

RACE SCENE

NATIONAL ROAD RACING CHAMPS PREVIEW



TRACKFACTS

Words: Glen Williams Photos: BRM / fotoCD

Racing contributor Glen Williams gives us the low-down on the tracks that the Castrol Power 1 New Zealand Superbike Championship racers will be visiting this year. Here's the hum on the tracks, their signature corners and quick tip or two on how to cut a fast lap.

Round: 1

Where: Levels, Timaru
When: January 29-30

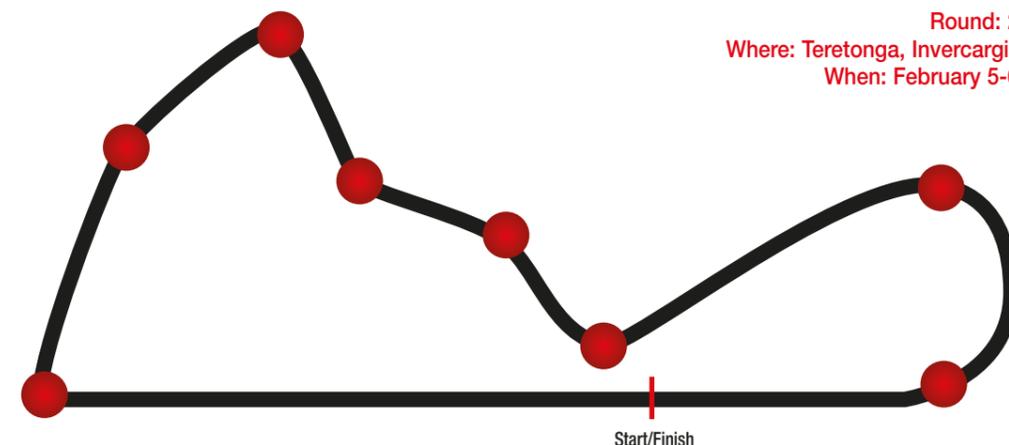
Timaru or 'Levels' is a tight and twisty track that's rated highly by many of the top riders. It's quite technical to ride and is a good test of your cornering skills. It also tests the trust that you have in your front-end setup and grip, as this track demands that you carry lots of lean-angle whilst trail braking into many of its nil camber turns.

It has a good mixture of corners including a fast entry one at the end of the back straight, which has a blind exit that requires serious commitment. It also features a number of decreasing radius turns that require pinpoint accuracy with your entry line and a steady throttle hand going through them.

Levels is a track made up mostly of a newer 'extension' track built some 20 years ago and this joins together with a portion of the old original surface. The older section is quite a bit bumpier and the seal type differs from the extension, which has a different grip level, keeping you on your toes and thinking all the time.

Signature corners of Levels are the ballsy 260kph entry left-hander at the end of the longish back straight (turn 4) and also the long left-hander (turn 6) that turns back on itself before taking a right and then going into the circuit's infield tight right-hand hairpin.

Starting a race at Levels is always a bit of a lottery with the start-line being no more than 50 or so meters from the first turn which is a tight narrow 90° right-hander. It's a favourite place for spectators to



Round: 2
Where: Teretonga, Invercargill
When: February 5-6

stand and they will often get to see plenty of contact.

The trick to a good lap time at Levels is making sure that you get a good drive onto the back straight, and then getting from turn 6 through to the front straight in as short a time as possible.

Being the first round of the New Zealand Road Race Series, there should be plenty of action with all riders wishing to establish a top position in the championship to then build on. Spectator viewing points are good, although it's not possible to watch the full track from any one position.

Superbike Lap Record:

1.03:59 - held by Andrew Stroud

Levels Track Scoreboard

Condition of surface: 6/10

Grip availability: 6/10

Difficulty level: 8/10

Pit facilities: 2/10

Spectator viewing points: 7/10

Overall rating: 5.8/10

Round: 2

Where: Teretonga, Invercargill
When: February 5-6

Teretonga is not only New Zealand's southernmost circuit; it is the southernmost in the world. This fact can make for interesting conditions weather-wise and it is distinctly possible to experience all seasons in their extreme within the same day.

Teretonga is located not much more than a Par 5 from the Southern Ocean and is renowned for viscous gusty crosswinds that can whistle over the track, catching even the most experienced rider out at times.

The track is blessed though with a surface that provides simply outstanding grip – so much so that it often presents suspension technicians and riders with lots of headaches trying to minimize tyre wear from the abrasive surface.

The signature corner at Teretonga is without doubt the very fast entry left-hand turn one 'Southern loop' or sweeper. It is a stunning bend within which you spend 10 seconds of your



lap time – most of it at full lean-angle. It's a critical turn to get right for a fast lap and is at best an exhilarating corner and at worst, downright scary.

The balance of the track is fast and flowing – with the final left-hand turn coming back onto the front straight being the only one that feels the odd one out from the rhythm of the others - this may be due to the fact that the final turn as it is today was not part of the original designer's layout.

A good spectator point is to park up on the bank on the outside of turn one, this spot gives you a seriously close look at the speed of the bikes entering this very fast corner and if anything happens it will be big.

Superbike Lap Record:

57.5sec - held by Robbie Bugden

Teretonga Track Scoreboard

Condition of surface: 7/10

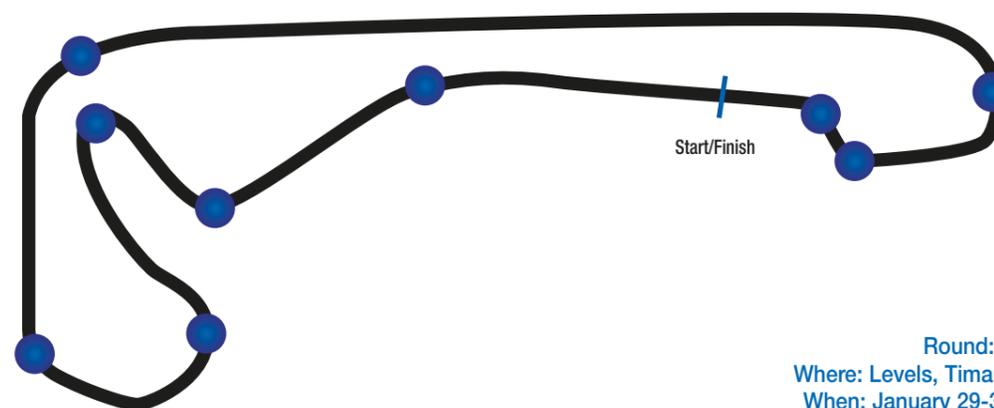
Grip availability: 9/10

Difficulty level: 7/10

Pit facilities: 4/10

Spectator viewing points 6/10

Overall Rating: 6.6/10



Round: 1
Where: Levels, Timaru
When: January 29-30



Round: 3

Where: Ruapuna, Christchurch
When: 12-13 February

At 3.33km Ruapuna Powerbuilt Raceway is the longest track that the bikes visit in the five-round series. It is also where the NZGP title is competed for on the same weekend as the National Title event.

Ruapuna provides a big range of twists and turns, 16 or more in all, and so it can keep the mind busy and be a good test of your fitness. It can be quite challenging trying to smoothly link all of the many turns together and maintain a fast flowing rhythm.

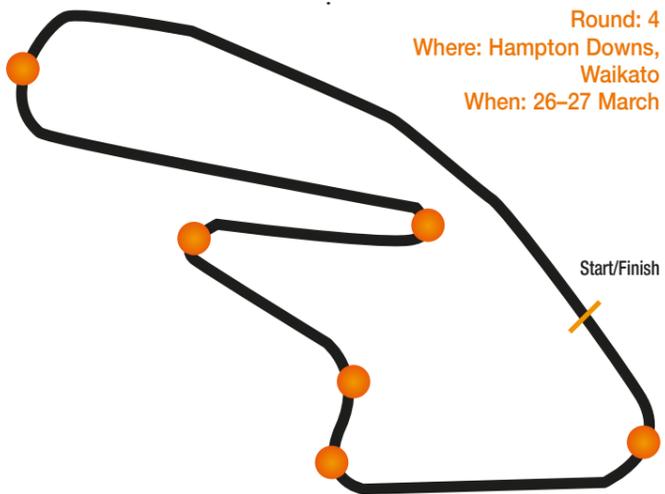
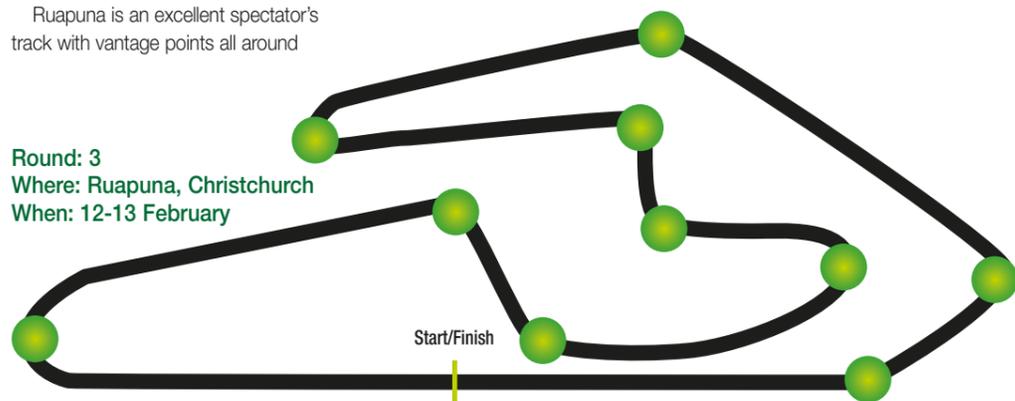
The long front straight doubles as the local drag strip (in reverse) and thus at its end just about where the bikes tip into a fast left-hand kink that precedes the bumpy turn one there tends to be lots of rubber and ripples left by the drag racers. This makes things slippery in wet conditions and is something to be aware of.

Somewhat unique to Ruapuna and most likely the signature corner for bikes is a turn called 'the dipper'. It's a first or second gear right-hander near to the end of the lap and as the name suggests it's a turn that you drop into and literally dip out of sight from the track-side spectators, followed a moment later by popping out the other side on the steep uphill exit. Many of the riders are wary of the rear end unloading as you crest the rise exiting this turn in a low gear and will be mindful of a potential high-side crash of which there are always a few come race day.

Ruapuna is an excellent spectator's track with vantage points all around

Round: 3

Where: Ruapuna, Christchurch
When: 12-13 February



Round: 4

Where: Hampton Downs, Waikato
When: 26-27 March

the circuit where you can drive to and watch pretty much most of the circuit from the comfort of your own car. The trick to a fast lap time is getting good drive onto the front straight and also nailing a smooth and fast line through the fast kink on the far side straight. The many corners are important also – but concentrating on 'Nanas' a long in-field right hand turn is also critical to a hot lap.

Superbike Lap Record:
1.30.0 - held by Andrew Stroud

Ruapuna Track Scoreboard
Condition of surface: 7/10
Grip availability: 7/10
Difficulty level: 8/10
Pit Facilities: 7/10
Spectator Viewing Points 8/10
Overall rating: 7.4/10

Round: 4

Where: Hampton Downs, Waikato
When: 26-27 March

The newest of the New Zealand tracks means that 2011 will be just the second year that the championship comes to this circuit. Still under construction, the current circuit is 2.8km long with this expecting to be lengthened by 1km in the future.

Hampton Downs is a fast and flowing circuit with some moderate elevation changes giving riders a different experience from most other

NZ track layouts, which are generally speaking flat in nature.

The right-hand downhill entry turn one at Hampton Downs is a fun and challenging turn with its apex being blind. The infield left-hand hairpin is another downhill turn with the main challenge being its braking point occurring near to the crown of the hill just prior to the corner. This then makes the bike quite light in the rear and it is a popular place for spectators to watch and see some sideways entry action.

The penultimate turn is a fast right-hand sweeper that is critical to a good lap time as its exit leads onto the long and curved uphill final turn and front 'straight'. The start/finish line has moved back a little for this season as last year it was placed beyond the brake mark points for many bikes – meaning some tough decisions were made by some riders if they were in a close dice and didn't want to close the throttle until crossing the line – well beyond their usual braking point for turn one!

Grip as a rule is excellent with few bumps and surface faults to speak of as should be expected from a track this new. The NZTT title is also competed for at this event.

Superbike Lap Record:
1.04.6 - held by Andrew Stroud

Hampton Downs Track Scoreboard
Condition of surface: 8/10
Grip availability: 8/10
Difficulty level: 7/10
Pit Facilities: 2/10
Spectator Viewing Points: 6/10
Overall rating: 5.6/10

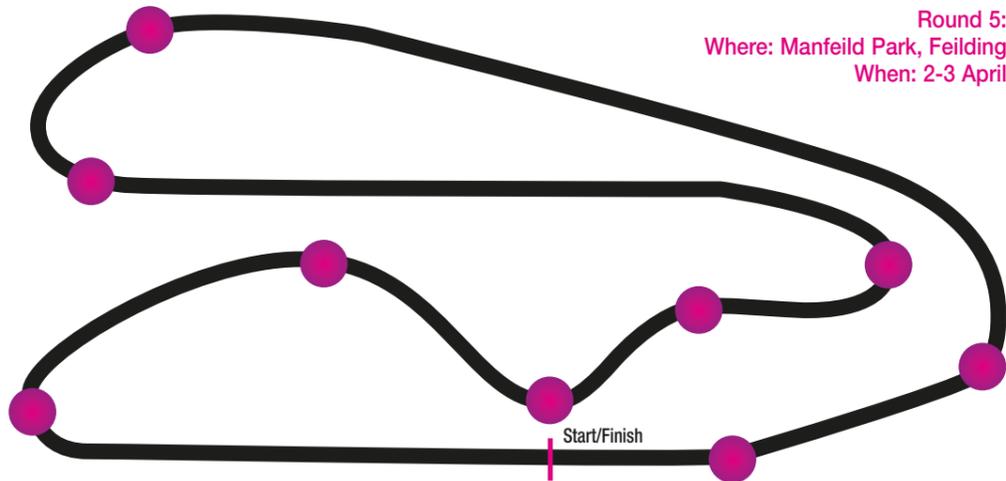
Round 5:

Where: Manfeild Park, Feilding
When: 2-3 April

Manfeild is commonly referred to by racers as being three drag strips inter-connected by a few bendy bits, and in essence it can be broken down to that. Brake performance and your braking setup on the machine is therefore always an important consideration at this circuit.

The 'short' 3km circuit is used for the New Zealand nationals even though the Feilding based layout has an excellent 1.5km extension available for use.

For spectator viewing it is the



Round 5:
Where: Manfeild Park, Feilding
When: 2-3 April

Superbike Lap Record:
1.05.3 - held by Andrew Stroud

Manfeild Track Scoreboard
Condition of surface: 6/10
Grip availability: 7/10
Difficulty level: 10/10
Pit Facilities: 7/10
Spectator Viewing: 8/10
Overall rating: 6.8/10

Final word

This year's racing is going to be close; will the Aussies be able to reclaim the Superbike title from NZ's own Mr Stroud? Will the 600 Supersport title stay in New Zealand hands? The 600 Superstock class is looking to be well supported with entries at the moment and there are a number of young up-and-coming riders chasing that title. The 1000cc Superstock class is also up for grabs.

All other classes will be closely contested also, so pack your lunch, jump on your bike or throw the family in the car and get along to your local round and cheer the Kiwis on! Check www.brm.co.nz for regular updates on the action.

pick of the bunch – with the entire track being able to be viewed from a number of vantage points in the grandstand alongside the front straight. The stop/go nature of the circuit also creates many passing opportunities for riders, giving spectators of action for their buck.

It's tough to pick a signature corner for Manfeild but if pushed to decide it's probably the last turn (Dunlop) which is the one that comes back onto the front straight, if any-

thing only because this turn has seen so many races decided at the last moment. This turn has two or three distinctly different lines through it, with each having their strengths and weaknesses. The heavily banked Higgins corner preceding the last turn is also a good test of man/woman and machine as this turn differs so much in camber from all the others on the circuit making it hard at times to judge just how much extra corner speed may be carried through it.

'Splash' or the infield left hander is the turn to watch at Manfeild with it being the first left hander on the circuit and it is a place where cold tyres and a bit of red-mist can catch the unwary out in the first few laps.

The trick to a fast lap time is getting through Higgins and Dunlop as quickly as possible.

Being the last round of the series there should be plenty of action with championships likely being decided in each of the classes.