

Motor Cycle News

August 16th 2006



“I’ll win.....or crash trying”

MCN man’s plan on race try-out only half succeeds.

By Chris Newbigging

When I announced I was taking part in my first race meeting, most of the office offered advice, tips on the best lines and several said “take it easy”. One fool took a different approach, telling me: ”You win a race, or crash trying!” Well, I managed one of those.....

The British MZ Racing Club offers a rent-a-racer scheme on the Brands Hatch Indy circuit, intended to help raw novices like me try out the full race weekend experience. The idea is to give you a chance to decide if you really do want to go racing before investing in a bike, van and all the other paraphernalia required. At £450 for everything you need for two days racing, including your entry fees and licence costs, it’s good value compared to the real thing.

My weekend started a day early – on Friday – to take part in a compulsory training course that all new ACU race licence applicants have to complete before being granted one. The course teaches the basics every rider needs to know before heading out on track, including the many flags, start procedures and other vital information.

The day was also a perfect chance to familiarise myself with my machine for the weekend – a 1987 MZ ETZ250. Hardly the stuff GP dreams are made of, but the humble East German two-stroke commuters have been modified almost beyond recognition. The chassis is upgraded, GP125 slicks added and the motor tuned for a true 30bhp.

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The MZs will have four races split over Saturday and Sunday. Grid positions for race one are decided by series positions, so newcomers start at the back. From then on your start position is decided by your previous race result.

After a nervous ten-minute practice on Saturday morning, I find myself farting nervously on the grid waiting for the lights to go out. They do, and we're off. Paddock Hill is a whole new world in a pack of 30 bikes. I make it through, and settle into the groove, picking off bikes and working up to 17th from 32nd on the grid.

Race two brings a mini disaster. MZs cook their clutches if you leave them in first with the clutch in, and, unable to find neutral, my bike's clutch protests, dragging heavily and stalling the bike seconds before the light goes out. 15 seconds in, I'm finally on the move with a bump start.

My angry state leads to a brain-out ten laps, and I make some overtakes so bold my victims don't have much choice to submit.

Race one on Sunday goes well, making up for a cautious start and working up to 14th, scoring my first two points.

For the second race, my elevated grid positions put me on row four, and I wheelie off the start, shooting through row three. I grab some places on the brakes at Druids. Then things go tits up. Pete Lawrence, the bloke kind enough to have loaned me a bike, lowsides directly in front of me, launching self and MZ three feet in the air, ending my race, writing off two bikes and leaving me with a sore shoulder.

Despite this, I had a great weekend. MZ racers are so friendly, the bikes are a laugh, the racing is close and accessible to a wide range of abilities.

Once I'm healed, I'll be back out on track.....