

# What a year its been!

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{Words & Images Stephen English}

# Interview



## What was the highlight of the year for you?

The highlight was probably scoring points on the PBM bike at Jerez. It's frustrating to say that the highlight was round three but we did start stronger and stagnated and didn't really improve towards the end of the year. We started the season pretty strong and it was nice to get points on the board with a brand new bike that early. At the beginning of the season we were beating some established names like Colin Edwards and it was nice that we were in there battling with the CRTs at that point and for sure that was the happiest point in the season where I felt that we were competitive.

## What about your own performance and your development as the year went on?

I felt that I stayed fairly consistent performance wise and I learned a lot. I learned how to manage the Bridgestone's more and get the most from the tyres. I learned how to set the GP bike up a bit better but I felt performance wise that I was consistent throughout the year but it was just that the rest of the guys moved on and that left me not quite as strong as I looked at the start. I wouldn't say that I deteriorated, I would just say that the rest progressed and my performance and the bike stayed the same. I think that your first year, even speaking to Cal Crutchlow about it, that the first year is the hardest. There's so much to take in. There's new tracks and figuring out how to setup the GP bike and be prepared to open your mind a little and be prepared to ride it a little bit different to how you rode anything else in the past. There's a lot to take in that way to change your style and change your approach but I think that I progressed as a rider as the season went on.

## What were the adjustments that you had to make? Comparing you to Shakey today at Cartagena you were riding differently to try and get the bike upright earlier out of corners and some other things.

The biggest thing is how hard you can push the Bridgestone tyre and getting back here and getting back here on the BSB bike and getting used to the feeling from the Pirelli isn't the same and the Bridgestone front is out of this world. The carbon brakes and how hard you pull them and lean it over are different so it's a slightly different corner approach. You approach with so much brake on and you still have to keep the mid-corner speed and then get it upright and use the acceleration. Overall how much load you put into the tyres, and you have to load them either with braking really deep or getting straight

back on the throttle hard, is the biggest thing. The tyres are the most different thing because a CRT bike isn't a million miles away from a WSBK spec Superbike, I rode those. Getting on the bike the electronics are little more complex but actually being able to use those tyres to the limit is what takes time and more understanding.

## You've had a full season on the bike now so are well placed to look at the difficulties that most Superbike riders have in MotoGP. Why is that most riders reach a certain level in MotoGP and can't move forward?

It's the million dollar question. Spies looked like he was capable of doing but in his last year at Yamaha he seemed to have a lot of bad luck, to be fair to him, but it did seem that he would be the man that could [make the step]. When you look at the likes of Marquez the game was moved on this year and the Moto2 route has brought bigger lean angles and riding the bike sideways and looser. It's an evolution style if you like. Marquez is coming in with a different mode and he's attacking all the time. Lorenzo and Pedrosa had to up their game to match them and Valentino wasn't fit to change, maybe he's an older head on his shoulders and it's hard for him to adapt. But looking at GP from the outside it looked as though the game was up this year and Marquez raised the bar. He was coming from the Moto2 route with maybe a slightly different mindset.

Superbike riders are definitely more than capable but I suppose that a Superbike is softer and has a bit more flex and you can't quite push it that close to the limit whereas the GP bike is very rigid and to get them loose you have to work them hard. It's a different style and I don't think a Superbike rider can't adapt. I think that Spies had the speed to do it but circumstances went against him. I think that Cal has done a good job on the Yamaha at getting damn close to the factory boys this year. Nicky Hayden and Colin Edwards are Superbike guys too.

I don't think that it hinders people and looking now at those guys who came through the two-stroke over Superbike didn't really create a better rider. But looking now at Espargaro, Scott Redding and Marc they ride it that way all over the front with big lean angles and all elbows and it seems that works the Bridgestone tyres better. When you see Lorenzo, if you look at him from two years ago he's a different rider now. He's now off the thing and he's got his body right off it. Stoner did the same thing and I think that's just the way it's going and everyone has to adapt otherwise they'll be left behind. I wouldn't

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**“The whole thing was good and enjoyable and it was a hell of an experience.”**

say that it doesn't matter where you come from, you've got to recalibrate your brain and try and do what they're doing.

**Can the CRT bikes be ridden in the same way as Marquez rides or do you have to ride them differently?**

Whenever you've got a chassis that's working well you can ride them quite aggressively. When you've watch the likes of Marquez and Pedrosa you can't take a CRT Aprilia and ride it like that because the power characteristics and how the chassis and electronics work is very different so you can't look at it and say 'I'll ride my bike like that.' You try and figure out how the bike needs to be ridden and you ride to those strengths.

It's the same with Espargaro he rides that ART very differently to the prototype guys but he made it work. He didn't have the elbow down or the big lean angles and he actually rode it like a Superbike. He was always loading the tyre, which is a good thing, and he'd brake really late and then get straight onto the gas. It was a totally different way to how Marquez or Lorenzo ride the bike but it worked on the CRT bike. According to the bike in question you have to ride that way and a good working CRT bike you can get the chassis and do what the prototype boys do if you get everything dialled in. It's understanding what way the bike needs to be ridden is the biggest thing and then adapting your style to suit that.

**Once you went on the ART bike at the end of the year how disappointing was it not to get a clear run at a race weekend?**

At Aragon I was knocked off, at Sepang I jumped the start, Australia we had the pit stops and Japan we had no practice. I arrived at Valencia and thought that we'd have a crack at it but it was the worst weekend on the ART. For whatever reason the bike didn't work and it was either chattering or wheel spinning and I was fighting it all weekend. I struggled like hell all weekend and then got on the PBM bike on Monday and went a second quicker and consistently faster than I had been going all weekend. That was my only clear weekend and I really struggled to make the bike work better. I never really got a crack on it and when I was fast on the ART, like at Aragon on the first weekend with it, I had potential for points and the same in Sepang and Australia but bad luck and circumstances [worked against us].

One of the nicest things was rocking up to Valencia and having the upgrades for the PBM and actually seeing that the potential that I said we had at the start of the year was now apparent. The upgrades were electronic and the chassis was pretty much the same as what Damo [Cudlin] had on Sunday and it was way easier to stop and didn't wheelie as much and I could ride it so much more aggressively. I said from the word go that the bike didn't stop and that it made it difficult for but on the Monday I thought, 'Woah, this is a different bike to ride,' and I had a good test on it.

I did similar laps on the last day as Espargaro's best Aprilia laps so could get the most out of it and it was working well. You could say then that if you gave me ten more horsepower that I would be going a second a lap faster and it would have put me in the back of the top ten territory. I was really happy with how it was going and that was the first time that I felt that I could ride it aggressively and rear wheel steer. It was working good for me and I was on a good rhythm on it. It's frustrating as hell in one way thinking why couldn't we have this five months ago? But in another it was good to see light at the end of the tunnel and that once we got those upgrades it was nice and gave us some fresh impetus that if we continue with the PBM bike for 2014 that we can turn it around and hopefully chase after the IODA team and the Blusen team who will still be on CRT spec bikes whereas those Production Honda and Production Yamaha bikes will be very strong.

The Production Yamaha that Espargaro and Edwards got for the test was basically Bradley Smith's semi-factory Yamaha will be difficult but the target is to take it to 1.5-2s off next year. This year I was 2.5-3s off no matter what we did so next year we want to take it to 1.5s and if we can do that we'll be in the race.

When I rode Espargaro's 2014 ART, I got 12 laps on the Wednesday, and I think that the speed trap speeds were only a couple of miles an hour slower than the Production Honda but with our engines from this year it was 6 or 7 mp/h. I think that if Aprilia give us the Spec 4 from the start of the year we won't be too far away but we're hoping for a Spec 5 and that may not arrive until June, we're not sure but it might be quite late, before we get the pneumatic valves and stuff. So we'll still be at a horsepower deficit but if we can improve the chassis and electronics and hopefully Aprilia give us some more horsepower than I think that we could be quite good. At the moment it's still up in the air because we could still be riding ART's and that decision is still to be made.

**Is the full ART bike still an option on the table?**

Definitely it's still an option. As of last week Aprilia asked us to put a proposal to them for what we would need to run it. Basically we came up with the numbers for what it would take for us to the run the PBM and it went back to Aprilia so the ball is in their court. Personally I see it that IODA will run the ART's with Camier and Petrucci and we'll run the PBMs with Aprilia engines. I think that could have already happened but I could be wrong and Aprilia might turn around and say that they could do as we are asking. That would probably give us the 2013 chassis but I would maybe prefer it if was the PBM chassis. I don't think that there is anything wrong with our chassis. The weight distribution is slightly wrong and the electronics but if we fix those and we bolt in the latest Aprilia engine I think that we would have a bike every bit as good as the ART and possibly even better. I'm hoping that we can continue with our project and Aprilia will up their game with the engines and that would be the ideal scenario for me.

**This was your first year on the world scene after ten years in the British or AMA Superbike paddocks. How did you find it adapting to the travel and a new paddock?**

I enjoyed the travel side of it and seeing new countries. Probably more so because Jodi was with me and she made me go to see things. Sometimes if we were there a day early we'd go see the local city so that was nice to see new places. It was nice to learn new tracks and meet a load of new people. You go in there with an open mind and don't get stressed with having a 30 hour journey to Australia. The whole thing was good and enjoyable and it was a hell of an experience. I've no real negatives about it other than adjusting your mindset from being a potential winner to being a 15-20th place guy. That was the biggest change in mentality of not having a package that you could stand on the podium any given weekend but you just have to accept that. You're a much smaller fish than in the BSB paddock but you don't feel that because everyone makes you feel welcome and it's a friendly paddock and atmosphere. There's obviously a language barrier that I don't quite have and I'd like to gain a bit more Spanish and Italian. English is the main language in the paddock but overall it's been good.

**Of the new tracks what was your favourite?**

Philip Island! I loved it and I'm looking forward going back next year. I know all the tracks now and there were quite a few that were good fun but everyone loves it. I was hoping that I would enjoy it and it didn't disappoint. It's a really enjoyable track to ride.

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