



TECH TROIS - GIVE HERVE PONCERAL A RING TO LET HIM KNOW THE NEW RECRUITS ARE IN TRAINING?

worked and learnt progressively. The one thing they all have in common is a thirst for knowledge and a set plan of how to progress from their respective starter classes and onto the next stage without trying to dodge an opportunity to learn.

Just to pick out one single rider is probably unfair, but I'm going to do it anyway. Ross Simpson arrived into the Aprilia Superteens at the start of this season and I was immediately impressed. Not with his speed, but with his ability to knuckle down and learn from the faster riders around him. His riding has been honed and polished over the course of the season and he rarely – if ever – makes the same mistake twice. This youngster isn't brash or over-confident and appears to realise that he can learn from almost anyone he happens to be racing with. He has a 3 year

WHERE'S THE FIRE

WORDS: Dave Stewart

Sometimes a little distance from something, gives you a perspective that makes you see a bigger and far clearer picture. We often get asked by riders and their parents about the "quickest route to the top" in the motorcycle racing world. My question is usually as above – "Where's the Fire?"

If we look at the broader picture with regard to the most successful British riders though, it can give you pause for thought. Mike Hailwood is still in the opinion of many, the best motorcycle racer that ever lived. I am aware of the existence of Valentino Rossi by the way, but I think I remember his dad driving an ice cream van around Tooting Broadway when I was a kid – or was that a different Rossi?

Mike Hailwood, Barry Sheene, Rob McElnea, Niall MacKenzie, John Reynolds, Carl Fogarty, Jeremy McWilliams, Dave Jefferies, Joey Dunlop and George O'Dell all have something significant in common (as well as being world class road racers). None of them even started their first road race until they were over 16 years old.

We have built in quite a lot of development room by allowing riders to begin their careers at as young as 12 years old, but sometimes that can give rise to a completely unwarranted thought that if they haven't "made it" by the time they're 18 years old, they have somehow missed the boat. That clearly isn't the case as the riders currently sitting highest in the premier classes of World, European and British Championships are all closer to 30 years old than 20 years old. The chance to learn and become the best rider that you can possibly be is a process that is different for every individual. At every

stage of the process it is important to learn as much as possible and thoroughly absorb the skills available at that level.

I had a bizarre conversation with a parent recently who was looking for the least competitive class open to his son, so that he could obtain his National licence quickly and enter British Championship events straight away. After a fairly lengthy conversation that I won't bore you with, it transpired that he knew that his son would not make the qualifying time but 'being there' was more important than actually racing. It takes all sorts.

There are relatively few riders each year who you look at and think "That lad really has what it takes!" when thinking about going all the way to World Championship level, but happily there are a few that have caught the eye in the past 3 seasons. Not all of them were winning upon arrival, but they have

plan in front of him and I know that at the end of it he will be a formidable racer, ready to take on the best young riders in Europe.

I've seen that attitude before and even when the Manager of the ACU Road Race Academy couldn't see the potential in the lad concerned, I knew he would be one of the very best riders this country has ever produced. The youngster concerned was Bradley Smith and I believe the inadequacies of his current Moto-2 bike are hiding the best of his talents from the world. 2013 will be a defining year for Bradley, but I truly believe that in 2014 he will be a Moto-GP race winner. Somewhat perversely, I hope he isn't the first British rider since Barry Sheene to win a premier class Grand Prix, as I think and hope that another ex-Aprilia Superteen in the shape of Cal Crutchlow will get there first.

And THAT is when the fire really gets lit!

