



IT'S LOVE AT FIRST BIKE

Words: Glen Williams

He's young, he's fast and he's Ginga – and according to our race reporter Glen Williams he has the credentials to go far. So we sent Glen off to Round 6 of the Victoria Motorcycle Club's winter series to share a pit shed with Sam Love and get the low-down on this new star in the 600cc Supersport class.



Wheelies in the paddock - age 10

I've known Sam for a few years now and have watched his steady development as a road racer and also as a person. His style on the track is smooth, consistent and calculating. His manner off track is that of a person that sets high goals for himself and goes about achieving them with dedication and resolve.

These are attributes that any good road racer needs to get them through the tough times when things might not be going smoothly (and in the sport of road racing – things can get pretty rough, pretty darn fast...)

Sam Love has some well known close relations that many motorcyclists may already know; his uncle Laurie Love is a multiple road race

and off-road champion, whilst his cousin Jared - ten years Sam's senior - has proved himself to be a successful road racer in New Zealand. Sam started his two-wheeled adventure at age six on a motocross bike and from that point on has always had access to something with two wheels and an engine around home.

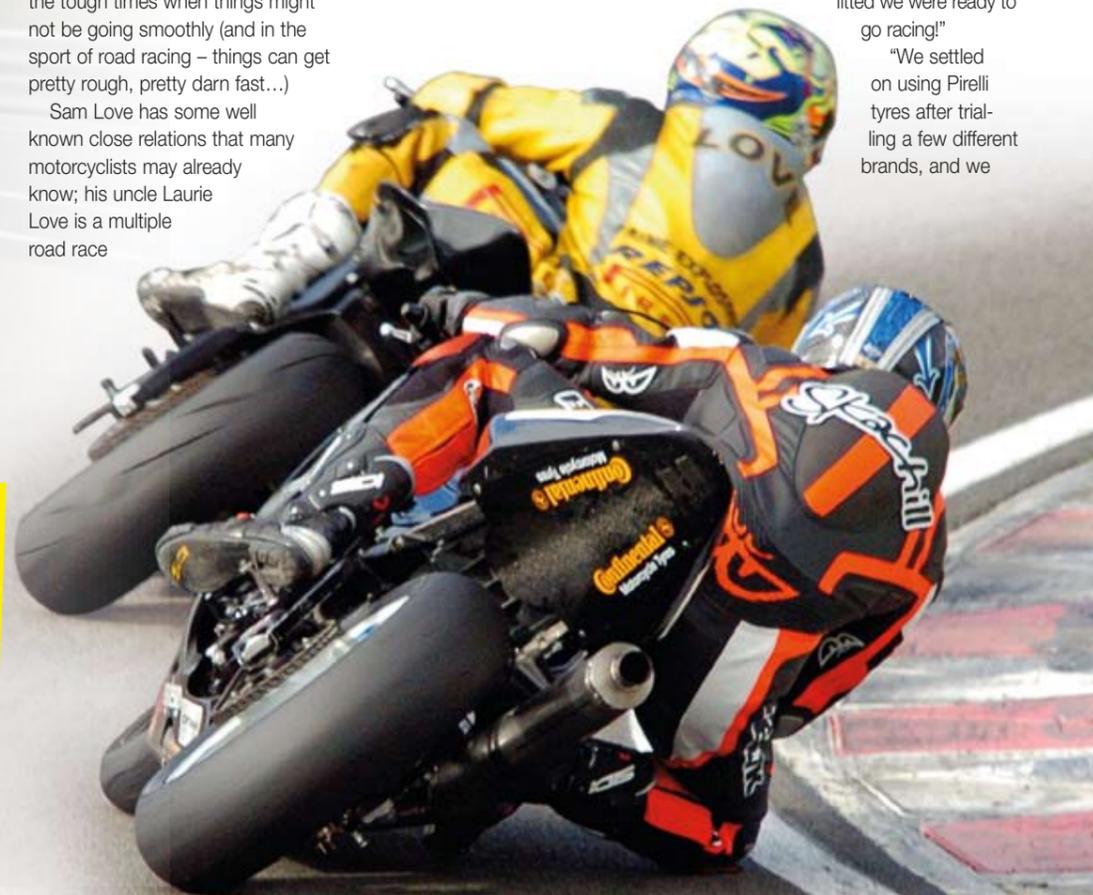
Sam's own family had mixed feelings in the early days when he wanted to get into road racing, with his mum (Donna) being dead against the idea (especially if it involved racing on street circuits), and his dad Allan (who owns and rides a road bike) being only slightly more enthusiastic. "Mum was dead set against me getting into road racing after seeing some of my cousin Jared's bad accidents. However, dad soon realised that it was better for me to be getting into this sport than wandering off and maybe getting into some less savoury pastimes that a young person might fall into nowadays. Dad suggested to my mum that at least this sport would teach me about taking responsibility for myself and also that success only comes from hard work and commitment."

It wasn't until he was 17 that he had an opportunity to purchase a Kawasaki ZX-R400 and go to his first road race meeting. "I remember my first road race meeting at one of the Pacific Motorcycle Club's summer series held at Taupo in early 2007. I finished in the top five in Formula 3 and from then on I knew that this was what I wanted to do!"

He only kept the ZXR for six months as he had heard about a new national level racing class called 'Pro-Twins' being started up by MNZ, which was to be a low cost and closely competitive race class. "I learnt that the Pro-Twins class was to be for more-or-less stock standard 650cc twin machines, and that it was to be run as a national title class, and I saw this as a good opportunity to step up a level."

Sam went straight to the bank and arranged a loan – with this he was able to go out and purchase a new Suzuki SV650 from his long time supporter Dannevirke Suzuki. "It didn't take long to turn the bike into a race machine with some race fibreglass from Auto Cycle Refinishers in Tauranga, and with some Öhlins suspension parts fitted we were ready to go racing!"

"We settled on using Pirelli tyres after trialling a few different brands, and we



QUICK FIRE STATS:

- Age: 21
- Weight/Height: 62kg / 170cm
- Home Base: Hamilton
- Occupation: Electrician
- Dream Dolly Brolly: Girlfriend (Kylie) – or Hayley from Paramore...
- Best race advice ever given: If you don't wanna go broke, don't go racing
- Best race advice to give: Racing is 60% mental, 40% physical
- Age first rode bike: 5
- Favorite Movie: The Girl Next Door
- Other hobbies: BMX
- Favorite Music: Paramore
- Most respected rider: Jorge Lorenzo



Racer On Racer

- SAM LOVE

have "stuck" with these ever since. "My proud debut for the Pro-Twin bike was at one of the rounds of the Victoria Motorcycle Club's winter series in 2007, although unfortunately my gear linkage fell off in practice (my fault) and I didn't qualify! I was pretty much an unknown then, so I had to race in the Clubman's class, where I had the ignominy of crashing out on the very first lap (whilst in the lead!)" After that rather inglorious start, Sam then caught glandular fever and was out of racing for four months, recovering and having his tonsils removed.

Later that year he got back on the bike and felt pretty much at home on it straight away. "I still had my sights set on competing in the 2008 National series in the Pro-Twins class. Some stiff competition was ahead from the likes of Karl Morgan and Geoff Booth – but I felt that I had a real chance, and at the time I was receiving some mentoring support from road race star Shaun Harris." His parents wouldn't (and still don't) want him to compete in the street meetings, so he ignored these and prepared to head to the South Island and the start of the national road race series.

"We arrived at the Ruapuna track in Christchurch on a mission! However, it was not to be a good series... On the very first day (unofficial practice on Thursday), I crashed out at turn one which is a 200kph entry corner." Sam badly broke his ankle in that crash which took six months to recover from and he still has four pins in his ankle today to show for it. I re-call visiting

him in hospital that same day, and to say he was gutted and totally disappointed with his performance would be an understatement. "I F*^#-ed up big time, it was a big crash and that incident taught me a lot about how you go about winning a championship." It ended Sam's campaign for that season and whilst his mum was secretly hoping that this would signal the end of Sam's road racing, it only in fact endeared his resolve to succeed in this sport.

Sam's next ride on a bike was not until the middle of 2008 and it took a few rides to get back up to his old pace again. "I was much more prepared for the 2009 National season in Pro-Twins and approached the build up to this series with a real awareness of the consequences if I got things wrong!" In 2009 the series started at Teretonga in Invercargill (a track that Sam had never seen before) but nevertheless the results were spectacular – with pole, three wins and a new lap record. "I couldn't have asked for a better start to the season and it gave me a lot more confidence." Timaru was the next round up (after some 'R&R' in Queenstown with the boys (and girls), the result was much the same with three wins and maximum points.

Sam's bogey track (Ruapuna) was next, and he was happy to come away with a second overall result from local rider Patrick Jones, as well as securing another lap record. The fourth round



The aftermath of Ruapuna 2008



ProTwin champ

at Manfeild was another success with pole, three wins and

a lap record. Sam sewed the national Pro-Twins championship up at the last round at Pukekohe, and even though it was the only place he had a DNF from a crash, he did manage to win the New Zealand TT and set the lap record.

"I was rapt with how the season went overall and I was able to repay my support from long-term sponsors Prime Explosives and N & D Natural Health Ltd for their support and faith." It was indeed an impressive and totally dominant performance. An added bonus of Sam's recent success is that his mum is now a lot more supportive of his racing career as well.

For this season Sam has decided to move up to the 600 Supersport class and has recently purchased a

Yamaha R6 for this job. Recent tests at Manfeild have shown him to be just over one second off lap record pace – and that's in the winter when track conditions have been cool and less grippy. "I'm really enjoying the ease of set up that the Yamaha R6 offers with the help of Dukic suspension, plus the power and speed is awesome"

It would be a fair bet that Sam Love will be playing at the pointy end of the race field when the flag drops. "My goal is to finish in the top five for the 2010 national season - I am really looking forward to it!" Sam expects his main competition to come from experienced campaigners James Smith, Dennis Charlette and Nick Cole, as well as new comer Glen Skachill. Sam's long-term future wish is to take his racing career as far as possible in New Zealand – but to look at racing opportunities overseas as soon as he can. We at BRM wish him all the best for this season. **BRM**



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