

Motor cycling with John Savage

TOP STARS AT MOTORCYCLE FESTIVAL



Motorcycle Festival promoter Billy Nutt with promotions girl Laura Eastwood.

Sponsorship bodyblow for Pearson

Irish Superbike champion Michael Pearson is facing an uphill battle, as he prepares to begin the defence of his hard earned ISB title, after a potential sponsor for the forthcoming season had to withdraw support.

Pearson clinched the ISB title in the final race of the series at Bishopscourt last October, to take the crown by just 1.5 points from Waterford rider Brian McCormack.

But despite the Moneyreagh man's title coup, obtaining sponsorship for the forthcoming season has proved to be problematic.

Michael will continue to ride under the Carryduff Forklifts banner this season, with valued additional support from other faithful sponsors and from his Supporters' Club.

Pearson, who recently received the prestigious *Irish Racer Magazine* Short Circuit Merit Award, explained: "This is a real bodyblow for us, I have had to suspend plans to turn our standard R1 Yamaha into superbike spec and any hopes

of adding a 600 Supersport machine into the team have also been scuppered. Quite frankly it's not looking good at all."

Michael continued: "I met with some of our team members last Thursday night to discuss the situation and they also agreed that we will have to trim back our previous plans, unless a sponsor can be found."

Although his budget has fallen short, Michael is as determined as ever to defend the Irish title he won last season.

He explained: "We were given sponsorship assurances from one company, who at the 11th hour have had to say 'no', due to a turn down in the local economy. I fully understand and appreciate their decision."

In addition to the Irish Superbike Championship, Pearson hopes to return to both the North West 200 and Ulster Grand Prix this year, and also plans to contest selected British Superbike Championship rounds, plus the Southern 100 in the Isle of Man and Kells road races. He had already scrapped his intention to return to the Daytona 100 in Florida in March, where he made an impressive debut last year.

Michel, who will be amongst the guests at this weekend's Motorcycle Festival in Belfast,

concluded: "My team manager is frantically trying to secure some sponsorship, but as I said before, it's not looking good."



Irish Superbike champion Michael Pearson, who recently received the coveted *Irish Racer Magazine* Short Circuit Merit Award, is struggling for sponsorship for the forthcoming season.

Some of motorcycle racing's top stars will make guest appearances at the Adelaide and IAM Motorcycle Festival, which opens in the King's Hall, Belfast, tomorrow (Friday) and continues until Sunday.

Isle of Man TT hero John McGuinness, British Supersport champion Michael Laverty, multi-Ulster Grand Prix winner Guy Martin, double Irish road race champion Conor Cummins, Irish Superbike champion Michael Pearson, HM Plant Honda's new recruit Steve Brogan and Dublin road race ace Martin Finnegan, will be amongst the guests at the three day show, organised by former North West 200 and Ulster Grand Prix supremo, Billy Nutt.

David Hailwood, son of the late great Mike Hailwood, will be the special guest. On the Hailwood stand will be a display of some very special racing bikes, which include a six cylinder 350 Honda, similar to that raced by his dad; one of Phil Read's MV bikes; and a replica Bob McIntyre 500 Gilera, on which the legendary Scot set the first 100mph lap at the Isle of Man TT.

Stunt rider Mattie Griffin will be there on all three days, during which he will be carrying out

some amazing stunts on both one wheel and two wheel motorcycles, while moto cross will be represented by Wayne Garrett and Phillip McCullough.

The show has attracted all the major manufacturers, including Honda, Suzuki, Kawasaki, Ducati, Yamaha, KTM, Triumph and Moto Guzzi.

Classic and vintage British and Japanese bikes will be on display, with many machines being seen for the first time, and a large number of auto jumblers will gather under one roof in the Balmoral Hall.

A Champion of Champions competition will be run on simulators, during which champions from road racing, short circuit racing, moto cross, karting and supermoto, will battle it out over three days to become the champion and pocket £500 prize money.

Amongst the 32 competitors will be former and current race aces, amongst them Phillip McCallen, Michael Swann, Marshall Neill, Marty Nutt, Mark Lunney and William and Michael Dunlop.

Another new feature this year will be the Festival Cinema, which will screen dvds all day throughout the three days, and can be found between the Nugent Hall and the Kings Hall.

Visitors to the show will also be able to compete in games and activities to win free ferry crossings and admission tickets to British Superbike



Championship rounds.

Ireland's leading Irish Superbike Championship riders have also taken the initiative to promote this year's ISB Championship, and will have a stand at the show, manned by leading local riders, while the North West 200 Supporters' Club

will be recruiting members with a stand at the show.

The show opens from 2-10pm tomorrow and from 10am-5pm on both Saturday and Sunday. Admission is £10 for adults and £5 for senior citizens, while accompanied children aged under 14 will be admitted free.

British Supersport champion Michael Laverty will be amongst the guests at this weekend's Motorcycle Festival.

Duncan snaps up Johnson

Donegal-based Uel Duncan Racing has snapped up rising road race star Gary Johnson for the forthcoming season, with continued support from Honda Racing.

Johnson, one of the Isle of Man TT's 'Young Guns', will contest the three international road races — North West 200, TT and Ulster Grand Prix — together with selected Irish national road races.

With continued support from Robinson Concrete, Johnson will be equipped with Superbike, Superstock and Supersport Hondas, and will also compete in selected rounds of the British Supersport and British Superstock Championships.

Team principal Uel Duncan, a former road racer confined to a wheelchair as a result of injuries sustained in a practice crash at the Ulster Grand Prix a number of years ago, has helped to progress the careers of a string of leading riders, including Australian Cameron Donald, Lincolnshire's Guy Martin, Scots pair Keith Amor and Les Shand, as well as the late Darran Lindsay, from Lisburn.

Therefore, 26 year old Johnson, from Lincolnshire, is following in illustrious wheel tracks and is eagerly looking forward to the challenge.

The former British Supersport Cup champion genuinely impressed in his rookie road race season last year, despite only having a Superstock machine at his disposal, when he scored a trio of top three finishes at the TT, including a near 123mph lap, and a top ten finish at the North West.

Gary said: "I really enjoyed my racing last year and my results at the North West, Isle of Man TT and Ulster GP far exceeded my expectations. I wasn't sure what to expect, but it was definitely the right move for me and I'm delighted that my efforts and results were noticed."

"I'm delighted to have joined such a professional and highly respected outfit, like Uel Duncan Racing. The success they have had in the past speaks for itself and they have a history of bringing riders to the forefront, so I'm hopeful and confident that I can continue that trend."

He continued: "We have the ideal combination of meetings scheduled, combining some British Championship rounds with the roads, and Uel and the team have given me a fantastic opportunity, one I intend to make the most of."

"Obviously I'm still learning my craft on the roads and am under no illusions that there's plenty more to learn, but it will be great to have a good crack at the North West, TT and Ulster GP on some top level machinery."

"I'm really confident that with the support of Honda Racing, Uel, and his team, I'll have the package to help me move up to the next level. I'm well aware that it's not going to be easy, but I'm learning all the time and am getting faster and faster, so I know I can give a good account of myself."

Uel Duncan added: "The team are very pleased to have Gary on board and with the Robinson Concrete Hondas at his disposal, we are all looking forward to the 2008 season."

"His performances last year caught the eye of many, so we're delighted to have secured the signature of one of the sport's brightest and freshest talents. We're confident we can give him all that he needs to succeed and we can't wait for the new season to start."

The season will begin for the team with testing next month, probably in Spain.



Uel Duncan Racing recruit Gary Johnson can't wait to get to grips with the Robinson Concrete Hondas. Photo by Stephen Davidson, Pacemaker Press International

'Mondello Masters' to boost national racing

At a time when Ulster's top riders are striving to promote the Irish Superbike Championship north of the border the Mondello Park circuit, in Co Kildare, has revealed it is to stage a three race 'Mondello Masters' big money mini-championship, with the co-operation of the Motor Cycle Union of Ireland's Southern Centre Short Circuit Committee.

During recent weeks, some of Ulster's Irish Superbike Championship (ISB) riders have been attempting to elevate the prestige of the ISB series.

Ulster riders filled three of the top four positions in last season's enthralling ISB Championship, which Moneyreagh's Michael Pearson won in the final race of the series at Bishopscourt, to clinch the title by 1.5 points from Waterford man Brian McCormack.

Pearson, together with Coleraine's James Dickson and Newtownards rider Kirk Jamison, who respectively placed third and fourth in last year's ISB Championship, recently got together with ISB newcomer Scott Kelly, from Comber, to discuss how they could improve and enhance the image of the ISB series.

Their debate was published in the most recent issue of *Irish Racer Magazine*, and as a consequence, the quartet were invited to meet senior officials of the Ulster Centre of the Motor Cycle Union of Ireland (MCUI), the governing body of the sport in the province, together with representatives of some of the clubs which will promote ISB Championship rounds this year.

A comprehensive and affable meeting between the riders and the officials took place recently and the riders left with the understanding their ideas and concerns would be referred by the Ulster Centre to the MCUI Short Circuit Commission, which effectively 'owns' the Irish Superbike Championship.

The Short Circuit Commission comprises five delegates each from the Ulster and Southern Centres of the Commission are: Ivan Davidson, Ray Wilson and Barry Scott, plus sidecar driver Scobie Killough and his passenger, Paddy Marley.

The riders, who have been meeting regularly during recent weeks, will have a stand at this weekend's Motorcycle Festival in Belfast's King's Hall to continue their



There was superb Irish Superbike Championship action at Kirkistown last September, leading eventual champion Michael Pearson, but at the moment there will only be one ISB round at the Ards Peninsula circuit this year. Photo by Philip Campbell

endeavours to promote this year's ISB Championship, take on board the suggestions and feelings of their fellow competitors, and gauge how the racing public feels about ISB, which kick-starts with a double header at Bishopscourt and Kirkistown at Easter.

It also emerged this week that, at the invitation of Coleraine and District Motor Club, a group of riders visited Ballykelly Army base in Co Londonderry on Sunday to assess whether the base would be suitable to host an ISB Championship round in July.

The Coleraine Club stages its ISB round at Aghadowey, but following considerable criticism of the condition of the track last season, the club is contemplating a switch to Ballykelly, which has never previously been used for motor cycle racing.

However, due to lack of sponsorship, Belfast and District Motor Club — which promoted two ISB Championship events at Kirkistown last year — is planning to stage only one ISB round at the Ards Peninsula circuit this season, on Easter Monday, March 24.

Last year, the B&D staged their second ISB round at the request of the Ulster Centre, and the riders have been attempting to obtain a sponsor to enable the B&D to run an ISB round at Kirkistown on September 6, on which date the B&D is currently planning to run an Irish Clubmans' Championship meeting.

If the B&D is unable to promote an ISB round in September, there will only be one ISB round at Kirkistown this year and only five ISB rounds

staged in the province: the Killiney & District/Motor Cycle Road Racing Club of Ireland Enkalon Trophy meeting at Bishopscourt on Easter Saturday; Kirkistown on Easter Monday; the North Armagh Club's fixture at Bishopscourt on June 14; Coleraine Club's event at either Aghadowey or Ballykelly on July 19; and the Hillsborough Club's Sunflower Trophy meeting at Bishopscourt on October 12.

Meanwhile, having relinquished hosting a round of the British Superbike Championship, Mondello Park has come up with an appetising alternative, with a 25,000 Euro prize fund for the 'Mondello Masters' series.

The mini-championship will be staged at the Naas circuit's three ISB rounds, aiming to attract the cream of leading Irish riders, both those who ply their trade at home and those who currently race abroad, together with some top British national riders.

Mondello Park is replacing the Birrane Cup series, staged for national riders at Irish Clubmans' Championship events, with the Mondello Masters series, with the schedule arranged, so as not to clash with British Superbike Championship meetings.

The opening Mondello Masters event will take place on April 12/13, with 3,000 Euros on offer to the winner, 1,250 Euros for the runner-up, and 750 Euros for the third finisher.

The second event will run on May 10/11 — a week before the international North West 200 — with 6,000 Euros on offer to the winner,

2,500 for the runner-up and 1,500 for third.

The final round will be on October 4/5, reverting to the 5,000 Euros prize fund, as per the April meeting, however, 5,000 Euros is also up for grabs to any rider who can win all three rounds of the series, or 2,000 for taking a brace of wins.

These prize funds are in addition to those available for the ISB Championship races, from which the winner could also pocket up to 1,000 Euro per event.

The Mondello Masters will be open to Superbike and Supersport riders, with the top 24 on each day invited to compete. The schedule for all three events will be organised so that the Masters race is the final class on the programme, to facilitate ISB and Irish Supersport Championship competitors.

Mondello Park boss John Morris is delighted with the new project. He said: "The ISB Championship has certainly struggled in recent years, with many Irish competitors going straight to the UK, or choosing to race on the roads."

"This triangular championship offers these competitors a real opportunity to pocket serious prize money from only three visits to Mondello. A quality entry should provide a great show, and hopefully this will return significant spectator numbers at these events."

If the inaugural series is a success, the levels of investment and promotion may be expanded in future years.

Good news at long last for Ulster's top short circuit racers, thanks to their southern Irish cousins.

Nicole signs for British title winning team

Omagh schoolgirl Nicole McAleer has signed to ride in this season's British 125cc Championship for the West Yorkshire-based team which won the corresponding title last year.

English rider Luke Jones won the 2007 British 125cc crown for Shipley-based SP125Racing, owned by former British 125cc champion and former 125cc World Championship grands prix rider, Steve Patrickson — who himself was a teenage racing prodigy.

Daughter of former road racer Liam McAleer, Nicole began competing as an eight year old in the Irish Mini Moto Championship in 2000, before progressing to the British Mini Moto Championship in 2002.

She made her short circuit racing debut in the Irish 125cc Clubmans' Championship in 2005 and contested half of the Irish 125cc National Championship the following year, before she concentrated on the British 125cc Championship for the remainder of that season.

Nicole made history during 2006, when she became the first Irish female to score points in a British short circuit championship event, when she finished 15th in the British 125cc Championship race at Snetterton in Norfolk, and she subsequently topped that with an excellent tenth position in the British 125cc Championship race at Knockhill in Scotland.

That year, she was also awarded the prestigious *Irish Racer Magazine* Short Circuit Merit Award.

Known as 'Bratface', and a diminutive 5ft 4in and 58kg — wearing leathers, helmet, boots and gloves — Nicole had a disappointing 2007 British 125cc Championship season aboard her Splash Racing Honda, largely due to mechanical gremlins, and at the end of last year she qualified for the Red Bull Rookies selection finals at the Paul Ricard circuit in France, but failed to gain a Red Bull Rookies scholarship.

Already in training for the forthcoming season — cycling, riding a moto cross bike and kick boxing — the GCSE student enthused: "I am really looking forward to riding for Steve Patrickson. The experience that Steve can pass on will be very valuable to me in my racing career. I cannot wait 'til the season starts, as having a bad year in '07 has made me twice as determined as before."

Nicole joins Matthew Hoyle — who she dubs her most respected rival — together with Ben Barrett, Jordan Malton and Luke Hinton in the SP125Racing team, with 16 year old Hoyle to concentrate on contesting the Red Bull MotoGP Rookies Cup, which will be staged at seven European MotoGP venues — a series in which Ballinamallard youngster Josh Elliott will also compete.

Nicole will get to grips with her new 125cc Honda for the first time during pre-season testing in Spain at the end of next month.



15 year old Nicole McAleer has signed for top British 125cc Championship team, Steve Patrickson's SP125Racing.