



A little piece of history has gone virtually unnoticed this season on the Irish short circuit scene. 17-year-old Dubliner Jack Kennedy lifted the Irish Supersport 600cc short circuit championship following on from his success in the Clubmans 600cc series of 2004. This is the first time that any rider has had back to back Clubmans and national championship success in the Supersport class, and for the record, Jack is the youngest rider to ever win the Supersport National title.

Interview – ROY HARRIS
Images – CAREVAPICS / SAM WILSON

JACK KENNEDY

A NEW SENSATION



THE QUIET TEENAGER has been racing for four years having started his career in the 125 Aprilia class where he finished second to Scott Kelly in the 2003 series. He also rode a 250 Aprilia in the same season before switching to the 600 class at Clubmans level in 2004 where he piloted a Suzuki to nine wins from nineteen races, clinching the championship at his first attempt – now one year, he has repeated the same feat at National level with two rounds to remaining.

Irish Racer caught up with Jack a few days after he had clinched the championship with a memorable treble at Mondello Park during the Leinster 200 meeting to discuss his career to date and how he got started in racing?

"My dad raced a TZ350 Yamaha and then cars so I was always around race tracks and paddocks. I had a PW 50cc Yamaha that I rode around the fields when I was about six years old before going mini moto racing where I won a 4.2 championship and finished second in the

6.2 series before moving to the 125 Aprilia class.

So do you think the mini moto scene that is producing more and more top riders [Ollie Bridewell who was featured in the last issue of Irish Racer] helped develop your talent?

Mini moto is a great breeding ground for short circuit racing, it teaches you about cornering, passing and even throttle control at a young age and this sticks with you when you switch to short circuits. In fact, mini moto is just a smaller version of short circuit racing when you think about it."

So how did you find the transition to 4-stroke racing, was it a big step?

"Yes, it took a bit of time to get used to having more power and better brakes. The speed and weight difference was also a factor but I had a couple of outings at the end of 2003 on a 600 bike so I had a fair idea of what was ahead of me in 2004. In saying that, winning the Clubmans championship was a bonus as I thought it would take at least a season to get to grips with the Supersport class, knowing the

strength in depth of the opposition with Pat Duffy my toughest opponent in the class. I also rode in the Stars of Tomorrow to gain more experience and finished eighth in that series which was won by Alastair Seeley"

Asked about his latest championship success Kennedy quipped, "Very early in the season I had a standard CBR Honda but then I acquired the CBR-RR machine that Hilton Hincks rode in the 2003 British Supersport Championship and I just loved it to bits. It is just like a 250cc machine although slightly heavier, but only just, and it handles like a dream. My intention was to try for a few podiums and go for the championship next season but I latched onto a few of the quicker riders in practice and saw that I could match their pace and the more track time I got I found I was getting quicker. The results then just started to come and when the results come the championship looks after itself."

Jack revealed to us a secret he held from everybody surrounding the Coleraine Club's Kirkistown event in late August explaining, "On the Sunday prior to that event I broke both my wrists in a motocross accident and thought that was that for the championship. I went to England on the Monday and had laser

Above:
Heading the experienced Marshall Neill at the Sunflower

Top Right:
JACK will look to the UK in 2006 to continue his fast growing career.

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treatment in Ipswich and it is thanks to Brian Simpson that I was able to make it onto the grid come Saturday! Then in the first race I was battling with Alan O'Connor – my most respected rival in the class and who was also in contention for the championship – and on the last lap he took me out at the hairpin and we both went down.

He was able to lift his bike and cross the line for twenty points but with my damaged wrists I couldn't lift my bike up so I scored no points and the advantage swayed in his direction. I was seething with anger about his move but I did the best thing possible and beat him in the second race. Then at the Celtic Match race meeting at Aghadowey he crashed out chasing me, so I thought 'what goes around comes around' and here I am as champion. It means a lot to me to win this championship but I would like to dedicate it to Stephen Dennehy who lost his life at Mondello Park recently after having raced for some 14 years."

So what does the future hold for a young man who has achieved so much in a short space of time, and is there anything left in Ireland to prove?

"I have nothing confirmed yet but it looks like UK mainland racing in some shape or form. I am not interested in riding a superbike at the moment so it looks like MRO or possibly R6 or Honda RR Cup whichever the organisers decide on, although I would prefer the Honda option if it materialises. There is no future at present for young short circuit racers here in Ireland and I know I will have to spend a season learning the circuits in England so it will be to my advantage to go now while I am still young enough."

His father Paddy reckons BSB (Supersport privateers cup) could be the option, saying, "When you think about it; MRO or BSB it is the same boat fare across the water and the entry fees are nearly the same. Watching MRO on television there are very few spectators and at some of the rounds the grids were very sparse indeed. At BSB you are talking about record crowds attending the meetings, quality grids, better media coverage plus the opportunity to meet and talk to teams and trade representatives at the highest level. Either way Jack will need a season learning the circuits and it all depends on our current sponsors and their plans. We will have to weigh everything up in the coming weeks before taking a decision."

Jack sampled the BSB series at Mondello Park back in May and he says, "It was a tremendous experience all round although in the Supersport race I got no further than the second corner before I went cart-wheeling out of the action [caught by an *Irish Racer* camera] after another rider and me touched. That was the lowest point of my career to date although it was a tremendous experience riding with quality riders in practice, learning lines all the time as I followed them. In fact I knocked four seconds of my previous best Mondello times that weekend qualifying twenty-second on the grid. Watching and learning was what the BSB exercise was about and it is my ambition to eventually race at this level. I hope to ride in it again next year and maybe get to finish the race this time!"

To be successful at any level needs a fair amount of support and Jack would like, through *Irish Racer*, to thank Tossie and Gerry at Van Fleet Transport; Owen from Planet Fun who have backed him from the start of his career; Aiden from Mototech; Paul Swords Cars; Tony from Capital Motorcycles; Mick from Santry

Motorcycles; Mick from Global Distributors; Leslie at Power Tools; Stevie from Bridgestone tyres, and last but not least Mum, Dad, sister Heather, girlfriend Lorna and Walter Bell – his number one fan for all their behind the scenes work.

Jack continues, "My dad has been my mechanic all year and as you know a lot of trust and faith is put in mechanics by the riders, so before the start of every race my dad and me give each other a little thumbs up. He would be the biggest influence on my career, he has always been there and I couldn't do it without him."

The 2005 Kennedy Racing season ended at the Sunflower Trophy meeting and in front of a huge crowd Jack put in two of his best races of the season finishing fourth in the first Supersport race before making it onto the rostrum in race two behind the TAS Suzuki duo of Tom Sykes and Ian Lowry. His reaction afterwards was. "I am really pleased with my performances today and have ended the season on a high. It has probably been the best meeting of the year for me as I lapped within 0.2 seconds of Virgin Mobile R6 Cup fourth place finisher Ian Lowry and had tremendous dices with Marshall Neill and Steve Brogan for the final rostrum place in both races. I am going into the winter in a good frame of mind and I intend training hard to come back fitter and stronger for 2006."

Jack Kennedy is a young competitor who has come through the ranks of the Irish scene and his progress has been remarkable for one so young. He now feels he is ready to follow in the wheel-tracks of Hilton Hincks and Mark Pollock by 'testing the water' at the next level of competition, which means racing outside Ireland – *Irish Racer* wishes him every success. ●