



# Racer On Racer

**RACER ON RACER**  
HAYDEN FITZGERALD



*Fast Family*

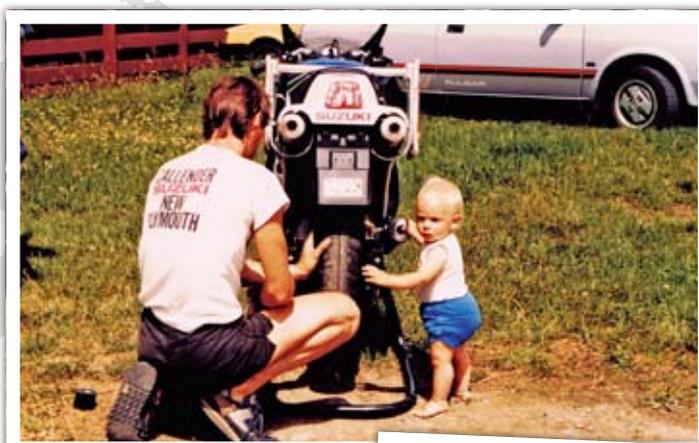
# Fitzgerald

Words: **Glen Williams**

Hayden Fitzgerald seems to have been around the New Zealand road racing scene for a while now, but at only 25 years young – there is still plenty of time for this second generation Fitzgerald (who is the son of NZ road race icon Terry) to make his mark on our shores. Glen Williams gets the gossip on the lad from the Naki.



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Being one of the more, ahem, "experienced" road race campaigners in New Zealand I can clearly remember a fresh faced Hayden Fitzgerald turning up on the race scene some ten years ago. Typically he would be riding one of his dad's spare bikes or be on a borrowed bike to race in the Clubmans or one of Tim Gibbes Winter Series graded racing classes. He clearly enjoyed being part of the scene and had a hunger to take this road racing lark a lot further.

## Back in the day....

Hayden's first experience on two wheels was riding around on the home farm aged 2 1/2. "Me and my sister would send my mum mad going round and round in circles all day long – and it was from there that we both learnt the basics which took us onto riding in local junior motocross meetings and the like in Taranaki". Hayden had to wait until he was 16 before being allowed to legally compete in a race on tarmac, which seemed like an eternity and he was gutted to find that the very year he was allowed they changed the rules to let 13 year old juniors onto the track. Nevertheless he was now on the black stuff and doing what he wanted to do. "I started by racing my Suzuki RGV250 and then dad's GSX-R400 for the first few years, I travelled to the Nationals with him and got to ride on most of the tracks in New Zealand. My dad (Terry) was really good and allowed me to develop my own skills and make my own mistakes – and I learnt a lot along the way and I thank him for that".

From there he moved onto an ex Ray Clee Racing Suzuki GSX-R600 that was owned by one of Hayden's earliest sponsors; Deane and Donna Labrum from Design Engineering Specialist Ltd.

## Opportunity knocks

In 2004 Hayden was selected to represent New Zealand in the Oceania Championship and managed to finish 5th overall in the New Zealand National 600cc production class.

At the same time, Irishman Des Collins was out in New Zealand scouting for riders to go over and compete in the Isle of Man Manx GP, and approached Hayden. "It sounded like a lot of fun and the timing worked out so that I would go straight over there after I had finished doing some racing with Brian Bernard in Queensland, Australia. The Manx course is pretty scary but once you learn how to link up a few of the many corners it becomes a bit more comfortable". Hayden reckons that one of the best ways to approach a circuit like the Manx was to treat it like "a fast ride to the shops". And so it was that at the age of 19 "Blondini" (a nickname given to him by Steve Bagshaw and the late Derek Hill due to his flowing blond locks during the 2004 season) became 'blooded' as a NZ international rider.

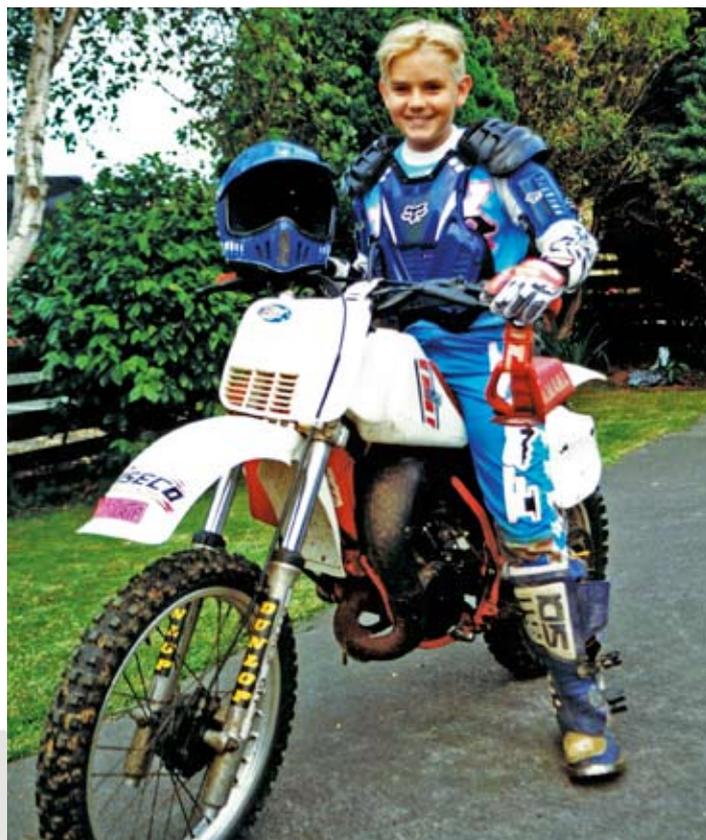
"In 2005 I became part of Brian Bernard's rider development team on a 600. We had a lot of fun that year and I finished 4th in the NZ Nationals plus I competed in the 3 hour endurance race at Pukekohe with Brian as my team mate". The year also included Hayden's first ride on a Honda. "Gary Pendelton (then from GP Honda, Tauranga) organised a ride for me on a CBR600 and we took it to

Australia to do most of the Australian National Championship series. It was a steep learning curve to turn up to new tracks and have very little practice time to get up to a competitive speed. Gary and Brian came over to assist me and without them it would have been impossible to do – I also had the assistance of fellow Kiwi (& ex racer) Sally Steadman who was training to become a sports psychologist at the time and was willing to experiment on me". The team had a couple of respectable top ten finishes in the Aussie series which is considered by many to be a world class level competition.

The Honda 600 connection continued in NZ for 2006, netting a fifth place overall in the NZ nat's and then it was off to the UK to compete in the ACU Star Championship, which is just one level down from the British Superbike Series (BSB). "I had some really good results with the help of Taubman's in the UK that year riding a Yamaha R6 and finishing second overall. It managed to get me noticed by a few teams for my return in 2007 to do the BSB series on a Yamaha R1". But first it was another round of the NZ Nationals on a CBR1000 Honda with his right hand man and trusted mechanic 'Westie' in tow – they ended the year with a respectable seventh place overall that being his first full year on a Superbike.

## British Superbike Beckons:

Hayden had to front up with some hard earned cash to ride in the British Superbike Champs (to the tune of NZ\$45,000) – this getting him a start in the series with a relatively new team named NCT Vanfit Yamaha. "I tried to do BSB for as little cost as possible and lived with the team 24/7. The team was new to the sport and there were some issues that needed to be ironed out in respect of how it was run and how the bikes would get set up. It can get quite political within these teams and I had to get adjusted to all the different characters and pressures that existed, which was tricky at times". Hayden's first experience of BSB was turning up at Brands Hatch to find 62 teams entered and only 40 spots available on the grid. "I ended up qualifying 40th! – it was pretty amazing, if I had been even a tenth of a second slower I would have been 46th and not even qualified!" Hayden did achieve a personal victory though by out-qualifying his own team mate Alistair Seeley. The year also included competing in the Northwest 200 which he loved. "The Northwest 200 road circuit was fantastic and something just clicked with me and the bike while we were there, and from that point on we had better results pretty much everywhere". Some help from world road racing



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ate about motorcycles, meant that there was plenty of motivation to do well and a third place at the NZ GP in Christchurch was a good start

"I managed to finish 4th overall that year and was pleased with some of my results against some pretty tough competition. While the bike was very good, both Craig and I treated this first season as a bit of a development year for the new machine".

At only 25 Hayden Fitzgerald still has plenty of time to prove his worth, and now he has completed his degree in computer graphics he is planning to settle down in "The Naki" to concentrate on work and his racing. The team at BRM wish him the best of luck in his future endeavours. **BRM**

**QUICK FIRE STATS:**

- Age:** 25
- Nickname:** Blondini
- Height/Weight:** Height - 176 cm, Weight 78 kg
- First Bike owned:** PW 50
- Home Town:** Bell Block
- Marital Status:** Unmarried
- Occupation:** Computer Graphic Designer
- Other Hobbies:** Mountain Biking, Motocross, Swimming
- Favourite Movie:** Faster
- Favourite Music:** Pennywise
- Dream Broolly Dolly:** Lacey Chabert
- Favourite Track:** NZ- Levels International Raceway. World- Between Oulton Park and Phillip Island
- Most respected riders:** John McGuinness, Johnny Rae and Eugene Laverty
- Best race advice ever given:** If in doubt, flat out (advice while doing the Isle of Man)
- Best race advice to give:** Focus on your own game.

icon John McGuinness also helped. "I got on really well with John and at many tracks he went out of his way to help me out with some local track knowledge and assisting with bike set up stuff - he is a really nice guy and seemed to like the Kiwi way of doing things". Hayden secured a very respectable 11th place finish at Mondello in Ireland, but not long after that he realised he couldn't afford to carry on and had to finish up with the BSB series.

**Homeward bound**

Back home for the 2008 season and his overall result in the NZ superbike series was not helped by a BIG crash at the Timaru round. "I had the fastest crash of my career, hopping off

the Blade at 280kph at round two of the Nationals. The bike ended up over the boundary fence and planted in the front seat of one of the flag marshal's cars!! Fortunately no-one including myself got badly hurt, but by the end of the series I only managed a 7th place finish".

He had no money to head overseas in 2009, however an all-new Honda Fireblade was released for that season which looked pretty exciting. "The 2009 Blade was a totally new bike, it handled as nimbly as a 600 and was a pleasure to race from day one". He also got a new teammate in the form of the fast and experienced Craig Shirriffs, and this along with a new head honcho Phil Haynes at Honda NZ who is passion-

