

RAPIDO LENTO!

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» LAST WEEKEND AT BRANDS HATCH BRITISH SUPERBIKES, ONCE AGAIN DEMONSTRATED WHY THE SPANISH & ITALIANS DOMINATE WORLD CLASS MOTORCYCLE RACING. NO, THERE WEREN'T A RASH OF SOUTHERN EUROPEANS ON THE PODIUMS, BUT THERE WERE SOME KEY INDICATORS AS TO WHY THEY ARE SO SUCCESSFUL.



In both Spain and Italy there is a fixed system that all prospective champions go through, without missing out any of the steps. In Spain, Lorenzo, Pedrosa, Barbera and Bautista have all been competing against each other since the early days of the Aprilia RS50 Cup and have progressed up the ladder pretty much in parallel ever since. Whilst over in Italy, Ianone, Dovizioso, De Angelis and Pasini all came up through the Copa Italia from 125cc Aprilias and into the Grand Prix classes via the same fixed route.

Looking back to the support classes at Brands Hatch and we can see an almost pathologic obsession with quantity, rather than quality, when it comes to rider numbers.

In the Superstock 600 class there was a huge gap of nearly 7 seconds per lap in qualifying. This is to be expected in the feeder series, but not at an event that (rightly) claims to be the best promoted domestic championship in the world.

Superstock 1000 was even worse, with an 8 second gap and the most shocking of all was the Motostar class which had a gap of nearly 14 seconds! In each instance a little quality control would still have seen respectable sized grids, but could have

made the whole show a lot more polished. The racing at the front of these races is some of the very best to be seen anywhere in the world, so why is there a need to overcrowd the track for qualifying and cut down on the available track time?

Many of the riders at the tail end of those grids have never even won a competitive club race and have no real prospect of doing anything more than simply making up the numbers. That isn't to say that they couldn't shine eventually, just that they have arrived at that stage too early in their development as riders. The system should work in such a way as to help them achieve their goals. The Spanish CEV series very closely mimics the GP schedule, giving riders the right amount of set up time and getting them familiar with the system at world level. Is that why Brits have traditionally struggled in modern Grand Prix racing? Remember that Cal Crutchlow is the only one of the British contingent that didn't have to go to Spain after the Aprilia Superteen series in order to progress into GP racing.

Football long ago realised that restricting the availability of places in each division, far from putting people off, actually made

reaching the next level more desirable and valued. The old 1st Division at one time had 36 teams in it but now has only 20 teams. This has produced an overall increase in quality, spectacle and value to everyone involved.

The problem has always been that as soon as you obtain a National Licence, you are automatically eligible to enter events at the highest level. Some riders feel pressured into doing so before they are ready and without thought to whether the class they have been competing in at Clubmans level was actually the right grounding for them in the first place. Last year we had a few riders who went straight from our Pre-National Sport 600 class into the BSB paddock, jumping straight over the natural line of development that is our Sportsman Elite 600 class. It will come as no surprise that they are all either struggling or have given up. This is a direct result of the pressure exerted by that "National Licence" in the pocket of a young rider and it helps no one.

So, is there anyone out there who can see the problem and moreover has the will to do something about it?

Ian Newton from IN Competition has



been a leading light in rider and youth development for nearly 20 years. His contribution to British motor cycle sport over that period has gone largely unrecognised by the media, but those in the business know that without him the sport would be in a far worse state. Not many people know that when a young Australian called Casey Stoner arrived in England in 2000, he lived in a caravan in Ian's yard whilst competing in the Aprilia Superteen Challenge. Ian helped to steer Casey in the right direction for his career and has done so for many others since then. Others in his championship (it is "his" championship, as he is the driving force behind it) have been Bradley Smith, Chaz Davies, Craig Jones, Alex Lowes, Sam Lowes, James Westmoreland, Leon Camier, Danny Webb, Danny Kent and Cal Crutchlow. Some of the other young riders that are just bubbling under at the top level that came out of the IN Competition series are Joe Burns, Lee Jackson, Jimmy Storrar, Victor Cox, Luke Jones, Dean Hipwell, Nikki Coates, Ashley Beech, Wayne Ryan, Fraser Rogers, Joe Collier and Robbie Brown.

It's obviously no coincidence that most of the brightest young prospects in British racing have also since come through his championships, so surely his vision and intuition should hold some sway in how we do things.

We often discuss this problem and he recently said something to me that brought the whole thing into crystal clarity for me, as it wasn't something that I'd properly considered before.

"People want to take the quickest and easiest route to just being there, without much thought as to what's going to happen when they arrive!"

Ian believes that a solid grounding in the art of racing and strong competition on equal machinery are essential things that young riders need to learn, before moving on to the big stage.

It is no coincidence that probably the two

brightest new prospects at Brands Hatch last weekend were Jake Dixon and Callan Cooper both of whom set the fastest laps in their respective classes. Both went through the full IN Competition programme of Aprilia Superteens followed by Aprilia RRV450GP, which provided them with the best possible grounding for the next level of competition. Others that have gone forward without that grounding have not done justice to their undoubted natural talents.

The object lesson here would appear to be, that young riders need to look for the toughest, most equal competition possible. This needs to be on modern machinery, as the old 400cc Supersport bikes no longer hold much relevance to the handling of the lighter and more nimble 600cc derivatives.

The Spanish Federation have 5 regional championships running that provide an element of pre-qualification to the main CEV Championship, allowing riders to develop their skills to a much better level. In the absence of the organisers of the British Championships imposing any preliminary qualifiers onto entry criteria into their support races, young riders must ensure that

they have the utmost preparation for both themselves and their whole team, in order to make the most of their opportunities.

Why is all of this relevant now?

The FIM have recognised that there are two problems in top level Grand Prix racing. Firstly, the Spaniards are dominating the market and that is not beneficial to the worldwide promotion of motorcycle racing. Secondly, there are no National organisers willing to adopt the Spanish model.

Their solution is to expand the CEV series into the heart of Europe, taking in rounds in France, Germany and the Low Countries as early as next year.

If UK motorcycle sport culture doesn't change, we will be destined to the same fate as the AMA in the USA, where our riders have little or no prospect of progressing through our own British Championships and onto the world stage.

