



Craig being chased by Aussie Chris Seaton over Paeroa's hill.

RACER ON RACER

Words: Glen Williams, Pics: Terry Stevenson, Dalls Alexander and Honda

Craig Shirriffs is one of New Zealand's fastest racers and has just embarked on a new chapter of his career. BRM's racing contributor, Glen Williams gets the lowdown on Shirriffs' recent move to Castrol Honda Racing.

Feilding's Craig Shirriffs has been on the road racing scene in New Zealand for almost 15 of his 35 years and has developed into one of our country's quickest 'locals'. Craig comes from a family with a long racing heritage and he is set to continue this for some years yet. We had a chance to catch up with Craig at a recent race meeting where he was debuting his new Honda Fireblade for the 2009 season – here's his story so far.

So Craig, your dad (Morley) was a chap who could ride most things

with two wheels very quickly - do the genes follow in the family?

Yeah pretty much! Bikes have been in the family bloodline since I can remember and there's always been one or two around the place to throw a leg over, so we got plenty of practice from an early age.

When and where did your road racing career begin?

I suppose bucket racing was my first foray into road bikes and that led onto me buying a Honda NSR250 way back in 1993, which we took to the Masterton road race track and



immediately won on it. The following year we picked up a newer Suzuki RGV250 and we won a bunch of stuff on that plus also took it to Australia for the GP meeting and finished in the top ten there.

Is that where your long association with Suzuki began?

Yeah, pretty much. My dad had a very good relationship with Phil Turnbull and his Suzuki shop in Palmerston North, so with the RGV Suzuki's support just carried on from there really.

How hard was it to find private sponsorship support for you're racing in your early days - and even now?

It's still damn near impossible, which I think comes down to the public's perception of motorcycles generally

in New Zealand. This is where we need the governing body (MNZ) to get involved to keep trying to lift the spectacle of motorcycle racing as a sport within New Zealand by securing television and as much media coverage as possible. This then makes it a lot easier to go to potential sponsors as they are then able to quantify real returns in respect to exposure for their dollars.

Have you had any memorable crashes through your career thus far?

I've haven't really suffered too badly injury-wise from crashing, - but like anything you tend to do more of it when you are young and inexperienced than now. The most memorable - well probably falling off at turn one at Teretonga (a very fast 220kph + entry corner) is one you don't forget in a hurry!

Do you have a road bike at all?

Nope and I have never actually owned one, I much prefer to go fast on the track.

You rode a 600 and also a Superbike in the NZ road race championship in 2007, was that difficult?

No not really, and I would do it again (given the chance). It does require quite a bit more planning and teamwork though.



On the gas at Paeroa.

PIC: TERRY STEVENSON



Craig trying the CBR for size.

PIC: DALLAS ALEXANDER

How do you rate your 2008 Superbike effort?

It was good, but riding the extra class (600s) still would have been nice. I definitely have some unfinished business in Superbikes though.

You have had great success in the street meetings (Wanganui, Paeroa, Gisborne) over the years, why is that you think?

It's probably my dirt track background. Even my early buckets experience taught me to relax and ignore what's around you. I've never had a problem letting the bike move around a lot under me.

You also raced at the Isle of Man twice, - if you had to pick three words what would sum that track up?

Dangerous, Awesome, and Scary

What are you riding in the 2009 New Zealand road race championship?

I am in the Superbike class on a Honda Fireblade this year.

Why the change to Honda?

Cause I wanna win! And it's a great package we have this year, I'm

confident that we can do the business.

How strong is your motivation for 2009?

Very strong, I have the equipment and a fresh new attitude comes along with it.

How important is it to have the right people and team around you at the track?

It is very important. You need to have 100% faith in the people that work on the bike right through to the people that are supporting this team (Honda) - and I have that.

How important are tyre choices / brands on the machine?

It's critical to get the machine and the tyres working as a package, this year we are on Pirelli tyres and I have



PIC: TERRY STEVENSON

QUICK FACTS:

- Age: 35
- Married: As good as
- Family: Two children
- Location: Feilding
- Occupation: Fully qualified drainlayer
- Age first rode a bike: 3
- Favorite race circuit NZ: Teretonga
- Favorite street circuit NZ: Gisborne
- Least favorite track: Manfield
- Favourite band: ACDC (I had long hair once)
- Favourite Movie: Running on empty
- Other hobbies: Family
- Most respected local rival: Sam Smith
- Most idolized rider: Kevin Schwantz
- Dream job: MotoGP Superstar

no doubt that we can have a very competitive package.

Are you doing a lot of pre-season testing?

This year we are (which is a change from past years), and it's something I like to do - you can't beat bum in

the saddle time, especially as we are setting up an all new bike this year.

Are you still enjoying your racing?

Yeah for sure, as you become more experienced you learn to set ever higher goals, - this makes it both challenging and fun.

BRM



PIC: TERRY STEVENSON



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