

FEATURE MANX GP ROUND-UP

Text & Photos: John Winterson

Incoming

A Swedish entrepreneur who was the fastest newcomer in qualifying for this year's Manx Grand Prix, with an impressive lap of more than 115mph, devised a somewhat unique system for learning the Mountain Course. MSL tracked him down...

Many TT and MGP rookies attempt to master the excellent Playstation game, 'TT SuperBikes', or sit glued to their TV screens for hours on end watching Duke Videos' mind-blowing onboard footage, retracing the wheeltracks of their heroes.

The majority of first timers get the opportunity of making at least a fleeting visit to the Isle of Man to see the intricacies of the 37.7-mile Snaefell Course first hand before returning for official practice – but not so Mats Nilsson.

He claimed to have had just a single viewing of a David Jefferies' onboard lap before arriving in Mona's Isle, but his outgoing personality and master of the English language endeared him to other early arrivals in the paddock and, having travelled to the Island alone, he soon made friends.

It was one of these, Tamworth police officer Chris Bradshaw (contesting the Manx for a third time), who took the Swede on his first official lap of the course, as a pillion on a Kawasaki road bike. After that Nilsson completed about 10 laps in a van, including some in the company of TT regular and Manx resident Kevin 'Irish Ago' Murphy.

His first encounter with Bray Hill was one he will never forget. "The DVD doesn't show how steep Bray Hill is. I thought: 'holy shit, this is like a ski slope'. Going down this at 170mph will be fun!"

From those initial laps, Nilsson began memorising every single section of the course.

"Each night before I went to sleep in my camper van I would count corners instead of sheep and ride through the entire course in my head. Then, every morning at 6.30, as soon as I awoke, I'd go for a lap in a car to register the course."

Nilsson repeated this ritual each evening and morning, up to race day, which just happened to be his 31st birthday.

"By the start of practice I felt reasonably confident. My first timed lap was 100mph average and within a couple of sessions I was averaging more than 110mph."

A good friend of Christer Miinin, who made his TT debut in 2005, Nilsson was not deterred by the death of another Swede Joakim Karlsson during practice for the same 05 event.

"If you are a bike racer and enjoy speed, this is the place to be," claimed Nilsson, who scored a couple of top-10 finishes at world championship level as a schoolboy motocrosser. "I remember Christer sending me a text message containing the words: 'it's indescribable, a total buzz', and I thought to myself, I have to go."

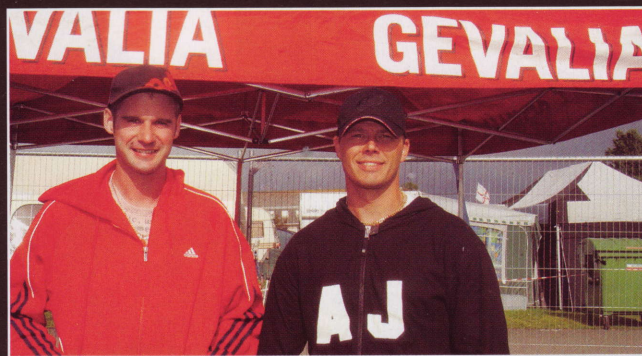
Thought to be the first Swedish rider ever to contest the Manx Grand Prix, Nilsson certainly made a big impression on what was a standard R6 Yamaha, despite having ridden a total of only eight race meetings before setting sail for the Isle of Man.

The owner of an air purification company (which imports into the UK under the product name Aircode), he also has interests in a brand of clothing named 'Troubleman'. "Quality clothes with incorrect attitude," he smiled.

Further assisted by double TT winner Ryan Farquhar on the build-up to his maiden race on the Mountain Course, Nilsson was nevertheless conscious that he had probably already pushed his stock 600 to the limit.

"There are other quick guys out there on tuned 600s and 750s, so I think I will struggle to keep with them in the race on a bike which is about 30 horse power down".

Taking time out for a bit of sightseeing the day before the four-lap Newcomers' event, he still made his daily visit to the local hyperbaric chamber – within



Mats Nilsson (right) with double TT winner Ryan Farquhar who befriended the Swede and took him on a couple of sighting laps of the course in a car. "Ryan told me that to win at the slowest possible speed was best," said Nilsson.

spitting distance of Quarter Bridge in Douglas – in an attempt to clear up a shoulder injury he suffered in a racing crash in Sweden just a few days before setting off for the Isle of Man.

Come race day and Nilsson's predictions came true. Having successfully negotiated a higher starting number he left alongside joint favourite Shane Connor.

Connor was marginally ahead on the road at the first commentary point, Glen Helen, but a determined Nilsson was back in front five miles farther on at Kirk Michael.

He did his utmost to deny the Irishman a passing opportunity, but Connor eventually fired his 750 Suzuki through into a never-to-be-relinquished lead.

A sub-20 minute standing start lap of 115.493mph left Nilsson 12 seconds adrift at quarter distance, but from thereon it was a hopeless

task and he settled for second at a race average of 112.653mph.

"Second place is not normally in my vocabulary," said Nilsson after the four-lapper.

"I tried really hard, but the standard forks compressed, making the rear-end very light. For a while it felt like a rear puncture. To make matters worse the rear shock didn't work after a while either, so I was riding on the edge to keep up.

"As far as I am concerned this is the start of a four-year plan for the Isle of Man. It was a case of turning up this year to see if it was my kind of thing. It's right up my alley so I intend to return.

"I may come back and ride the TT if I can get a good entry on a decent bike. I will seriously go for it in my third year and should be way up there with the fast guys by year four.

"John McGuinness look out!"



No Swede has ever won a solo race on the Snaefell Mountain Course – former GP star Borje Jansson finished runner-up to Chas Mortimer in the 1971 Lightweight 125 TT, filling the second place vacated by a certain newcomer by the name of Barry Sheene when he slid off at Quarter Bridge on lap two.