

Race Report / Vegas and Luck, Just not Good Luck!!!

Hey All,

Well the reason I haven't posted a race report from this past weekend will become very evident once you all see the two pictures of my bike after Saturday's 20 lap, or should I say my 17-3/4 lap race.

As you all can see, my bike didn't quite make it out without a few new scratches.

First let me just say, yes, I am a bit sore, but I am okay, for the most part. If you can imagine riding at 100.1% on a track you have never been on and only being a mere 5 seconds off the fastest lap, then having it all come crashing down in a mere instant at well over 100 mph. When the bike and I made our way back to the pits, I managed to get the slightly bent shift lever to move about four or five gear shifts down to neutral. This means, in the turn in which I encountered a slight miscalculation of suspension reaction to an uneven pavement section of racetrack, I was traveling at around 130 to 140 mph. Definitely one of the fastest crashes I have ever had in my short motorcycling career, since when I started riding over 25 years ago. This experience has definitely made me realize that I am not a mortal man but some lucky bastard that has not met fully his racing potential. Some would take this as a sign to stop the passionate pursuit of being a number one plate holder in a sport where men travel at extremely fast speeds only inches away from catastrophic failure at any moment. Death wish, no "LIFE WISH"!!!

As the weekend began, about 5:30 p.m. on Friday afternoon, the entire Graeber family headed out East to the "City of Sin", Las Vegas. It took a short 5-1/2 hours to make the trip to the "city that never sleeps". My body shook with anticipation of the following days exciting adventure of learning and conquering a new racetrack. My night was filled with dreams of success, just as if I knew how good I would perform the following day.

Saturday morning began a bit different than most race weekends because we were racing with a new race club, WERA WEST. I had to work on my bike that morning to pass technical inspection, before taking my machine to the warm asphalt of Las Vegas Motor Speedway.

Just as I finished putting my bike back to its original race condition, I heard the first call for my morning practice. This day would be much different than any other Saturday practice, as I would get three short, 6-7 lap practices and then a 20 lap afternoon race. I figured trial by fire is the only way to become a better, more experienced racer, and this is why I joined WERA, not only to race more tracks but also to compete with different racers of varying skill levels. I definitely got more than I bargained for in my first practice session, but I acknowledged the challenge and rose to meet the needs of learning the new track quickly.

The first session was not timed at all, the transponders were not functioning properly, and my lap timer had no beacon to set it off or on. I went out and rode fairly conservatively, not only because I didn't know the track, but also I had to feel out my new suspension on this new track. I was used to fast, some might even say unconscientiously fast sweepers, and Las Vegas Motor Speedway had none of these types of corners. What this track did have was a couple of straights that lead into second gear, tight, 180° corners that made you almost think you were going to fall over. The sensation of going into a corner at speeds that were slower than most

bicycles can pedal, and having it be part of a race track was a new feeling for me and my GSXR-1000. I also was able to start dragging my left knee, which almost never happens, but with these left handed, slow speed corners, it wasn't only a possibility, it was reality.

After the first practice, I was full of raw excitement and anticipation of attacking the course for another lap time crushing session. It came just as I was ready to go. I made many changes in line choice and speed acceleration and deceleration points of reference. My times were just now starting to show on my lap timer and I finally got an idea of how well, or at least the actual lap times I was putting down. First I saw a 1:54, then a 1:50, and finally a few 1:48's. I noticed where I was slow and could make up time and I also watched those that had practiced all Friday, during the track day, and tried to attempt their lines. I knew that the race this day would prove that I had actually learned the track sufficiently to compete in my first WERA WEST Expert Heavyweight Solo 20 race.

The last practice came just after I had changed my tires to the slicks I planned on racing on for the 20 lap Solo race. Unfortunately, I had misjudged the practice sessions as not two this day, but actually three. Learning the track and the bureaucracy of the new club proved challenging but not unattainable. I finished the last practice session with a renewed confidence with a practice session on the slicks that I would race on.

I downed a few snacks for lunch after talking with my new pit mates, Gregg and Kim, and Walt and Peg. Thanks for coming out, it was exciting, well at least until I made my move to eat asphalt. I promise the next time to make a better showing and you all will enjoy it just a bit more, especially since it will be in the hot August desert heat.

I would race the third race of the afternoon. I was gridded 7th out of 9 experts in the Heavyweight Solo 20 race. The start had me launching my bike as if I was on the starting grid of any one of my Willow Spring races, hard and fast!!! I was already guaranteed a top ten finish, well if I finished anyway.

The leaders pushed the pace out front by turning a few laps in the high 41's and low 42's. I was content running in 8th at a moderate pace of 1:50's for the first third of the race. After a few laps behind my buddy Kevin, #148, and another rider, they both decided it was time for me to move up in the overall standings. Kevin led the other rider right off the track in turn one at the end of the front straight. You would be traveling at about 150 mph, then come to the end of the front straight and have to down shift three gears and apply a massive amount of front brake to set your bike up for the tight right hand 90° corner. Unfortunately, Kevin braked too late and never made the turn, actually he did the same act about 3 or 4 more times during the race. I now sat in the very comfortable position of 6th place. I now made an effort to decrease my lap times to an even faster pace. I chased my buddy John Chen, #73 for about 6-7 laps cutting my lap times down to the low 49's high 48's. At about lap 16, the leaders made their way up to my rear tire and proceeded to lap me. As Kim said, she was definitely in disbelief that "I" would be lapped. I knew the leaders were getting tired and figured now was my time to take advantage of this opportunity to follow some of the more experienced riders. The difference in lines and speed had my lap time change dramatically from a 1:49.497 just before being lapped to a 1:46.868 the lap after following the first and second place riders. I later asked the third place rider, Ivan, why he didn't pass me also. His response made my

crash seem insignificant, when he stated he was getting tired and I was keeping up a good pace. I managed one and three quarters laps following the leaders until I made my way into turn 7.

Turn 7 was part of the new pavement section of the racetrack, and had a few unsettling bumps on the inside exit of the turn. The lap prior, while following the leaders I made my way through that corner without incident. The next lap, I had to negotiate the turn with a small gap between myself and the second place bike of my new buddy, Kane. As I entered the corner, I cut the apex a little short, and exited just over the rough section of pavement. My stiff front suspension didn't like the undulations and got a bit bouncy. I rolled off the throttle just a hair to try to get the front wheel to sit more on the roadway, but before I could do anything else, the front let go and I was thrown to my back. I knew this would not be a great crash by any means, mainly due to the speed involved, but I went limp to try and ride it out. I remember starting to slide at first, but then noticed my body curling into a ball to try and keep body parts from being snapped like twigs in a hurricane wind. I tumbled a few times and also recall looking for my bike at one point. Not seeing it sliding along the asphalt in front of me was puzzling, until I saw it launching into the air about 5 feet above the ground I was tumbling on. Just a short 2-1/2 laps more would have had me finishing the race with a confidence inspiring 6th place, but I decided to try to make a statement not only to myself but also the other competitors that I was there to not only compete but be a strong finisher. These dreams were now just a crumbled bike in the back of the crash truck a few feet behind me.

Luckily, I have had the absolute purest of luck during all of my non-riding incidents to walk away with minor bodily injury as well as minimal motorcycle damage. Not to say it won't take me a few days to repair my bike and a few weeks to allow my body the time to heal from the ground pounding I took. I look forwards to my next outing at another new track, Fontana's California Speedway in June.

We ended up watching the races on Sunday, and took Monday off to show the kids Circus Circus, a small part of Las Vegas. Thanks to Brian and all his roommates for a great BBQ on Sunday night, and to Gregg, Kim, Walt, and Peg for great company on Saturday night at the rib place.

Thank you is definitely in order to my family first, even if Jodie, my wife was sleeping while I decided to destroy my day's work in a short few seconds of metal and body contortion. Josephine, Sebastian, and Valentino all showed compassion for their dad when he arrived back to our pit in the back of the crash truck.

Next, to my sponsors, thanks, but I may need some extra assistance this month, as I will be rebuilding my bike for the next event in a few weeks. Thank You,

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Since the next race is at California Speedway June 12 & 13, I look forwards to seeing some more of you race fans out there at the track. With a little time and skill I should have my bike in great running order sooner than the race date. Keep your fingers crossed for my bike and me. Thanks.

Marcel