



The GSX-R Factor

You need talent to race at the top level. But just as importantly, you need a rich family, generous sponsors or both. But what if all you've got is talent?

Words: Kenny Poyte. Pics: Giovanni Brown.

You'd think that if you had the talent to race for play tennis or... anything your gift would be spotted, sponsors would arrive and success would follow as sure as a boom follows bust. But, in the real world of racing, talent isn't enough and never has been. You need a chunk of luck, you need to know the right people and you need to be in the right place at the right time. Pure, raw talent is just not enough to make it.

Given this fact, it is clear that a number of talented riders will slip through the net, their potential unfulfilled. This is a sad state

of affairs that isn't good for the long-term future of British bike racing. Well, Suzuki decided to do something about it and we were asked to help.

Which is all a long-winded way of saying that we've been helping Suzuki GB to do some talent hunting. Basically, Suzuki had two rides for youngsters in the European GSX-R Cup and needed to find worthy bums for the paid-for seats. So Suzuki contacted us to see what we thought. After less than a minute, we announced - with a stunning lack of imagination and originality - the

GSX-R Factor. It was going to do what it said on the tin. Through the magazine and website, we asked anyone eligible for the GSX-R Cup to get in touch and see if they were good enough to get a 'free' ride in the support championship at selected rounds of the World Superbike Championship, which isn't a bad prize - or a shop window to be seen in.

The rules were simple. All you had to do was check your eligibility for the GSX-R Cup then send in your racing CV to Superbike. After the entries were sifted by us and Suzuki, three riders were selected

who would go through to the grand finale, albeit without airhead, showboating judges on hand as you'd get on the poxy telly programme.

Final analysis

The final was to be judged at the Spanish track of Guadix, scene of a lot of British superbike testing. At Guadix, you were put up in a nice hotel, taken out to dinner then asked to ride a GSX-R750 the following day. And, while you were waiting around, you would be assessed by a panel comprising of Suzuki marketing

man Steve Booth and former British superbike champion

John Reynolds, while your scribble moped around, held a stopwatch and nodded every now and then.

The three finalists who were flown out to Spain were Alex Camner, Jimmy Storrer and Alex Gaulth, ranging in age and experience from 16-year-old Gaulth with a CE650 title under his slim belt, to 19-year-old Camner who had spent a season riding in the Japanese superbike championship on a Moriwaki Honda. In the middle, so to speak, was 20-year-old Storrer, who had campaigned

in the British Superstock Cup in 2004, with a win and seventh overall to his credit.

Although there was no formal interview - there was no point in stressing anyone out with anything like that - all the riders were being observed from the point at which they arrived at Spanish airport. Unsurprisingly, the youngest finalist, Gaulth, was the quietest and least forthcoming. The fact that his dad had come along for the trip, to keep an eye on his son, probably added to young Gaulth's desire to keep a low profile.

The other pair, older and

more experienced, exuded more confidence which, considering Camner (younger brother of former British supersport champion and 2007 superbike rider Leon) had spent a year living and racing in Japan, wasn't surprising. Storrer had done his fair share of racing and in setting under his own steam as well, all of which three Gaulth's inexperience and young age into sharper relief. Frankly, the night before the test, you would never have thought that the 16-year-old had a hope in hell. And, just to make things interesting for those more or less cullow

youths, they had to share the Guadix test track with the cream of the British superbike paddock: HM Plant Honda, Rola Suzuki, Sidiari Honda and Naturally Best Suzuki were all testing, as was Ian Hutchinson on the Honda official CBR600RR supersport entry. The only teams missing were MSF Kawasaki and Arrows Ducati. There were plenty of curious and experienced onlookers hanging over the start-finish straight well with binoculars.

To some extent, we were not simply looking at the riders' lap times. If there were only a couple



Alex Camier

Leeds, UK (born 1984) Age: 17

RACING CAREER

- 1997 British Junior Grasstrack Champion
- 1998 British Junior Grasstrack Champion
- 2001 Four rounds of Aprilia Supertrax Championship
- 2005 Virgin Yamaha Isle of Man TT
- 2006 All Japan superbike with Moriwaki Honda

Camier speed and handling. As his pit crew at Rizta Suzuki served their stopwatches and prepared to time their former rider, 'JR' was as nervous as the youngsters he was there to assess.

It was JR's first trip to Guadix and he took it easy for a few laps, until the tyres warmed up and he knew which way he was going over the blind crests.

And then it was time for the boys to perform – and they got down to the business of shaking off nerves and concentrating on the matter at hand. Each rider went out for a 20-minute session before being flagged in and the next rider went out. And so it went on. Bikes were switched between riders too, so there was as fair and flat a playing field as possible.

Straight back on the pace

And, as the day wore on, it became clear – to general surprise – that young Gault was consistently the quickest. And, even though he crashed twice, he picked himself back up, got back to the pits, got the Gaffa tape out and within two laps was back on the pace again. "That was impressive," said Reynolds later. "He was pushing quite hard to be on the pace he was, he wasn't hanging about. And when he went back out after his crash, he was bang on it again – and that was really good. If you race, you crash – it's inevitable when you are pushing to find the limit. It's how you react after the crash that's important."

The young Scot was still looking as nervous as a kitten, in spite of the fact that he could obviously ride. What was the biggest bike he had ridden previously? "The CB600," said Gault. "I've got an RR in the garage but some that we bought at the end of the season, but I've not been out on it yet. My other bikes all had race pattern gear shifts on them as well, this is the first time I've been on track with a road pattern shift." And, you have to say, the jump in terms of adjustability and power between the GSX-R750 and a CB600 is a big one. Needless to say, it was also his first time at Guadix. How much more could you ask of anyone?

"I was a bit nervous, but more determined than anything else. I had a chance of riding the RR Cup, but obviously racing in the European series was much better. I had taken part in a Red Bull Rookie competition that was basically the same thing as the RR Cup a few years ago, but I was a lot more determined this time. To be honest, I had a really

good day, it all came together and I had a smooth ride."

Apart from the crashes, obviously.

Meanwhile, Camier, resplendent in leathers from his Japanese superbike season, was smooth and consistent, but a little bit slower than Gault. Storror – who had ridden a GSX-R1000 in Superstock throughout 2006 – was struggling to push to find those extra few tenths to keep him in the frame for the ride.

Ice cold Alex

Camier edged Storror for the second place. He seemed sure of himself, but he was surprised all the way Gault had ridden? "Well, right from the start, we were told that lap times weren't important, so I didn't think that there was much point in going out there and pushing to the point of crashing – this wasn't the spec of bike, tyres or suspension that we are going to be racing – so I didn't want to crash and break a leg or anything. I just kept an eye on the lap times the others put in and did the job I was asked to do," explained Camier later. The experience of a rider who has done a bit of high-level racing is all contained in that explanation.

Having said that though, Camier was still under a bit of pressure. "I didn't really have anything else lined up in terms of rides. There weren't any other options really. There was the

RR Cup, but I wasn't sure that I'd be able to give it a good go because money is a big issue. The money situation is tough, so I was keen enough."

... Mind you, if you had spent a year in Japan racing for the legendary Moriwaki team and had your big brother Leon on hand in the same paddock like elder Camier was testing his Bike Animal Honda superbike, then you could afford to be a bit more relaxed. In the end, the determination of Gault saw off the challenge from the more experienced Camier.

So, there you have it. Two young riders with two paid rides in a high-profile European championship. There's something you don't hear about far read about every day. In these days of paid-for rides, you have to give Suzuki UK some credit for offering young talent a chance to shine. Stay tuned... **LT**



Alex Gault

Leeds, UK (born 1984) Age: 16

RACING CAREER

- 2001 Suzuki Junior Minimoto champion
- North East England Minimoto champion
- Endurance champion with team ZPF
- 2003 ACU National Pocket Bike Junior B champion
- ACU National Pocket Bike Production A champion
- 2005 JRA Formula 80 champion
- Darley Moor Formula 80 champion
- British PG Minimoto champion
- 2004 JRA 125SP champion
- 2005 Suzuki 125SP champion
- 2006 New Era CB500 Cup champion



Gault cut his racing teeth on a variety of ludicrous small events

of tenths between riders, then other factors would come into play. How consistent were the lags? What sort of quality of feedback were the riders offering on tyres and suspension? Did they make any demands of the 'pit crew' – aka Daryl in terms of getting pegs and bars moved? Did they appear over-awed by the company, or did they relax into the day and concentrate on what they had to do?

The day on track started at 10.30am – too early for the superbike teams who were waiting for the track temperature to rise – so it was left to John Reynolds to scrub in the tyres and verify the two stock GSX-R750



There was lots of expert advice on hand of Gault, with John Reynolds showing the young whipper-snapper the way round the circuit



"Although he crashed twice, Gault picked himself back up, got back to the pits, got the Gaffa tape out and within two laps was back on the pace again"