I had.

Practice for the rest of the day produced many happy thoughts, as I wore through a set of slicks as if I was eating my favorite ice cream in a sugar cone. 😊

All day the threatening clouds on the horizon had everyone's attention. They only opened up a bit that night after practice ended and I had almost finished barbequing our filet dinner. Luckily the RV has an awning. 🏆

Sunday morning came quick as a sailor on ship leave after a 6 month deployment. 🏆 I teched my bike and made the mistake of almost starting it in the no-starting-zone, due to my excitement of racing in the Formula 1 race later that day. I was truly excited to have reached another one of my racing goals this year, earning my PRO license and racing a PRO race. 🍷

The first race was that of Open Modified Production. I was gridded 7th in a field of 19. I knew I could improve my standings in the overall class point's battle by just finishing in the same place as I would start, but that is never my intention.

I started well and made a couple of early passes. I finished that race with a 5th place position which took me to the 11th most point's holder in the Modified Production class. One away from my goal of reaching top ten in all three of my Open classes. I figured that was a reasonable expectation, since I had only 6 months to gather points in the 12 month season. 🏆

The next race was my favorite, and the class I am doing the best in, Open Super Stock. I was gridded 8th in a field of 19 again. I knew from the past two months that two 4th place finishes had propelled me into a great position in the class championship point's hunt. I raced this race just as I had the past few months, start well, race my race, pass those that were in my sights, and finish strong. The ambient

temperature began to climb by now, since the day was almost half over. I finished another race in the top 5. I was 5th. This finishing position along with the rest of my four other race finishes put me 10th in points in the Open Super Stock class. 🤝 Another goal attained and I have one race weekend to improve my standings deeper into the top 10 in this class. Now I was getting ready for the BIG ONE!!! 🤘

The one thing I was supposed to remember before heading out for the Formula 1 race was to fill my gas tank, because the two races prior had drained it almost completely. Well, you guessed it, I may have forgot that one important fact. 😊 As they made the final call to the pre-grid for the Formula 1 race I started my way to the grid. About 2/3rds of the way through pit lane I had a momentary flash of brilliance and concern. I knew I had to return to my pit to refuel, or suffer the consequences of only racing about 1-2 laps of the 12 lap main event. I anxiously raced back to my pit and made a bee-line for the gas in my trailer. My pit mates, both of whom were Novices, jumped at the opportunity to help their fellow racer. I greatly appreciated their help and made my way expediently back to the pre-grid, which was now closed. A closed pre-grid means no warm up lap. Luckily, I had my tire warmers on up until the last few moments before they called us for last call to the grid. 🤝

Now I would be starting at the back of the grid. I had no problem with that really, because I was gridded 24th out of the 25 racers in this race. 😊

The start of this race had me accelerating like no other start before. I made up about 5 or 6 places by the time I got through turn 1. Then turn 2 had my adrenaline shooting me past a few more riders that were being a bit tentative. I was very confident in my abilities to race side by side with the BIG boys, as I had earned my place in this field of fast riders. 😊 As I left turn 2 and headed for my late braking mark of turn 3, IT HAPPENED!!! A couple of the top ten guys had tangled just moments before I made my entrance into turn 3. The result of their accidental contact was worse than an inattentive cell phone using SUV driver on the 405 freeway. One rider went down hard, the other went out into the rocks, and then went down himself. The pack scattered like bees being smoked out of their hive. I rode past the incident and immediately got on the gas, as no flags were waving. The race was on, temporarily, anyway. By the time we made it to turn 8 a checkered red and white flag was waving, but no instructions as to where to go, pits, pre-grid, grid.....etc.

After most of us proceeded back to the grid, we were instructed to take a warm up lap as they cleared up the accident. Not 2 turns later did the RED flag emerge. Chaos was in full affect, but quickly there was organization. A restart was in order in just a few minutes, as one rider had suffered a broken bone and the other was escorted away in the second ambulance.

One valuable lesson I learned from my first Formula 1 race was a new line on the opening lap through turn 1. Go wide and hole shot at least a few guys trying to hold the racing line through turn 1. It worked like magic on the restart. 🤘

I went to the outside of turn 1 on the next start and made up at least 5-6 places without barely touching my brakes. The guys that tried to follow the racing line had to brake much more than I did and thus were passed by myself and a few others that had already learned the valuable starting lesson. 😊

As the now 10 lap main event, cut from 12 laps due to the RED flag, ensued, I made a few exciting passes of guys that had been racing in the PRO Formula 1 races all season. I learned later that grid position 25 was reserved for the only other newbie to Formula 1, racer number 175. Remember that number for later as he and I had a great little encounter. 😏

About 4 laps into the race, I had passed almost all of the riders that were of my caliber and speed. Number 175 was in my sights next for a great battle of the newbies. Unfortunately, as I climbed up his back end in the next couple of laps, he made a fatal error in throttle control as he crested Stuart's and my favorite turn, 6. Number 175 fed just a bit too much gas for the bike and tires liking and there he went. TANKSLAPPING like a mother. 🚫 In the middle of trying to tame the beast he had created, he decided it would be good to know if anyone was around him. I was right there on his back tire just getting ready to pass him in my truly favorite corner, turn 8. Just as any great stalker, I waited for the perfect time to make my move. He was the last rider I would be able to defeat this day and his slight mistake made it that much easier to dominate the track with his bike in a vicious tank-slapper. Just a brief moment before the wiggling began, I had envisioned my pass on the inside of him as we transitioned between turn 8 and 9. Now I had to change my game plan as he had his helmet turned 90° to the left. Tigers pounce on the weak of the heard and number 175 became my prey this afternoon. 😏

Not only did it turn out to be the last racer I could pass, it was the last racer I did pass. The very next lap, there was another RED flag as two more of the front runners collided. The race was called with only 7-1/2 laps complete, but for me it was just the same since I had a large gap to overcome to catch the front 14. I had completed my first Formula 1 race with an incredible sense of accomplishment, 24th to 15th, against the fastest group of racers out there that Sunday. 👍

The last race of the day was the class I am doing the worst in, if I can even say that with a straight face. 😏 Open Super Bike had me 16th in the overall point's battle and I was gridded 9th of the 18 starters. My confidence on the start was almost uncontainable. I wanted to show off my newly acquired skill of flying past the others around the outside of turn 1. It worked again!!! 👍

I finished 7th after making a couple more well planned and executed passes on guys who were normally faster than I, and who were usually the ones finishing before me. I ended the weekend on another couple of great notes. I had made my way up to a position of 14th in points in Super Bike, with a definite possibility of breaking in to the top ten in all three of my classes in just half a season of racing. The final accomplishment was that of which I had planned on from the beginning of my racing endeavors, getting a double digit race number. Presently I am 98th in the Overall Championship Points rankings, guaranteeing me a double digit race number for next year, with the potential of dropping into the 80's, maybe. 😏

I now have to thank my family, for without them as my main supporters racing would only be a "me" sport not a family fun filled adventure. 👍 Thank you Jodie, Josephine, and Sebastian. 👍

Secondly, I can now thank my race sponsors;

Simi Valley Cycles

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and Engineered Racing Products.

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Marcel