

MARIA COSTELLO

» ROAD RACER MARIA COSTELLO – AND GUEST EDITOR CHRIS WALKER'S NEW TEAM MATE - REPORTS IN FROM TESTING IN ALMERIA, SPAIN.

Where did the off-season go? Winter has flown by and the start of the 2012 race season is well within sight. My year has kicked-off in fantastic style with three days of testing in Spanish sunshine with the great trackday company Racedays.

I'm actually writing this while sat in Malaga airport waiting for my flight home, after a very successful Spanish test on my Hol Taj Supertwin.

To say I'm excited about 2012 is an understatement. Everything seems to be finally falling into place, and the past two weeks have been full of fantastic news ahead of my forthcoming race season.

First off, Jamie & Eddie of the Ratech Group Ltd, a company who specialise in the design, build and conversion of large vehicles for promotional, hospitality or living purposes, collected on my behalf, my latest purchase – a 7.5 ton truck! This is my new project, which we've fondly named, 'the truck that Maria

built'. The plan is to take the basic shell of a truck, and turn it in to my race support vehicle – complete with tools, a kitted-out workshop and a living area for when we're home-from-home in a race paddock. It's going to be an epic challenge, as I'll be working hands-on with the team at Ratech, who, amongst other things, will be teaching me how to weld. The project has its own page on Twitter: @TheTruckThat, and Facebook: The Truck That Maria Built, so you can follow our progress every step of the way.

Then there's the announcement about me riding for the Pr1mo Bournemouth Kawasaki team at the 2012 TT. This is a fantastic opportunity, which has come about thanks to Joe and Enzo at Pr1mo – and it's always great to have support from local companies. It means that I'll be using a new ZX-10R at this year's TT and some other selected road races too.

This opportunity has also helped me to get support from another local backer in the form of the European Shoe Machinery company. They'll be one of my largest sponsors this season and I can't thank Roberto enough for his support.

I've been in this sport for a long time now, and I pinch myself every day for being so fortunate. I'm more passionate and determined than ever before - I can't wait to start racing.

So back to the testing, and the three days I spent at Almeria with Racedays. My boyfriend Tim, who doubles as my crew chief, and Paul from Vmtek Suspensions, came with me so we could obtain as much data as possible. And we did exactly that, utilising every available session on-track to ride the Hol-Taj-backed Kawasaki ER6 Supertwin, and get loads of valuable data in preparation for the road racing season ahead.

It was a massive success, and I'd like to thank suspension guru, Paul Mensenkampff. Having him on hand was a huge help in setting-up the new Wilbers suspension, and also in knocking chunks off my lap times each day! I also took my GoPro with me, and I'll be posting the video footage on-line, on www.costelloracing.com once I'm home.

Now we are all very keen to get to the first race of the year. On my calendar that's the Cookstown 100. Getting to race the 'pizza bike' (that's the nick name of the Supertwin) around the TT this year, in the new lightweight class is going to be awesome and, hopefully, it will be a real highlight of my 2012 season. It will be the first time I've raced a bike that I've built around my favourite road circuit.

So what happens next? Well first there's the Pr1mo Bournemouth Kawasaki team launch, then the Supertwin will be in high demand as various new parts are being

developed for it. First off it will have a new radiator built by Radicool. Then it will spend a couple of weeks at Scorpion Exhausts, getting a new race exhaust developed in time for the TT, and then finally, a couple of days at Track Electronics having a new loom built. It's going to be a busy month for my little Supertwin!

In the mean time I'll be testing the ZX-10R and I'll hopefully have some more news to announce about the Supersport bike I'll be competing on this season.

Until next time...
Maria x



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RACER DIARIES

» GERRARD SPEAR TALKS TO RACER ABOUT HIS TEAM'S PROSPECTS FOR THIS SEASON IN THE BEMSEE MINITWIN CHAMPIONSHIPS.

» TEAM VSPEED



PHOTO Racing Line Photography

So here we are on the cusp of the 2012 season, and along with everyone else who races or is involved with bike racing, either for personal fulfilment or career, the anticipation is building after what always seems like an endless winter. The feel of spring is in the air, the bikes have been stripped and rebuilt for the new season and the first test day is looming.

Team VSpeed has two riders, Dan Couzens #7 and Gerrard Spear #8, who race in the BMCRC Minitwin Championship, a competitive and closely-fought grass-roots club series, which is celebrating its tenth anniversary this year. The weapon of choice for the 72bhp limit class is the Suzuki SV650 and strict technical regs govern the class (I couldn't possibly mention them all now – check them out at www.minitwins.co.uk).

MSV Racing have arranged for our Minitwin class to be a support series at the World

Superbike meeting at Donington in May - a fantastic opportunity for us to race in front of crowds of tens of thousands.

We formed Team VSpeed in 2010 because I wanted to create a professional team and brand that was easy to recognise. Our goal was to secure the Minitwin title, and attract enough sponsorship to get Dan racing in the Metzeler National Superstock 1000 Championship.

Regrettably Dan missed out on the 2011 Bemsee Minitwin title by 19 points – but he had a good reason! He missed two rounds - and a potential 200 points – on account of his wedding in August. His marriage to Samantha was organised a long time before I wandered up to him in 2010 and suggested we went racing together, so it was just lousy luck with the way the dates fell that cost us the title. We did manage to get heroically

drunk on the day to compensate however, so all was not lost!

Nonetheless, Bemsee honoured his achievements by awarding him the Dunlop Trophy for Individual Achievement in 2011, which he now shares with illustrious names as Hailwood, Read, Grant and Sheene.

On the way to overall second place, Dan broke the lap record at every circuit he raced at last season, and is the outright Minitwin lap record holder for Brands Indy (0:50:547) and Snetterton 300 (2:04.604). He had 16 wins and 23 podiums from 25 starts last season, with no DNFs, in a fiercely competitive year that saw lap times plummeting and records broken at almost every meeting. We guested at the opening BSB round at Brands over the 2011 Easter weekend, and the top 19 bikes were running 52 seconds or faster, which was race winning

pace for the previous two years, not half bad for 72bhp shopping bikes! Search YouTube for Team VSpeed to see some of last season's best races, and keep up to date with this season where we will be filming in full HD on our miniDVR bullet cameras supplied by www.dogcamsport.co.uk.

I started racing with Bemsee in the Rookie 1000 class in 2010 getting fourth overall at the ripe age of 46. I also had a great season last year, progressing into the points with a best finish of 9th in class.

Our first meeting is at the Snetterton 300 on 24-25th March and we can't wait! It will be great to get back on the bikes in anger, and tweak them to how we want after the rebuilds and powder-coating over the winter - and to set up the race shocks that we've received from Nitron Racing.

We both have a point to prove this season, to ourselves and to our audience; nothing less than the Championship will do for Dan, and I need to show them all that, like one of my racing heroes, Spike Edwards, age is not a barrier to success if your mind is in the right place – I'm aiming for an overall top 10 finish.

So, if you are at any of the Bemsee meetings, please come and say hello. UK club racing provides a unique opportunity to get up close and personal with the people providing the entertainment for spectators. Where else can you go to watch a day's continuous racing for £10 (under 12's get in for free), meet the racers and get involved?

Failing that, you can follow us at www.teamvespeed.com, where you can check out the gallery and race videos, team news and updates and offers from our sponsors! See you in the paddock.

Gerrard Spear
Team VSpeed #8
www.bemsee.net *racers*

RACER DIARIES

» SHAKEY BYRNE'S FORMER TRUCK DRIVER AND TYRE TECH FILLS RACER IN ON A LITTLE OF HIS BACK HISTORY AND THE FUN AND GAMES INVOLVED IN BUILDING AND RACING BIKES.

» MICHAEL SIMMONS

I started in motocross in 1981 after a receiving compensation from being knocked off my roadbike the previous year. I finally retired in 1991, but returned to roadbikes in 1995, doing trackdays to get the biking fix. Racing beckoned in 1999 (after one too many speeding tickets) with BEMSEE Powerbikes on an R1, but I only managed three rounds before being offered a job with the Harris Performance BSB team, who needed a truck driver and tyre tech for that season with Shakey on a Kawasaki. I worked in BSB for two more seasons with Shakey, and then Craig Jones in his first season in Junior Superstocks with Motopower in 2001.

A return to motocross in the Twinshock class, racing the old 500cc two strokes in 2006, soon took its toll on the old body, and I stopped to concentrate on building up our newly acquired business, Westcountry Windings in 2007. Late in 2010 I started looking at returning to circuit racing, (there seems to be a pattern forming here) as I always saw it as unfinished business, and I was able to sell it to my long suffering wife, Sharon, as a way to promote and test the racing parts we were selling and developing. I looked at going down the usual 600 rookie route, but I was encouraged to have a look at the BEMSEE Thunderbike class by one of our customers and long time BEMSEE rider

Mike Baxter. A trip to the final round and a last minute Ebay bid on a TRX850 made the decision for me. I have always had a soft spot for these bikes, and this class caters for bikes like this that aren't usually competitive in normal groups. The rules allow for substantial modifications, apart from the main frame and original engine cases, giving plenty of scope for mixing and matching parts from other models, whilst staying within the power to weight ratio. This allows the choice of either buying a bike that is already at the limit, or building something yourself which many riders do, resulting in some really well engineered and effective machines.

A long list of modifications to make the bike a bit more 'race-ready' followed, including an R1 front end, YZF750 rear end, new subframe, Minitwin bodywork, race loom, full race exhaust, cut down generator and lightweight battery, but alas no engine mods due to hitting the bottom of the preparation budget early. This was finished days before the excellent BEMSEE rookie day, which unlike this year, was run in very cold and wet conditions.

We managed to race in five of the eight rounds, with the first three being completed with the standard engine. This meant I was a fair way off the ideal power to weight ratio, but I did manage to win the 'Rookie of the



RACER DIARIES

» ALEX HUTCHINSON PROVIDES RACER WITH SOME OF HIS YEARS OF WISDOM FROM A CAREER THAT HAS COVERED ROAD AND TRACK RACING ON 250S TO 1200S.

» ALEX HUTCHINSON

When I first started racing back in 1993, I did not think for a minute that all these years later I would be about to embark on my 20th season of racing. The problem is that racing is like a drug, once you have had that initial hit of pure adrenalin, it is very hard to walk away from it. Sat on the start line with your stomach in knots, waiting for the lights to go out, is one of the strangest most sadistic pleasures you can have, but also the main reason why I continue. The photo of the dashing pink machine is from that first season in 1993 in the Superteens Championship aboard a Suzuki RGV250M, you will have to forgive the colour scheme as time has moved on a little since then and the 90's were not known for their iconic fashion. The style was already there though!

Last year I competed in the Harley Davidson XR1200 Trophy, and while it was a departure from my usual racing steeds, as I am sure it would be for a fair few people, I thoroughly enjoyed the racing and the 'quirkiness' of the bikes handling. Therefore when the news came through that the series would not be running in 2012 I was a little disappointed but my thoughts then turned to what I should do for the 2012 season.

Obviously I would have to turn my attentions elsewhere. The decision of what to race was a fairly simple one as I,

along with our friend Colin of 'Road and Race Developments' have been building a Kawasaki ER6 Supertwin over the last few months. Not a great deal is left of the original machine, having changed the forks, swingarm, shock, exhaust, brakes, subframe, bodywork etc. - I think you get the picture. What will eventually roll out onto the track, will be a finely honed racing machine - well that is the plan anyway!

Now that this class has been included into the Isle of Man TT races, the profile of the class will be lifted enormously. There were a few reasons for choosing this bike and class: firstly the initial bike is fairly cheap to buy in comparison to the 600s and 1000s and, being a true Yorkshireman, this obviously appeals to me greatly! Secondly the openness of the class rules allow for engineering types like myself to experiment a bit with the machine, rather than just writing a cheque and bolting on some goodies. Having raced Supermono machines for a number of years, and seen the vast array of technical workmanship that this series produced, it makes you understand what the 'art of the possible' really is. Also, I wanted to make our own mini Moto2 bike, but that is just pure self indulgence. And finally, coming from 250GP racing machines, my preference has always been to the slightly smaller



machines, it's either that or just that the 1000s scare me too much!

Where to race the Supertwin was also quite a simple question to answer, as ThundersportGB had just announced that they would be running a championship for this class in 2012. I raced with ThundersportGB in 2011 and managed to win the GP2 class so the omens are good. In addition to the short circuits, I have always enjoyed a bit of the pure road racing over the years. I'm by no means a roads specialist, although I have managed a top six at the NW200 and wins at Scarborough and Aberdare, so maybe I am not too shabby. To this end, my intention is to take in the North West 200 and Scarborough races as and when time and monies allow.

On the subject of monies, a lot of time and effort goes in to trying to secure product and financial backing for the season at this time of year. Any type of motorsport is a very expensive game, and as much effort goes into this side of the operation as building

and actually racing the bike itself. The team have been very lucky this year, as our sponsors from last year have stuck with us, and some new ones have come on board too. It is almost a full-time job to keep on top of everything, but that is what you must do to try and attract new sponsors and keep the existing ones happy. With the current economic climate, this has proved more and more difficult, so I took on board the idea from a few other racers around the patch of starting 'Club 77'. The idea behind this is that rather than trying to secure that one big sponsor, which invariably you never do, we would look for 77 people to sponsor us for £77. This makes it far more manageable for people to take onboard and, in return, they can get their names on the bike and have a good day out at the races with us. If anyone is interested in this then please drop me a line at hutch7777@hotmail.co.uk.

In addition to my racing activities I also hold my ACU Coaching Licence, and

one of my first jobs of the year will be at the ThundersportGB training day on the 26th of February. My role for the day is to oversee the new racers taking to the track, and to ascertain that they have the necessary skills to be safe to both themselves and the other racers out on track. Once I am happy that they meet the criteria, their certificate can be signed and they can then send off for their first racing licence. I enjoy this side of things, as it is very rewarding when you see some of the guys you have helped progressing through the ranks.

Right now it is back to the shed for some more tinkering to get ready for the start of the season.

All the best
Alex

You can keep up to date with how Alex's season is progressing by taking a look at our blog at www.alexhutch77.blogspot.com. **racet**

"We managed to race in five of the eight rounds, with the first three being completed with the standard engine. This meant I was a fair way off the power to weight ratio ideal but managed to win the rookie of the day trophy..."

Day' trophy at all bar one round, which went to my arch rival, Ian Davis, with whom I had some epic battles and constant banter throughout the year. Re-profiled cams and 41mm flatslide carbs improved the engine dramatically in time for Brands Indy in July, but frustratingly they didn't herald any improvement in lap times, which was a valuable lesson learned. The season finished on a high with a 5th place in the final race of the year, in a biblical downpour at Snetterton, leaving me in second place in the rookie championship, with first deservedly going to Ian Davis.

For 2012 I have elected to compete in the Thunderbike Championship again in the sport class, which is the same power to weight ratio as last year. I will also be riding in the Thundersport GB Golden Era Superbike Championship which, as a new class, will be an unknown quantity with regards to how competitive my bike will be against 750 fours and 1000 twins. I am looking forward to this new challenge immensely.

For this season I have modified the bike to be right on the Thunderbike limit, with weight loss and engine tuning, which will hopefully be enough for both classes. In the mad rush to prepare the bike for the first shakedown run on the 25th of February at Snetterton, I have been unswervingly assisted by Alf Mossell of AMR Motorsport, Mike Baxter of BBS Motorcycles, Mel Manning of Classic Bike Restorations, Stortford Body Repairs, Ashley Barter, Race Engineering, Sam and Daz at WCW and all the family. I'd like to thank all of the above for their continued support and help on race weekends.

Here we go again!!

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