



When The Flag Drops

The Bullshit Stops (Part 1)

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When road racing - the importance of your pre-race routine pit preparations, warm-up lap, and start-line technique should not be minimized as resident racer contributor Glen Williams explains.

Preparation first

The build-up for heading out onto track for a road-race begins in your pit. Being mentally prepared and avoiding being 'stressed out' prior to going racing can be important for your focus. Sometimes it's the small things like not rushing to get your race gear on, or having a clear pre-race routine developed prior to leaving your pit area.

Some riders find that listening to music will calm their nerves prior to racing; others find that they need to sit quietly and collect their thoughts before getting on the bike, but whatever your preference - it is best to find a routine that suits you and is the most effective at getting you focused.

Having your bike prepared and ready to race is another step in this process. Having confidence in things like your tyre condition and their temperature, the condition of your brakes, the bikes suspension set up etc will all play a part in your own mind-set and whether or not you will be psychologically "prepared to go" when the flag drops.

If you have doubts in your mind regarding some aspects of either the bike's or your own pre-race preparation then this can rob you of confidence and this will almost certainly show up in your on track riding performance.

Part of your preparation can also include taking the opportunity to go and study the starting lights or the flag operator of a race prior to your own. Take note of their position and the starting technique used - sometimes this information can provide you with an advantage.

The warm up lap

So you've removed your tyre warmers, double checked that the tyres are hot with your bare hand (it's amazing how often tyre warmers breakdown or become unplugged accidentally). You've also warmed the engine up to operating temp, - so your sighting or "warm up lap" is the next step.

Some riders prefer to complete the warm up lap at a fast pace in the interest of getting their minds up to "race pace" and to get corner speeds clear in their head. (Note: - I can vouch for a fact that falling off in a warm up lap is highly embarrassing...

- so don't go too fast...).

Others might want to dawdle around on the warm up lap, quietly calming themselves whilst scrubbing in their tyres and calculating tactics and then roll up onto the grid in a more relaxed style.

Beware of completing your warm-up lap too slowly though as the race officials and your competitors (with ever cooling tyres) might take exception to you holding them up on the starting grid for too long!

The trick again is to find out which technique suits your own style and then stick to it.

Turning up at the grid

When arriving on the starting grid you will need to be paying attention to your surroundings (especially if the field sizes are large) - as there will be other riders slowing down, some quite quickly, testing brakes and some more slowly, some will be weaving back and forth to coax that last little bit of heat into their tyres whilst yet others will be arriving from behind you and some will have already stopped on their allocated grid marker.

Of importance to yourself is to avoid all of this traffic and to settle yourself on your allocated grid. Take



Pre-start checklist

Warm tyres



a good look at your grid mark before rolling to a stop, - is it located on a flat part of the track? Or is there some camber to consider? (This becomes especially important if it is wet, as the camber could possibly generate a rear wheel sideways slide as you accelerate away), are there white lines on your grid mark or just in front of the mark that you might be able to avoid by aligning yourself slightly to one side or the other? Pay

special attention to try and avoid any painted lines that run longitudinally with the track.

If there is a rider gridded directly in front of you (and not offset) - check to see if you can line up slightly to one side or the other of him/her? This is in case they don't get a quick start and might hinder you as you accelerate away, consider this especially if the grid rows are quite close together front to back.

Once you have come to a stop - now is also the time to take a few deep breaths and give your brain a bit of oxygen, also settle your thoughts and focus on the job at hand of getting away from the start line quickly, cleanly and under control!

Personally I tend to check helmet straps, glove and boot Velcro straps, Leather suit zips are secure and my helmet visor position, these are simple things to double check plus it gives your mind something to do other than get all hyped up about the pending start!

Prior to flag drop

Just prior to the lights going out or the green flag dropping - you should have your bike in gear, the bike exactly

upright/vertical and front wheel pointing dead straight. Your start line posture should be set with your body lent forward and low resting the weight of your midriff onto the rear of the fuel tank, helping to limit the severity of any impromptu wheelies.

Some riders like to have both feet on the ground, others have their right foot down and with left foot on the peg or vice versa, - whatever technique you use, I suggest that you stick to one version only as this way you will breed consistency with your starts and receive a similar reaction from the machine each time you make a start.

Throttle and clutch control release is your next choice, there are a few options. Do you hold it steady at high revs at or near peak torque followed by feeding out the clutch? Or hold the throttle steady at high revs (whilst) having the clutch partially out and just beginning to "bite" but preventing the bike from moving forward by holding it back with a bit of pressure on the front brake? Another alternative is "blipping" the throttle and timing the feeding of the clutch in when leaving the line?

On smaller race machines it is not uncommon to see riders assisting

there starts with a bit of a push from their legs on the ground.

I have seen top riders use any of the above techniques and more, but once again, whichever your preference simply choose one and keep practicing it and stick with it to breed consistency.

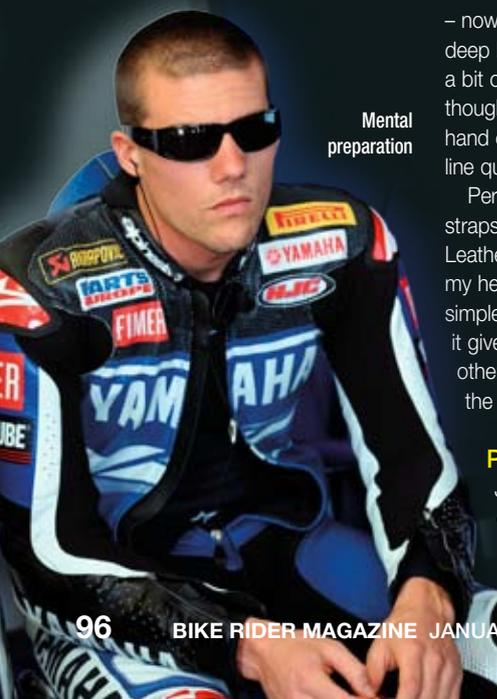
The moment of truth

Reaction times rule when it comes to quick effective starts - however having your head in a calm place, remembering to breathe properly and being focused on the flag or the lights is the key. Try not to pay any attention to riders in your peripheral vision, whilst also trying to block out the general din of engine noise around you. Concentrate simply on your own personal starting technique and the flag drop or starting light sequence.

All of these things will hopefully help you maintain your focus on getting a good start. Once moving then the race has started and race tactics apply.

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Our next article will further cover getting away from the start line, the hectic dash to the first corner and the importance and strategy involved in the first lap of a motorcycle race.

Mental
preparation