

Last Race of the Rookie's Season / 26's BABY!!!

Well, it has finally come and passed. The last race weekend of the 2003 race season. I figured I would go out on the highest of highs 😊 or the lowest of lows. 😞 Luckily for me it was the better of the two outcomes that I possess after last weekend. 👍

Saturday was to be filled with large amounts of computer downloading after each session, as I would do back to back testing of rear suspension testing for my buddy, Ray Engelhardt of Engineered Racing Products. We fitted my bike with front and rear suspension telemetry, two recording computers, and a remote record switch. I felt like a real factory guy with all the cool tools to better my bike and riding skills during off season testing. 😊

My other goal for this weekend was to finalize my tire choice for next year. I had previously tested Pirelli slicks in November, and now it was Dunlop's turn.

Testing would provide many valuable lessons for me;

- 1) Suspension is critical to going faster.
- 2) Not all suspension is equal.
- 3) Experience makes you faster.
- 4) Good machinery plus skill is the equation of success.
- 5) Fast is always relative.

The last lesson was more of a rehash, since our buddy Josh Hayes came out to play with the amateurs, on his new toys for 2004. See Stuman's thread with regards to his two toys.

I started the day of testing with a used set of Pirelli slicks from last weekend. They worked great for about 2/3 of the day until I decided to trade them in for my new DOT Dunlop 208 GPA's. I am thoroughly surprised by the longevity of slicks versus DOT racing tires. The extra money spent up front is definitely worth not only the added life, but also added performance characteristics of the race built tires. 👍

After a few sessions to work out the bugs of recording suspension travel, we got some great readings. Unfortunately, I was testing a Penske rebuilt rear shock first, and the shock didn't work nearly as well as my previously reworked Lindemann rear set up. As we switched to the Race Tech rear shock, I made sure, as a true engineer would, to be fair in my evaluation of the two different shocks. I had just replaced the worn slicks with a new set of Dunlops. I took one session on the new tires with the Penske shock, then one session right after that on the Race Tech shock. Night and Day. For about half the cost, I found the Race Tech rebuild to be far more superior in every facet of suspension needs on the track. 👍 I found the 450 pound spring of the Penske to be slightly soft and the bike would dip slightly as I drove out of corners, while the 425 pound spring on the Race Tech to stay firm and give excellent response to every input the bike would give to its suspension pieces. I can only tell you that in my experience with both of these shocks, the Race Tech suspension parts will be on my race bike next year, due to their great performance and cost effective value that is added confidence to my racing experience. 👍

Now on to the actual racing experiences. 😊

Sunday would have me racing on DOT's in the morning and Slicks in the afternoon. I would start the day off with slightly used, three sessions used tires. I figured I would

have plenty of tire left for a 6 lap race of Open Modified Production and a 6 lap race of Open Super Stock.

I guess the faster I go, the more I need good tires, or even perfect tires for just two races.

I was gridded 29th on the grid for the two wave race start to Open Mod. Prod. That put me in 8th out of 18 participants. My prior comment of thinking I had plenty of tire left for the two morning races was only half true. 🚫 More on that later.

The start of the race had me in about the same position as I started. I rode hard but only managed to finish 8th. I won't complain now, as I know what the rest of the day had in store for me. At the time, I was a bit disappointed in my racing performance as the new suspension had instilled new confidence in my abilities with the complimentary addition to my machinery.

The race involved only a couple of passes with a pit mate, James, who had been off racing for about 12 years, 🚫 and this was his first year back. He used to race AMA, Canadian Super Bike, and a few other clubs. He was a champion then, and only runs 27's now, 😊 with his first race in the over 50 class on an R1. 🚫

We had a great battle for a couple of laps with me making the last pass to beat him by one place. 😊 This had almost no affect on my overall standings in the class championship, but with the few points I gathered from 8th place I was now in the top 10 in that class. After racing only 6 of 12 races for the 2003 season I had climbed up to 10th out of 54 combatants in the Open Modified Production class on my Open Super Stock bike. 😊

The next race had a different outcome between James and me with many more interesting facts between other riders as well. 😊

The Open Super Stock race started with #767 in position 7 on the grid of 15 warriors. I had the most to gain in this race towards my overall standings, as I was doing the best in this class and it was the closest to what my bike specifications were set up for.

On the first lap, James, John, another buddy I had been competing with for the past few months, and a guy named Morgan, all ended up in front of me. I knew this race would be a hard fought one, as my tires were now fairly well disintegrated after a pummeling in the prior race. I fought hard to pass James, which I did by the end of lap one, late breaking him and another rider into turn one. The second lap had James watching my rear tire slip and slide like a little child deep in the middle of summer on a water covered piece of plastic covering the front yard's grass. 🚫 I managed to only allow James to pass me, but John, and Morgan were also ahead of me still. I knew the next few laps would have me following them with the hopes of having enough tire left to out drive them in a few corners and make a late in the race desperation pass. 😊 As we crossed the start/finish line for the third time we entered turn one with Morgan leading John leading James leading me. I had the fastest exit of turn one and was now on James's rear wheel. John was pursuing Morgan with the same intensity and as the four of us exited turn two, John made his move to the outside of Morgan. In a brilliant late breaking maneuver, John was able to get about one half of a bike length on Morgan. He, John, turned to make the

ascent up turn three, but Morgan was on his inside and didn't make the same effort to turn left. 😞 The two intertwined handle bars and leathers; with Morgan hitting the asphalt in a sparkling display of metal erosion at it's finest. 🚫 John managed to ride off track but unfortunately, as he described it, he tried to dirt track it back into the race to resume our previous battle. In his enthusiasm to rejoin the others on the track he encountered the same fate as Morgan, just a few moments prior, except John's downing involved dirt and rocks, not asphalt. 😞

Both riders were okay, with John battling me later that day, again to be discussed later. I on the other hand, now had to defend my place behind James with a rear tire that resembled my new slick in my trailer, awaiting its entry to the race track. 🚫 I slid my way through two more laps and sat on James's rear wheel through turn 8 with the intention of out driving him down the front straight. I made the amateurish mistake of thinking I missed a shift in the middle of turn 8 and I shifted down one too many gears. 😞 As the rear end of my bike twitched like an epileptic seizure victim, I made the decision to leave it in the wrong gear and just follow the best line through turn 8 and still try to get James on the front straight. I learned that being in the wrong gear for even a couple of seconds at very high speeds, makes for a very difficult gap to be overcome even with a large amount of horse power to push your bike forwards. 😞

Needless to say, I finished behind James in 5th position. I later found out that I had moved up to 9th in the overall standings in Open Super Stock out of the 46 entrants in the class. 😊 I now had two of my three goals covered. 👍 I was only partially upset that I had missed the shift and lost out on the outstanding drag race that could have been to the finish line. I now knew what I had to do, change tires for the next race, Formula 1 PRO.

Slicks were mounted and lunch was consumed. I was ready to battle the big boys of Formula 1 with my handy, reliable Super Stock GSXR-1000. 👍 I had visions of winning, but in the end, all I was rewarded with was three out of 12 laps in the 1 minute 26 second lap times, and a 14th place finishing position. 😞 Not bad for a guy on a super stock spec. bike after only 8 months of racing at Willow Springs International Race Track. The newest fastest lap of #767 was a

1:26:67!!! I felt like I accomplished everything I wanted to and more. 👍 Now for the race.

The start had me 19th out of 22, as my previous race experience only mustered me 2 points. I guess more than at least a couple of racers. My first start was absolutely hideous. I was 21st out of turn one. I had plenty of confidence in the bike's suspension, the new set of Dunlop slicks, and my abilities, but my starts were still a point of concern. 😞 I will get them to a point where they are at least consistently decent as opposed to some really great others just plain shitty.

I followed #51, Mathias Jezek, for 4 laps until the #1 plate holder for 2004, #33, Jeff Stern, crashed in turn 5. His bike scattered across the race track, which in turn brought out the red flag. By the way, Jeff has been racing with WSMC for 15 years and now is NUMBER 1!!! 🚫 Congratulations Jeff, 👍 I will be following in your foot steps, soon I hope. 😞

On the restart, I made a much better jump towards turn 1. Using the newly acquired pass on the outside on the start method, I made up a few more places. I proceeded to ride my ass off managing to get into a great dice with Kenny on bike #109. 😊 He also started this season as a Novice, a few months before me though. We passed each other numerous times in all different places on the track. I finally made a late breaking pass on Kenny in turn 1 with about two laps to go. 🍊 I never looked back and he never passed me again. I went on to finish 14th and posted three laps in the 26's. I was elated to say the least. 🍊

Now was the class that I had been doing the worst in, Open Super Bike. My bike is only second to the weakest in this class compared to Formula 1 PRO. My bike has the least amount of modifications to compete at the Super Bike level, but I still go out and battle hard. 😡 This race was to be my finest clash with the elite to date. 🍊

I lined up 9th out of 13 on the starting grid. I was also in 14th in the overall points in this class. I would have one final say in my quest to achieve top ten in all three of my classes. 😡

The race started fast, just like it always does. After the first 8 turns, I sat directly behind my racing buddy Alex, #331 on a TLR. This bike is made just a bit stronger to compete in the Super Bike class, and Alex is a good rider. 🍊 This was not to be his day. 😊 As we entered turn 9 his front tucked more than it had on any of the previous eight turns, and he was unable to save it as he had in the last eight turns. I had followed closely, but not too closely, as I had seen the problem evolve over the period of the past minute or so. He was entering turn 9 on his ass; with the TLR spitting parts like a boxer does in his corner after taking a 3 minute beating in the ring. 😊 I was able to duck under the fender as it flew over my head at about 100 miles per hour. 🍊 From that point on, the rest of the race was a blur of corners, (left, right, left, right, left, right, left, right, right) and breaths that fogged my visor in the cool December afternoon. I finished the race with a convincing 5th place to move myself into the 11th most point holding position in the 38 person Open Super Bike class championship. 🍊 One away from my goal of 3 top 10's, but great none the less for only competing in half of the races. 🍊

This year has been one of great beginnings; racing, working, and the soon to be larger Graeber family. I have to stop each day and realize how great a life I have; friends, family, and health. 😊 So now starts the beginning of a new year, more racing, more work, and more family. Only great things lie ahead, and I can't wait for these events to unfold in front of me. 🍊 😡

Thank you goes first to my family;

Jodie, the wife that is almost perfect, 🍊 😊
Josephine, a daughter only her father could love, well since some of you have met her, maybe a few others could love her too, 😡
Sebastian, my little stunt riding fool, who doesn't know what crashing means quite yet, 🍊 and to #3, we wish you all the best when you enter this world in 2004. 😊

My sponsors are always helping my racing career, and to them I say THANK YOU, as well;

Simi Valley Cycles

Van Nuys Suzuki

Lockhart Phillips USA

Motul

Engineered Racing Products

Graeber Engineering and Consulting

Graeber Family Daycare

I must also thank all of you who have helped me in your own ways; Bombaybusa 🤪 is almost my manager, thanks for everything Pranav, 👍 Eastern Breeze has made the financial aspect of racing much easier to bear by helping with my race resume, helping secure sponsorship, thank you very much Peg, 👍 6 for hooking me up way back when he was still living on this side of the U.S., Jeff I appreciate your words of criticism and the helping hand of a new set of tires, Thanks, 👍 Flea for sewing together the now famous #767 banner that some of you signed when you attended the races, thank you Kim for your wonderful support, 👍 Wicked Angel, Princess, D, ZRX61, Crash, Johnny, Biggar, Mr. Bear, LotaFun, Jen, E-Ticket, eeeeeek, Choptop, Moviestar, Falco, Tina, and all the others that came out to the track to cheer us racers on, THANK YOU!!! 👍👍👍

Finally, I want to wish everyone a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year, as I head off to play Santa to my two little ones tonight. 🤪 Hope everyone gets what they wanted for the next week 👍 and we will see some of you at the track next year. 😊 Thanks for reading.

Marcel