

Motorcycle Racer

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Cover

Top contenders for Brands glory. From left: Chili, Edwards, Fogarty, Haga and Yanagawa. (Kel Edge & Mark Wernham)

Karl Harris (Paul Brookes); Chris Walker (Paul Brookes); Carl Fogarty (Mark Wernham); Tetsuya Harada (Andrew Northcott); Tohru Ukawa (Gold & Goose); the Hayden boys (Brian Leazenby); VR1000 (Kel Edge); Paul Young (Double Red); Hayden's Shoei (Steve Fletcher)

For connoisseurs only?

We were stood on the dusty track between the outside of Turn One and the outside of the right hander that leads the riders back towards the newer, slick section of the Misano track.

The second World Superbike race was coming to a close when Alan Cathcart looked up and said, 'You know, we said race one was a Superbike race for the connoisseur. Not much of the usual Superbike scrapping but plenty of interest. Well, sorry, but this race has been plain boring. More like an F1 car race!'

He was right. Fogarty comprehensively stomped the opposition at Misano. On a track he hates. On a track he had never won on before. But right now there's no stopping the world champion. Misano was his command performance.

But there was also much to savour at Misano - especially in the first race. Slight's aggressive pass of Corser into Turn One, for example. "Dooh, that's so hard to do that there, it's the most demanding corner on this track," Cathcart exclaimed as we watched Slight, still tucked inside the bubble, swoop under the Ducati. Obviously, that was before the brakes started dragging.....

More impressive was Yanagawa later doing the same to Slight. But this time it wasn't so much the pass - two-wheel drifting into the turn - but the drive off the corner that impressed us both. Okay, we know the Hondas had tyre problems all weekend and maybe Slight's dual-compound Michelin was starting to fade but Yanagawa actually yarded on Slight's RC45 off the turn. Excuse me, was that a Kawasaki out-accelerating a Honda? Surely was. It shows how much development goes on between races. We already knew Eckl's crew had picked up more top speed with recent refinements - and the bonus was increased bottom end too. But it wasn't just motor. Latest Dunlop rubber allowed Akira to max-out the power delivery. Time was when the Michelins worked best in the hot conditions but here we were, 35 degrees of Italian sunshine and the Dunlops were hooking. What's more, the tyres looked in great shape at the end of each race.

Still on the Kawasaki theme, it was encouraging to see just how competitive Gregorio Lavilla is becoming. There were many of us (me included) writing him off after some lacklustre early season performances but he battled through race one passing Chili and Haga to finish fifth and wasn't far off the lap times of team-mate Yanagawa in either race.

There was also an impressive performance from Frankie Chili. Fourth might have looked good on paper but if you saw his horrendous crash during practice on Saturday you would have been even more impressed - if not a little surprised - he was even on the bike. He tweaked his ankle in the tumble and didn't have any feeling in the latter stages of the race. Afterwards, when we were sat in the Alstare Suzuki hospitality having a spot of lunch, a showered Frankie appeared and received a hero's welcome. Nice team set-up there. Family.

The other inspiration was Haga's second race charge. Okay, he threw it away in the end - whereupon the race degenerated into a procession - but he certainly gave Foggy and Corser something to think about. Yamaha, though, really does need to cure the instability of the bike under braking. It wasn't just Haga who had to fight the bike into corners. Guareschi's R7 rear end was also flapping about. Disconcerting.

What really surprised us was Colin Edwards' apparent lack of motivation during the weekend. During an interview on Saturday afternoon he was obviously still reeling from the Nurburgring fiasco - and battling to find a set-up all weekend didn't improve his demeanour. We watched him trail around in sixth and seventh in obvious tyre problems but as Cathcart pointed out, 'there just doesn't seem any fire there this weekend. Pity.'

As we go to press, the boys will be off to do the business at Laguna. Can Edwards bounce back? Can Corser match his team-mate? Can Yanagawa win on a track where he almost died a year ago?

Whatever the answers, let's hope the racing is back to the handlebar-rattling scraps that have made superbike so popular. And whatever happens, we'll see you at Brands on August 1.

Gary Pinchin



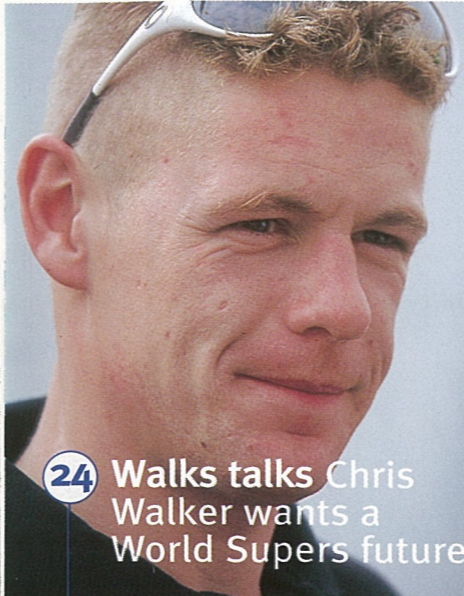
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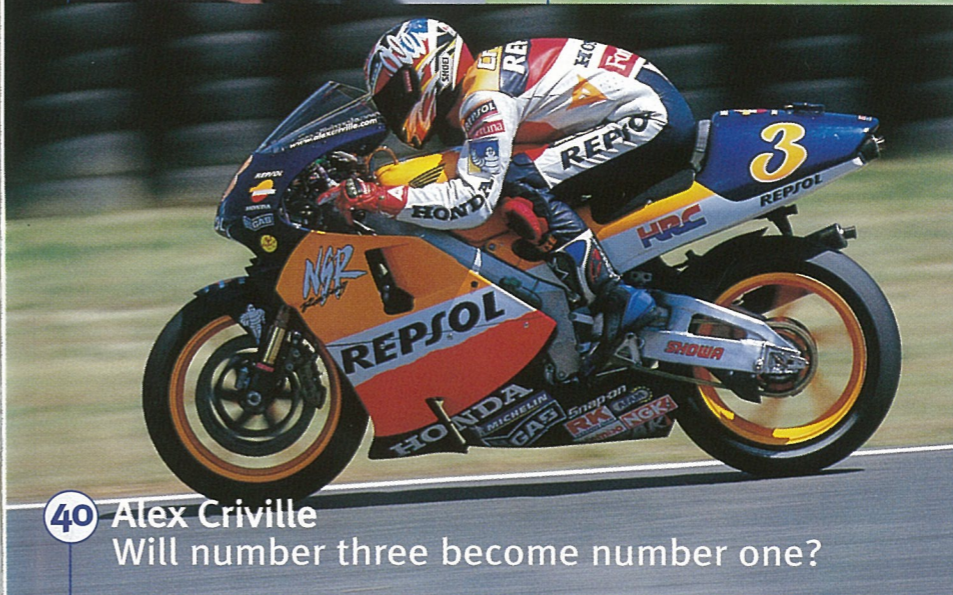
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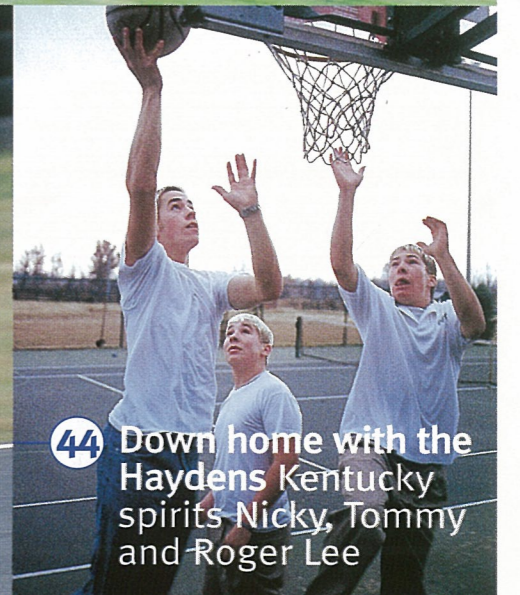
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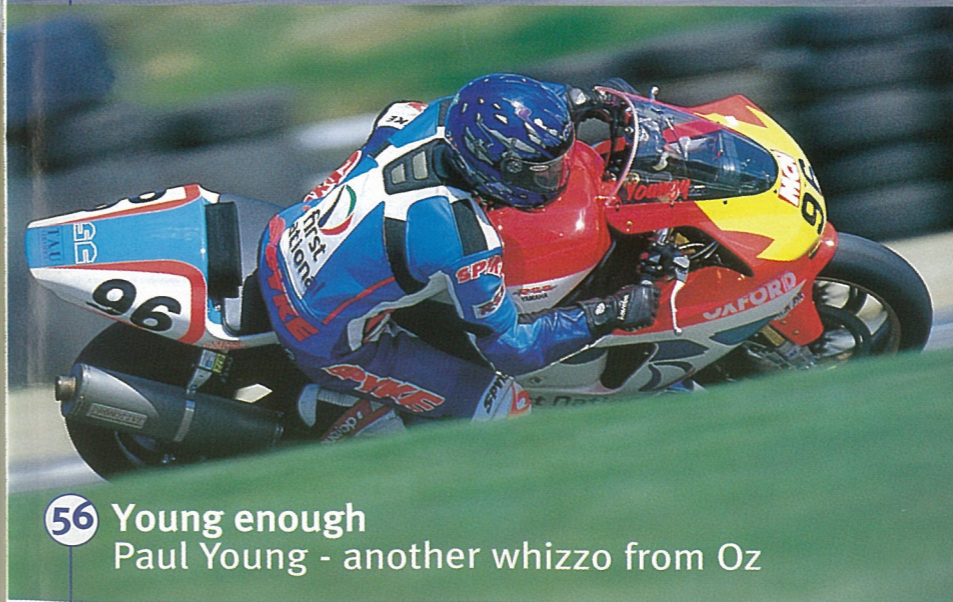
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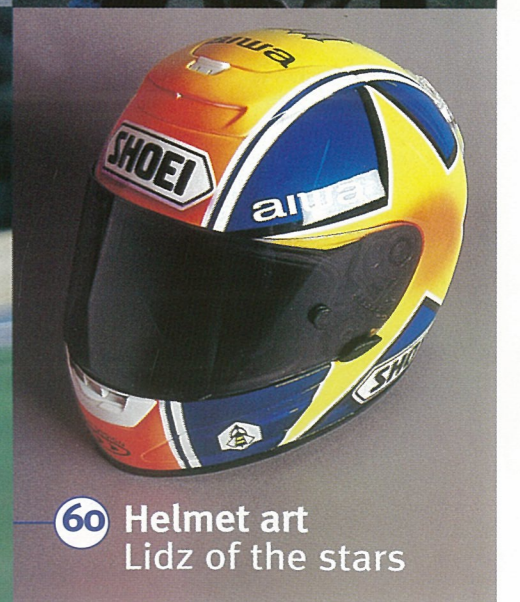
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