

Motorcycling with John Savage

# LOWRY HEADS UP BRITISH SUPERSPORT CHALLENGE

## Road Racing Ireland

The March issue of Road Racing Ireland magazine is now in the shops, with some interesting reading, as racing enthusiasts prepare for the start of the new season.

Aspiring Bangor journalist cum-Aprilia Challenge racer, Jonathan Annett, has penned an interesting interview with the versatile Steve Plater, while another Bangor teenager, Richard McNeill, is also featured, as he moves up from the 125GP Newcomers' class to the hotly competitive Supersport series on a Suzuki GSX-R600.

'Nostalgia rules ok' in the latest issue, as editor Leslie Moore treks back to the 1978 North West 200 and continues his profile of one of my racing heroes, exciting New Zealander Graeme Crosby.

There are also the regular monthly contributions by William Dunlop, Martin Finnegan and B. J. Toal.

## Kevin Briggs fund-raiser

A fund-raising evening in support of Bangor short circuit racer Kevin Briggs will be held in Bangor's Imperial Bar on Saturday, April 19, to which all motorcycling enthusiasts are invited.

Backed by Millisle-based Steve Baker Motorcycles, Kevin moves up to the Irish National Supersport Championship this coming season, after he finished fourth in last year's Bridgestone Irish Clubmans' Supersport Championship.

His first outing of the season on his K7 Suzuki GSX-R600 will be at Bishops court on Saturday.

The fund-raiser will feature a quiz, ballots, disco and 'loads of fun' — admission will be by ticket only (£5) and tickets are available from Kevin on 07722 405587, or from Steve Baker Motorcycles, Abbey Road, Millisle.



Ian Lowry, who will be in action at Bishops court on Saturday, finished runner-up to his Relentless TAS Suzuki team-mate Michael Laverty in last season's British Supersport Championship and starts as one of the favourites to lift the title this time around.

After he finished runner-up to his Relentless TAS Suzuki team-mate Michael Laverty in last season's British Supersport Championship, young Moira man Ian Lowry starts as one of the favourites to take this year's title.

Lowry has already impressed during pre-season testing in Spain, aboard the new Suzuki GSX-R600, and heads up a strong Irish challenge for this year's British Supersport crown, as Laverty's reward for pocketing last year's title is a welcome and warranted return to the premier Bennetts British Superbike Championship.

After three years, Castlerock's Marty Nutt drops out of the British Superbike Championship Privateers' Cup to challenge for the Supersport

title astride a Nuttravel/T&G Yamaha R6, while Portadown man Marshall Neill joins the Supersport chargers on a Suzuki GSX-R600.

Recently married Nutt, who recently tested his Yamaha YZF-R6 at Cartagena in Spain, where he escaped unscathed after a spill, is off to test at the Croft circuit in Yorkshire tomorrow (Friday). Speaking of his Supersport switch he explained: "It's what we needed — a change of scenery. Everybody in the team is buzzing about it."

Making his British Supersport Championship debut will be Omagh's B. J. Toal, who rides for Rob McElnea's Virgin Media Yamaha team, as his reward for winning last season's Virgin Media Yamaha R6 Cup series.

Corkman Alan O'Connor continues in the Supersport series with his MFC Racing Honda CBR600RR, and is joined this term by Dubliner Conor O'Brien aboard an Arkwood Honda.

The 43 strong British Supersport Championship entry list also includes John McGuinness and James Webb (Padgetts Honda), Steve Brogan (HM Plant Honda), former Superbike Cup winner Chris Martin (Gearlink Kawasaki), South African duo Hudson Kennah and Ronan Quarmby (Raceways Yamaha), together with last year's National Superstock champion, Glen Richards, who teams up with fellow Australian Paul Young to ride factory-backed Triumph twins.

The Supersport Championship is second in terms of prestige only to the Bennetts British Superbike Championship, and Fuchs-Silkolene is the new title sponsor, as well as the official oil and lubricants partner to the British Superbike Championship.

Meanwhile, this year's Bennetts British Superbike Championship will enjoy an

unprecedented amount of both live and delayed UK tv coverage, and for the first time significant international tv coverage, in its first season under the tenure of MotorSport Vision, who have secured new and extensive broadcast arrangements with Eurosport and Channel 4.

The move confirms British Eurosport in the UK as the undisputed home for live motorcycle racing, with BSB joining live racing from the MotoGP and World Superbike Championships, broadcast to over 10 million homes through the SKY and Virgin Media platforms.

The new acquisition, representing 48 hours of live and 66 hours of highlights coverage of BSB in the UK, is the start of a major new development for the British Eurosport 2 channel.

Viewers will be able to enjoy a regular four hours live race day show, featuring both Bennetts BSB races, the Fuchs-Silkolene British Supersport Championship, and the Henderson Yamaha R1 Cup races. Race day highlights will also be shown during primetime that evening and throughout the following week, including on Thursdays, a BSB Extra show, featuring all races from the previous weekend's British 125GP, Metzeler National Superstock 600/1000, and KTM 990 Super Duke Championships.

The Eurosport Group has signed an agreement with MotorSport Vision that will also see BSB broadcast live across Europe on Eurosport 2 and live in Asia and the Pacific, opening up the championship to a potential overseas audience of 30 million households in 53 countries.

In addition, there will be live streaming of all races on all Eurosport's websites — in the UK this will be at www.eurosport.yahoo.com

Channel 4 will broadcast an hour long highlights programme on the Tuesday night after each event, with a repeat later in the week. This marks a return to

BSB for the broadcaster, which last covered the action in 2005.

Jonathan Palmer, Chief Executive of MotorSport Vision, said: "As the new rights holder it is clear that television coverage is vital to the future development of BSB, so a great deal of effort has gone into understanding what matters and securing the optimal package."

"ITV1 was not going to continue carrying live BSB coverage from 2008 and we are in a new era in which the digital channels will be the home of virtually all sport. I believe it is important that we have a

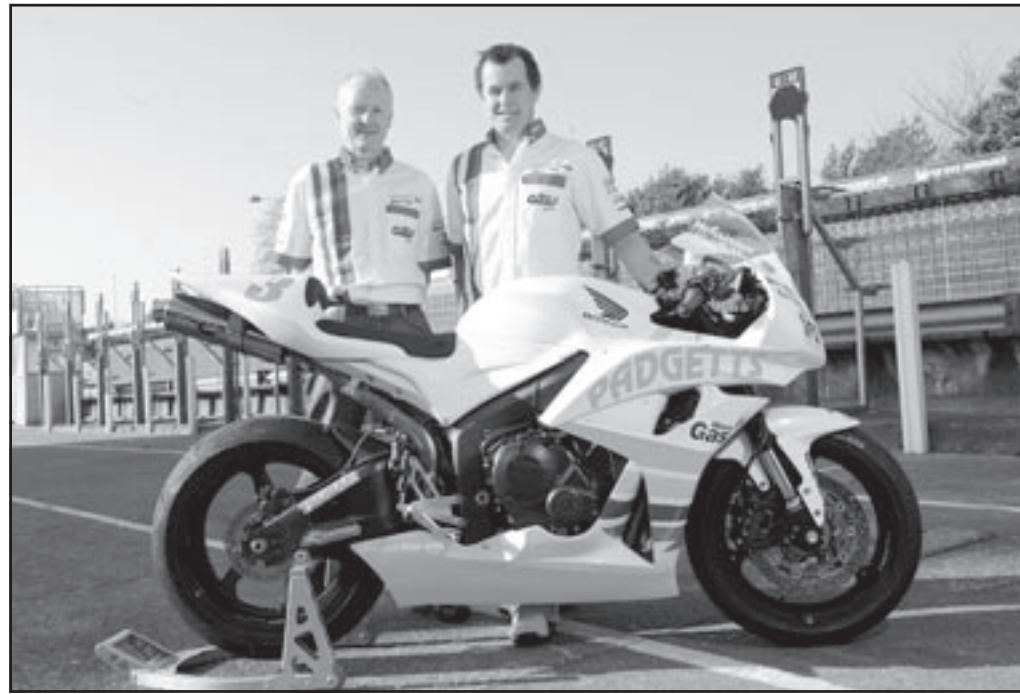
broadcast partner that is recognised as the logical and natural home for bike racing, so fans know where to find BSB on television.

"With nearly 20 years of sport broadcasting, and now covering both MotoGP and World Superbikes, Eurosport was the perfect choice and I was delighted to find that they were as excited as we were about completing the hat-trick with BSB too."

The former Formula One grands prix driver added: "I am determined that BSB shall also become internationally famous as the best national superbike

championship in the world and Eurosport's global coverage will play a major role in achieving that. It is also very important to maintain terrestrial coverage and our Channel 4 highlights programme will attract a big audience on Tuesday nights."

Stuart Higgs, BSB Series Director, added: "This is fantastic news for everyone associated with BSB — our teams, riders, the manufacturers, commercial partners and, of course, the fans, who will all benefit from the increased UK and now worldwide tv coverage of our events."



Isle of Man TT maestro John McGuinness, pictured with Clive Padgett, will contest this year's British Supersport Championship astride a Padgetts Honda CBR600RR.

# Top line up for curtain-raiser

# Nicole flips her lid!

The Irish racing season kickstarts in fine style at Bishops court on Saturday, and Dundrod and District Motorcycle Club has attracted what is likely to be one of the best and biggest entries of the year for an Irish short circuit fixture.

Headlining the line-up will be the Relentless TAS Suzuki quartet of Michael Laverty, Cameron Donald, Bruce Anstey and Ian Lowry, together with most of the men expected to be front-runners in this year's Irish Superbike Championship, in association with *Irish Racer Magazine*, including defending champion Michael Pearson, together with James Dickson, Kirk Jamison and Declan Swanton.

The non-championship meeting will give local fans their first chance to see Michael Laverty aboard the new Relentless TAS Suzuki GSX-R1000, astride which the Welsh-based Toomebridge man will contest this season's British Superbike Championship, after he lifted the British Supersport Championship title in commanding style for Relentless TAS Suzuki last year.

Laverty was extremely impressive aboard this year's K8 Suzuki superbike during recent testing in Spain, and Michael has fond memories of his last visit to Bishops court, where he won the Sunflower Trophy last October, although he was also beaten that day by Pearson, as the Ballygowan man closed in on last season's Irish Superbike Championship title.

For Cameron Donald, who flew into Northern Ireland from his Melbourne home on Monday evening, and who will be based in Cookstown during the racing season, it will be his first public appearance aboard his Relentless TAS Suzuki, after the Australian's switch from Uel Duncan's factory backed Honda equipe at the end of last season, while his fellow antipodean, New Zealander Bruce Anstey will be having his first outing of the year.

Ian Lowry finished runner-up to Laverty in last year's British Supersport Championship, and the Moira

man is amongst the favourites to take the title this year — like Laverty, he was also highly impressive during Spanish tests, aboard the new Relentless TAS Suzuki GSX-R600.

Incidentally, while Laverty will be at Snetterton in Norfolk for the official British Superbike Championship tests over the Easter weekend, Anstey, Donald and Lowry will be staying in the province for the commencement of the Irish Superbike Championship, in association with *Irish Racer Magazine*, with the traditional double header at Bishops court on Easter Saturday and Kirkistown on Easter Monday.

Also putting in an appearance this Saturday will be Dromarabased Welshman Ian Lougher, who admits this will be an extended test session for his Team Blackhorse Yamahas, in preparation for the forthcoming road race season.

After Bishops court, Lougher heads to Snetterton for the official BSB tests, where he won't be taking to the track

himself, but will be taking up his managerial role within Team Blackhorse Yamaha, nurturing the career of rising star Ollie Linsdell, who is contesting this season's newly introduced British Junior Superstock Championship, astride a Team Blackhorse Yamaha YZF-R6, and will be joining Lougher in action at the North West 200, Isle of Man TT and Ulster Grand Prix.

Lougher and Linsdell face a heavy schedule prior to the commencement of the BSB Championships, as the following week Linsdell will be testing in Valencia, prior to the commencement of the BSB series at Brands Hatch on the weekend of April 4/5/6.

Also in action at Bishops court will be Scots ace Keith Amor, together with Ulster road race specialists Adrian Archibald and Ryan Farquhar, both giving their new tackle an early season shakedown.

Another man having his first outing of the season will be Alastair Seeley from Carrickfergus, who will

concentrate on this year's British National Superstock Championship with backing from Belfast-based Rea Estates, but will ride JMF/Millsport Yamahas at Bishops court and also in the opening two rounds of the Irish Superbike Championship.

Saturday's meeting will also provide a valuable, competitive season opener for this season's home-based Irish Superbike Championship challengers, with defending champion Michael Pearson again astride his Davy Greer-backed Carryduff Forklifts Yamaha R1s, and keen to again put it over on Laverty and company.

Michael had his first track time of the season at Bishops court a couple of weeks ago and also tested at Kirkistown yesterday (Wednesday) and he will be back aboard his Yamahas at the Ards Peninsula track tomorrow.

Pearson has attracted a new backer this season, with sponsorship from Leeds-based Boost Drinks — Boost, who will launch a new brand of sporting

drinks next month, are one of the top three energy drinks brands in the UK and have an option of continuing their links with Michael next year.

Michael enthused: "This is really good news for the team. At the start of the season we were struggling to get the pennies together, but lady luck has changed for me, thanks to Boost Drinks."

He quipped: "It's just the boost I needed! I have also secured a very good sponsorship package with Lagan Construction, who are part of the highly successful Lagan Group in Belfast. To be honest, I am chuffed about the whole season ahead."

Newtownards man Kirk Jamison is making a two-pronged attack on the Irish Short Circuit Championships this season, with continued backing from faithful sponsors Jim Angus Contracts and Shane Braniff's Portaferry-based Feckin Irish Whiskey, together with his enthusiastic Greyabbey-based supporters' club.

Jamison is switching from his

Suzuki GSX-R1000 to a new Honda Fireblade CBR1000RR and adds a Yamaha YZF-R6 to his stable for a joint assault on the Irish Superbike and Irish Supersport Championships.

He picked up the machines from Padgetts of Batley's Yorkshire base at the beginning of this week and his only outing on his new tackle was during a track day at Oulton Park in Cheshire on Tuesday, so his efforts at Bishops court this weekend will be more an extended test session than a racing effort.

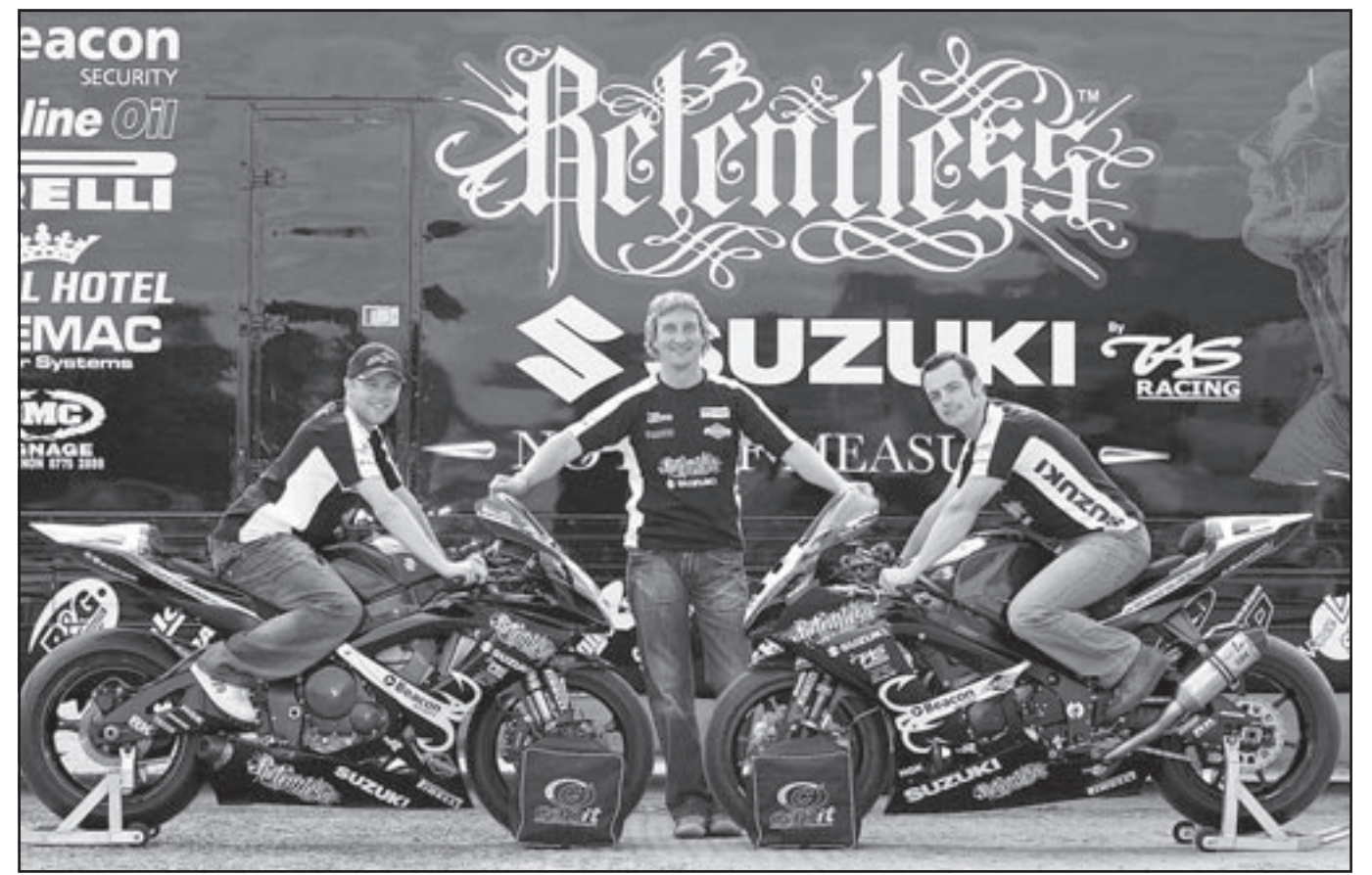
Jamison was delighted after his first time out on the bikes and said: "I got about 100 minutes on each bike at Oulton, and both seem very good, but Saturday will be used to finish setting them up."

Talented young Coleraine man James Dickson continues with backing from Gerald Kingsbury's KP Racing and will also be chasing both the ISB and Irish Supersport Championship titles this year, aboard his Superstock-specification Suzuki GSX-R1000 and Suzuki GSX-R600 respectively, while after mixed results last season, Corkman Declan Swanton is keen to make a competitive start to 2008.

The Dundrod Club is promoting a packed 17 race programme, the highlight of which should be the St Patrick's Weekend Invitation race, sponsored by Glen McGivern of Carrowdore-based Cardy Timber, which should feature all the 'big name' riders.

There will be two races in each class: National Superbike, Clubmans' Superbike, National Supersport, Clubmans' Supersport, Mini Twins (formerly Lightweight Supersport), 125cc, RS125 Aprilia/125 GP Clubmans', and combined 250cc/Pre-97 Classics. If there are sufficient entries, two sidecar races will also be staged.

Practice is due to commence at 9am, with racing scheduled to get underway at around 12.30pm.



Philip Neill (centre) is bringing the Relentless TAS Suzuki equip to Bishops court for the team's first competitive outing of the season on Saturday. Lining up on the grid will be reigning British Supersport champion Michael Laverty (left), aboard the Suzuki GSX-R1000 on which he will contest this season's British Superbike Championship, and Cameron Donald, who make his race debut for the Moneymore-based team. Also competing at Bishops court will be Relentless TAS Suzuki's other riders, Bruce Anstey and Ian Lowry.



Nicole McAleer unveiled Shoeni's new Papillion helmets at last weekend's Ballymoney Motorcycle Show.

The Newtownards Chronicle  
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