

MAMOLA

GP LEGEND WRITES FOR MCN

Randy's MotoGP class of 2006: the big boys

Dani Pedrosa (Repsol Honda): As a journalist I can't remember meeting a more awkward customer but I think one of the reasons for that is because he is not driven by fame, he is driven purely by winning. In this respect he reminds me very much of Eddie Lawson and on the track he is not too dissimilar either, with a very smooth and precise riding style. To take two wins and eight podiums in his first season is an incredible effort. For this year we'll just mark him on performance and no prizes for guessing why he loses a mark! **9/10**

Marco Melandri (Fortuna Honda): A very up and down season for Marco - similar to his team-mate Toni Elias in that he would win a race one week and finish seventh the next. Marco was also affected by that horrendous crash at Catalunya and he showed great physical and mental strength to come back from that in the way he did. In terms of physical preparation there is nobody fitter than this guy but he needs to show a much higher level of concentration and consistency if he is going to make the step up next season. **8.5/10**

Loris Capirossi (Ducati): Same number of wins and podiums as Melandri and separated from him by just one point in the final standings but the fact the next best Bridgestone rider is down in tenth place gives you an idea of his achievement. When the tyres and bike set-up were in place he would always make the most of it but if there is one thing Loris is guilty of this season I would say it was dropping his shoulders when things weren't going his way. **9/10**

Valentino Rossi (Camel Yamaha): A kid with so much talent it makes you laugh. This year we finally saw that the



THAT'S how much winning the title means to Hayden

NICKY HAYDEN is top of Mamola's class of 2006

guy is human and he admitted as much himself, but I still don't believe it! Valentino dented his own armour for the first time with the practice crash at Assen and made things hard for himself, especially after such a rotten run of luck in the first half of the season. I believe Yamaha made mistakes because they felt under pressure from Honda but I also think Rossi got distracted by the FI testing. Despite that, he won more races than anyone else and scored ten podiums, so there is no questioning his ability or the fact that with a little more luck he would have won his sixth straight title. **9.9/10**

Nicky Hayden (Repsol Honda): Had as many things going against him as he had going for him this season but refused to lie down. Nicky worked on every single area of his game in order to put together the consistency that eventually won him the title. His form during the flyaways led a few people to suggest he wasn't a worthy champion but the way he bounced back from what happened at Estoril to take the title told you everything you needed to know. Nicky is never afraid to accept the blame when things go wrong so when he points the finger at someone he is probably right. One of the nicest guys you could meet and by always speaking to TV on the grid he's shown Rossi he still has something to learn about being champ! **10/10**

MOTOGP EXCLUSIVE

Roberts targets instant success

British team's new 800 carries hopes of their best season ever

BY MATTHEW BIRT

KENNY ROBERTS expects his new Honda-powered 800cc MotoGP bike to challenge for podiums from race one of the new world championship era in Qatar in less than eight weeks time.

Roberts, owner of Team KR and father of chief rider Kenny Jr, believes his new bike will be a consistent podium threat and said: "We want to be racing for podiums right from the start, that's where our sights are at right now. With what we achieved and ambitions have gone up. We're going to be pretty disappointed if we're not racing at least for podiums.

"Last year was our first year with Honda and it was a big learning year for us, because we had never worked with that type of motor before or with that amount of torque. We'd never worked that kind of weight or that kind of stiffness and we had the best Michelins. So it really caught us out.

"I remember China early last season thinking hell what have we got? We're trying to make the bike more rider friendly and be faster for longer during the race. We started last year and we had no idea what to expect and we have certainly gained a lot from that."

Roberts' squad has resisted any temptation to build a bike that too closely mirrors Honda's own radical new RC212V and he said: "We didn't just want to copy. I like to be different, and not just for the sake of it but because we can, being an independent constructor. What we wanted to do was use everything we learned last year, make it a

tiny bit better and start from there."

Roberts said he had been surprised how small the bike was when first catching a glimpse of the new Honda when it broke cover in Japan last September. He added: "The first thing that struck me was that they made it so small and in doing that it makes it complicated. I thought it was a little bit out of our envelope and I didn't want to make that bigger step and have to come back. I've done that quite often in my career so after 30 years I'm a little gun shy.

"I thought they had jumped too far in a future direction but with their experience they can do that. They have so much experience with 750s that they know a hell of a lot more about it than I do. I didn't want to go that far with our own bike. I think it's a good thing to be small, especially with the rider that they have in Dani Pedrosa, but for us I didn't think it was that important.

"We couldn't build a bike similar to what Honda had done because that makes no sense. Kenny is much taller and much heavier so we have to tailor what we make for him rather than just copying Honda. Nobody is right and nobody is wrong, that's just the way we do it."

Roberts Jr is the only MotoGP rider yet to test an 800cc machine, but his dad reckons the transition will pose little problems for the 2000 world champion: "I think the new bikes are going to suit him really well. I don't think he's the fastest in terms of corner speed, certainly compared to guys like Pedrosa, but I think Kenny is going to be able to maintain his lap times much better, from the third lap once you are in the groove for longer in the race."



TECHNICAL OVERVIEW

1 KENNY ROBERTS gave MCN a sneak preview of the new bike before it hits the track for the first time later this week. Here's what we saw on a whirlwind tour of the 2007 KR212V.

1 Now it's lost a cylinder the Honda engine is about 50mm narrower than the old 990cc V5. From the front the whole bike is clearly narrower than last year, which cuts drag and boosts top speed. The engine is designed to be as short as possible, too, to allow as long a swingarm as possible, to aid stability under braking. Chassis

design uses experience gained from last year's Honda RCV engine.

2 Despite the length of the swingarm the wheelbase is almost exactly the same as the old 990 and the bodywork provides a seating position fairly close to the old bike, too, which is a marked contrast to the tiny RCV Honda where only the smallest riders seem to feel at home. Seat design is similar to last year's RCVs, which Roberts tested at year end and liked - so this year bike uses a similar, flatter, style of seat pad.

The tail is longer than the Honda because the team want to run a straighter exhaust than the complex system run on Honda's own RCVs.

3 The basic chassis is a twin beam design, using the old KR method of fabricated aluminium sheet, just like the last of the various versions of the 2006 chassis. The team has for several years used a design of side beam that is formed by 'spark eroding' away the centre. Roberts' tested at year end and liked - so this year bike uses a similar, flatter, style of seat pad.

The tail is longer than the Honda because the team want to run a straighter exhaust than the complex system run on Honda's own RCVs.

4 Aerodynamics are improved with all-new bodywork, the first major update for three years in that area for the KR bikes. The

beams that stretch all the way up to the steering head for strength and there isn't a spark eroding machine available that can work on beams that long. With a longer swingarm new suspension linkages were required. The shock is fixed to the frame at the top, which allows faster shock changes than the Honda style of fixing the absorber at both ends of the swingarm itself.

narrower bike allows much improved ducts to get the hot air out from behind the radiator. The air intake in the front of the engine is smaller too, with a top 'lip' to the duct on the centre of the nose that echoed some experimental designs used last year. Team manager Chuck Aksland said: "We use a different air intake design to Honda but like before ours goes through the centre of the chassis, so we are sending the bike to Honda in Japan so they can check that their fuel maps will work with out different airbox design."

TEAM owner Kenny Roberts has high hopes for his British-built 800cc contender

DESIGNER SPEAKS



WARD did it in 12 weeks

DESIGNING and working on a completely new MotoGP bike against the intense pressure of a 12 week deadline is like a holiday for Roberts' team - last year they built the bike from scratch in just 10 weeks. We caught up with chief designer Barry Ward for a chat about the latest KR212V.

Honda's new 800 chassis looks a lot different, but yours looks similar to last year's - what have you done?

"Our chassis is very much a progression from last year's. We want to carry on where we left off and hopefully not go down the road of mass producing chassis like we did last year, hopefully we'll be more in the ballpark at the first test so we'll just be fine tuning."

Can you adjust the rigidity of the chassis?

"To some degree we can adjust it. Chatter wasn't our biggest problem last year, we had ways of dialling it out. Hopefully that will carry on but until we know what the tyres are like they'll produce for the 800s we can't say."

What can you tell us about the long swingarm?

"It's the longest swingarm we've ever made. At the moment we have finished with mounting the shock on the swingarm. We went through various forms and ended up sticking to the one chassis fixing point."

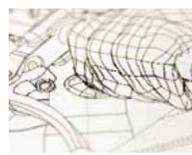
Is there much contact between yourself and HRC engineers?

"There is a lot of contact with the race team. During the design period we have quite serious links with their design guys, passing information backwards and forwards."

The fast pace of KR's development

HERE'S how the team got an 800cc engine up and running in such a short amount of time...

OCTOBER 15, 2006
Honda releases first information to Team Roberts about its RC212V at the Estoril GP. Details are instantly communicated to Banbury for designers to begin work the next day.



DECEMBER 13, 2006
The new HRC RC212V four-cylinder motor arrives in the UK. HRC ships a complete engine from Japan to Banbury. On the same day computer design work on the chassis is completed.



DECEMBER 18, 2006
With final computer design work at Team KR headquarters now complete, the first version of the all-new KR212V chassis is finished just one week before Christmas.



JANUARY 10, 2007
The first complete KR212V is finished in the early hours after bodywork arrives on January 9. A few hours later it's shipped straight to HRC headquarters in Japan for fuel mapping checks.



JANUARY 22, 2007
Just over three months after initial design work gets underway, former world champion Kenny Roberts Junior makes his 800cc debut in testing at the Sepang circuit in Malaysia.

