

Learning New Ropes

{Words: Stephen English} Images: Stephen English}

INTERVIEW



You had an issue with your wrist in Qatar, is that healed now?

I feel mint and I feel really good on the bike. My wrist is mega now, I did some physio on it but it was work on my shoulder that seems to have freed up my whole arm. I think the wrist was compensating for the shoulder injury. I think that we'll make a good step tomorrow and we can push to qualify close to the top ten and then you're in with the guys and it's a race tomorrow!

Have you had to change your mindset from being a World Supersport champion to being a rookie in Moto2?

I know that it's not Supersports and that there's a load of good guys and it's close. I don't want to make excuses, because I don't do that, but these are new tracks to me.

Looking back to your debut what was the reaction back home after you came home from Qatar?

It was really good, everyone was saying it was great and that it was a solid ride. It was quite mature just to finish and get the points. I always want more from myself but I was quite happy to finish fifth given it was my first race and I think that a lot of people would be happy with that but the idea is to get at the front and on the podium. I'm not going to jump around doing cartwheels for fifth but inside I was quite happy. I think that once get back to Europe it will feel a bit more normal. It's mint at the minute but I think now that we're back to Europe I'll really be able to get my teeth into it more.

How tough is it to watch the time spread in Moto2 where a second can cover the top 15 and two seconds almost the entire field?

For me the reason it's harder for me is that I never follow anyone, for whatever reason a lot of riders tow a lot but I never really follow anyone. Last year the biggest improvement that I made was that I worked on old tyres all the time in Supersports and that I was always on my own. That meant that every time I was in a race and I got to the front it was OK because that was what I practiced for. I

could make my own pace from the front. Look at Lorenzo and those guys, they can be so consistent and that's what I aim for. That's why I can qualify 22nd and finish 8th because I can do that lap all the time. The problem is that I've only been qualifying 15th and then I have the pace to finish top five but there's too much of a gap at the minute in qualifying. I was always really good at one lap pace and in Supersports I had the confidence to do it but here I have to work on qualifying. I'm not going to start following people though because while it might help me in qualifying this year in the bigger scheme of things and my career it won't help. This year I want to fight for podiums and wins, I know that it looks quite a bit away but Qatar I wasn't far away and Argentina I could do Salom and Cortese's pace if I could have been with them. They averaging one tenth of a second per lap faster than me. It's about 10% more confidence to do that ultimate lap and maybe a little bit of a different mindset in qualifying and start using fresh tyres better.

The start of the season was you trying to learn in Grand Prix and take the results that went along with that. Has your goal now changed and you need to start battling at the front and make that step forward in a race?

Yeah, definitely from this race [Jerez] onwards. I raced here and won in World Supersports and testing went well here. I know that I need to get a little more comfortable on the bike and a little bit more confident on the bike but I think that will come with just riding the bike more.

What have you learned over the start of the season and what do you need to improve on?

I spend so much time on old tyres during practice that I know how the bike will react at the end of the race, when it will slide and how far I can push it, that at the end of the race I know that I've still got that speed and consistency. You see other riders fall back as the race progresses but at the end of the race I can still be going somewhere

STEPHEN ENGLISH TALKS TO SAM LOWES ON THE EVE OF HIS RACE IN JEREZ

“I raced here and won in World Supersports”

whereas the other riders can go be going backwards. You've got to be fast at the end of the races, qualifying is mint and having pole positions and leading the first half of a race is mint but points are given out for that last lap. That's what I worked on last year and now I need a little bit more speed. We've got what we need in this garage but we need to be a bit smarter. In Texas and Argentina I had brand new tyres in warmup when I should have used them in qualifying. We've got more to come from this bike but in this class you've got to search for the maximum because if you make one mistake it costs you half a second.

On track the results have been promising for you.

If I hadn't been taken out in Austin I'd have been top eight and we would have started the year with three top eights which wouldn't have been a disaster. It's not amazing but it's definitely not a disaster. I haven't been to Le Mans, Mugello and Barcelona so that's a bit of an unknown.

Looking towards yourself and Alex obviously both of you had strong showings in your opening races this year and surprised people, how much pressure do you put on yourselves to perform at that level?

I think that we both put a bit too much pressure on ourselves to perform. This weekend I've tried to be a lot more positive. Last year in WSS was obviously very different to this, I was first or second in pretty much every qualifying and race and then coming here and being 19th on one day, normally I wouldn't want to speak to anyone after a day like that but I want to be logical about it. The pressure that I'm putting on myself is that by midseason I want to be with the fastest guys and fighting for the podium. I put a lot of pressure on myself but I'm trying to be patient. In the past I would have gone to Qatar and crashed my brains out trying to be first and in the race I would have tried to have caught

that group with Luthi and suddenly a good solid sixth place is gone. I'm doing my best but trying to do it in a more grown up way. I want to just keep finishing the races and in 19 laps around here I can learn so much. When we get to midseason and tracks like Assen, that I know and love, I'll be pushing myself to improve.

How close are you and Alex?

We're really close, I think that it helps that we've got the same interests and that we train together and live together. We don't fall out really and I think that we're closer than a lot of twins because we do so much together. Racing is a funny thing because until you've been put in certain positions, like both of us fighting for the championship last year, it brought us closer together because we could talk about how we'd think, "tomorrow I can't make a mistake, I can't crash." I had it at Magny Cours and I called him and having the same emotions, whether it's twins or friends, it brings people closer together. We're very close anyway and he's my best mate as well as my brother.

In the CEV championship last weekend Freddie Sheene made his debut at that level. How did that feel for you after both of you got him out on track for the first time?

Yeah, it was our fault! Honestly the problem for Freddie is that it looked rubbish, he had about three behind him in qualifying and crashed in the race, but the amount of riding he has done isn't a lot. That's not an easy class and I think that in the race he could have battled with the guys in front of him. I think that maybe at the minute it's a bit much for him but I think that he's doing the whole season and he'll improve a lot with more time on the bike. He went to Jerez last year and in two days did a 1m57s which is slow but he came back did a 1m51s this time. I know it's easy to improve when you're that far off but maybe next time he'll do a 1m48s or 49s and then he's not that far away. If he wants to do it that's mint and he can do it so that's nice.

