BRUTALITY...

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IN MOTION...

THE WORLD OF MOTORCYCLE DRAG RACING

One of the quickest motorcycles in the world was in Mumbai recently, thanks to Gulf, along with the guy who tamed this beast, Ian King. xBhp was there to be a part of this historic event. We cover it in a way that will blow your socks off...

December 18, 2011,

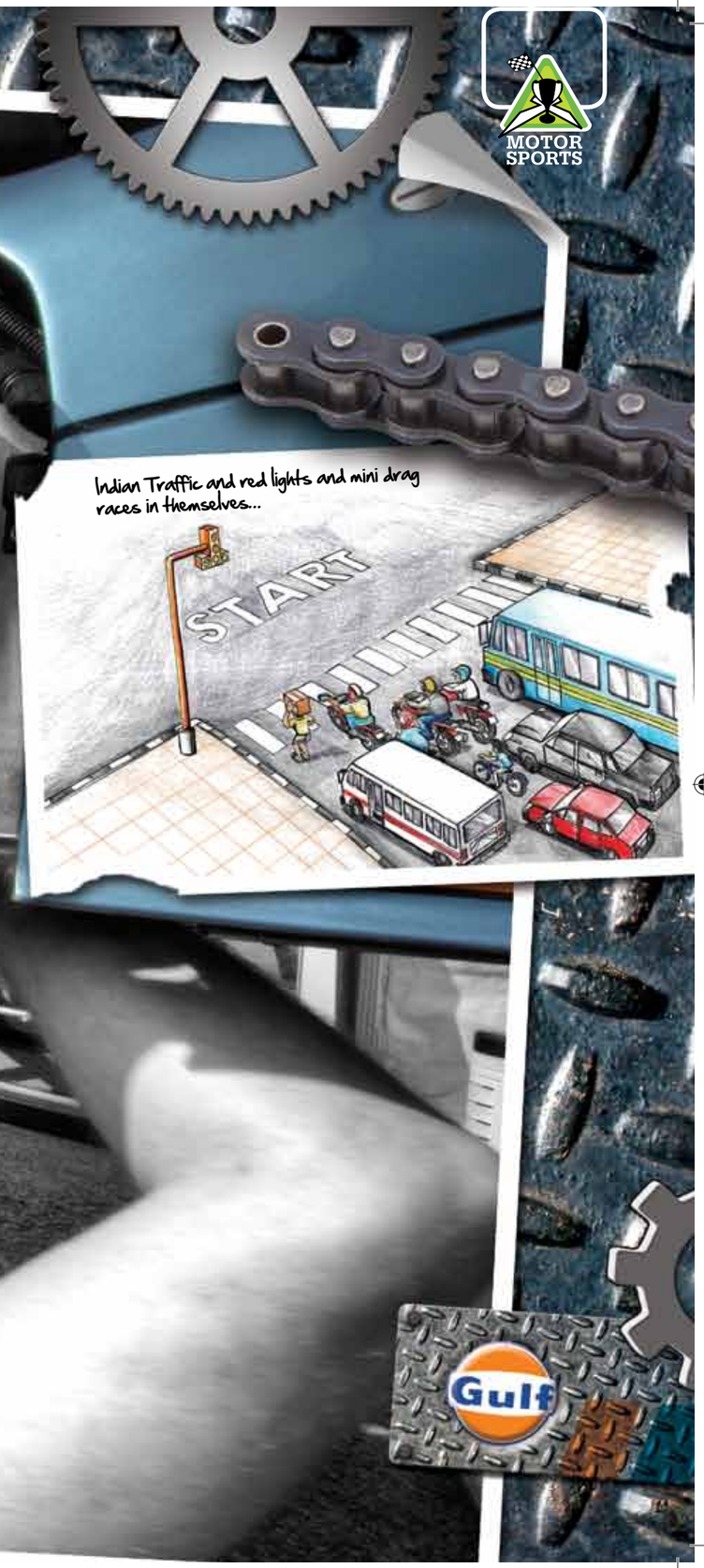
When most of North India was shivering with bone rattling winter chill, the temperature in Mumbai was unusually hot. Hot not just because it remains so throughout the year, but also because it was Mumbai's date with the one of the most brutally quick and fast machines on 2 wheels on this planet. Time stood still and the spectators held their breath when this 6-meter long, 1500-horse power beast roared in the city that never sleeps.

In a country which has just started to develop a taste for motosports thanks to the newly built F1 circuit and where drag racing is limited mostly to the traffic-light GPs, this specifically-made-for-drag-race bike was brought by the Gulf Lubricants and to tame this beast we also had Ian King at hand, a man who is the 5-time European Drag Bike Racing Champion and is currently ranked No. 3 in the world.

The Gulf Top Fuel Drag bike runs on a fuel other than gasoline, called Nitromethane and is powered by an engine from PUMA Engineering, a company that also makes engines for many of the world's fastest machines.

The bike was already on display at many malls and other prime locations in Mumbai for a couple of days, and we had the pleasure of talking to Mr. Ian King the evening before the event where he talked about drag racing, cricket, traffic in India, and how Indians can be good drag racers etc. You can read the excerpts from that tete-a-tete later in this article.

The crowd had already started building when we reached the venue, an isolated and barricaded stretch of road in Kharghar in Navi Mumbai, where this bike would be doing a demo run and the atmosphere there was abuzz in anticipation of something big about to happen. In a country where people are ready to jump from the 6th floor just for the glimpse of any 2 wheeler running on wider than 140 rear section, you could guess the expressions on the people's face when they saw such a bike in flesh. A bike that had a rear tire wider than the space occupied by 5 people in a Mumbai local train on a Monday morning.



Indian Traffic and red lights and mini drag races in themselves...

Finally after going through the routine pre-run preparation and happily posing for our lens, Ian King was at the start line with his bike, ready to create the spectacle that nobody had ever witnessed here before. The nitro-guzzling monster came to life with a loud roar, as if somebody had awakened the Parasaurolophus (the loudest dinosaur) from sound sleep. Then, Ian did a mandatory small burnout to warm up the tire for better grip on the tarmac. A blanket of thick smoke and the smell of rubber engulfed the entire venue and the initial roar of the Puma engine during the burnout made it clear that not just speed, this was going to be an orgasmic experience for those who love loud engines too. This make-shift track wasn't built for these kinds of bikes and was too short, slippery and uneven for the bike to show its true potential. Yet Ian King made most of what was available to him. The bike lunged forward and was at the far end of the track before anyone could even realize what had happened. Everyone just stood still with dropped jaws and eyes wide open. And like I said, it wasn't just about the visual high you get on seeing this bike in motion but it's the sound and visuals combined that create the spectacle that was. When the these top fuel bikes are revved, you wouldn't want to stand anywhere less than a few hundred feet away from it unless you are wearing earplugs or have got your ears insured for a value more than JLo's rear. Sunny and yours truly were standing just 3-4 meters away from the start line for some good pictures, totally unaware of the trauma that our ears were going to be exposed to, and we had to pay for it. This bike creates close to 150 dB of noise, which is sufficient to cause permanent hearing impairment. Our ears and head kept aching for hours after the run – talk about occupational hazards, eh?

During the day, this run was repeated 3 times with the mandatory breaks in between for the routine maintenance and was a memorable experience for all those who witnessed this brutality in motion. We sincerely thank Gulf Oil from the bottom of our hearts for bringing the Gulf Top Fuel Drag Bike here, for it is a rage worldwide but unseen and unheard of in India. Hope we'll soon see these beasts battling it out on a drag-strip in our backyard soon.

tête-à-tête with Ian King

We the bikers, Ian & Me at the event!

xBhp: Hi Ian! Everybody knows who Ian King is! People know that Ian King is the champion drag racer, but how would you define Ian King as?

Ian King: Uh! It is a slightly difficult question to answer because it depends on which walk of my life you are talking. Of course I have a family life and I am very close to my family - my 2 daughters and my wife. They in turn are also pretty closely involved with my racing. I think of myself as someone who is essentially a sportsman who not only wants to achieve the best possible but also as someone who really has a really keen idea of family and social responsibility as well.

xBhp: So that brings me to my next question. There are a lot of dangers involved in drag racing. Drag racing is a dangerous sport. So how does your family react to that? I mean are they worried or are they are supportive in what you are doing?

Ian King: Yes, they are worried in respect to the fact that I think everyone has to be worried, including myself. I mean, It's not like I lack fear. I am fearful every time I ride my bike. But my family supports me very much. In fact, without my family's support I wouldn't be possible for me to do what I do. Of course, Gulf Oil are my biggest sponsor though in reality and on a personal front, I think my family is my biggest sponsor.

xBhp: So, apart from spending time with the family and drag racing, how do you spend your time? What are your hobbies?

Ian King: Well, the little time I have left, I guess one of the things that is very much aligned with my racing is that I also co-own the company that designs, builds, and manufacturers the same motorcycle engines we use and chassis and complete bikes for other people. It is a non-profit making company in that the idea is that we have been able to share our know-how, what we have learnt, and our engineering capabilities. Outside of that I play a lot of football. Well, I still try and play a lot of football. I am trying to stay fit for my racing and it is an ideal thing for me to do. I love playing the sport I have played since I was a child and it is something I do at least twice a week when I can.

xBhp: You have been born and brought up England, so you must have grown up watching cricket? Are you a fan of cricket?

Ian King: Yes, I am a fan of cricket. I played cricket in school. My daughters play cricket as well. In fact, they are much better at cricket than I am. But of course, I follow cricket. My father played a lot of cricket at county level. I follow it on television. I watch test matches. I like to follow what is going on in the IPL too.

xBhp: So who is your favorite Indian cricket player?

Ian King: Well, it has to be M.S. Dhoni. And it is not just me; billions of other people across the world share the love for the way Dhoni plays. Sachin Tendulkar before as well was obviously someone that I used to admire, but I like M.S. Dhoni's professionalism and the way with which he handles himself in front of the media and fans. It is really amazing that someone who could be bigger than Beckham could be so humble and such a responsible guy.

xBhp: Going back, it is one interesting thing you mentioned that yours' is a non-profit making company. In a business where there is lot of money involved and needed to do the kind of work you are doing, how have you been able to keep it a 'non-profit making'?

Ian King: We actually try to not to make it, though we would love to make a profit, but reality is that all we want to do is to be able to achieve what we want to with the engines, with the designs and cover the costs. So we don't sell the engines at cost, but we sell them at cost plus the amount needed to keep the business going. You can say that we don't take money out of the company but we put back whatever we earn into the company every month. Which is not actually profit making business, but that is what we do.

xBhp: During the race, which part of your body faces the maximum stress?

Ian King: My back, particularly the lower back and my neck actually because obviously you get a lot of compression of the spine, and also my head because of the wind or should I say the force generated as you go down the track and the G-forces that you are pulling actually do make it quite a stressful experience for those parts of your body.

xBhp: To be a drag racer is about a combination of a lot of skills. How do you prepare yourself mentally as well as physically?

Ian King: For the mental state, the trick for me is that I try to be as relaxed as possible. I tend not to get too anxious about the race. Some people put themselves in that 'zone' before they actually the start the race; for example, they put their leathers and their helmets on up to an hour before the race start, just to sort of isolate themselves and concentrate their mind whereas my point is that I like to be as relaxed as possible. So I like to leave my leathers off and my helmet off so I can talk to the people, off course not to my opponents who are trying too hard to concentrate (laughs), but to my supporters and other people around.

On the physical fitness side, as I explained, you need to have reasonable amount of upper body strength and leg strength to move the bike as it goes down the track because the front wheel is off the ground and you can't steer it. On that basis, I try and keep myself as fit as possible. Again, the football training helps, moving around a lot. So that is really the main area of training of my life.

xBhp: The race lasts just a few seconds, approximately 6 seconds. So during those 6 seconds, what goes in your mind when you are racing?

Ian King: During those 6 seconds, up to the point to which I have to take the bike to the line and then going to stage, which is where you start the sequence of the lights and then when you take the green light, which is when you should start as soon as possible of course to try and react to win the race, I am thinking a lot about what I am going to do during the ride. I am very aware of the other rider in the adjoining lane in my competition. Actually when I hit the throttle and of course it is full throttle directly from the line, then I will be honest, most of it is just focusing on the end, focusing on the finish line. There is little I can do other than try and steer the bike as well as possible because as I said, I can't really roll off the throttle, I have to stay full-on all the way. So really it is a case of just steering, making sure I am in my lane and then concentrate on how I am going to stop at the top because that is the most critical part of the race, the most dangerous part of the race.

xBhp: If somebody wants to be a drag racer, what is that set of skills that one must possess?

Ian King: you don't have to have any special physical attributes unless you are racing the bikes that are the weight of mine; for example when you are racing in the street bike class. In fact it is a perfect sport whether you are a male or female, young or an older person like me. The fact is that it is about concentration, number one. It is about getting to the other end first. So it doesn't matter how fantastic your bike is and how quick it is and how powerful, if you are not able to react faster than your opponent and actually use the power you have, you are no good. Drag race is about getting to the other end first. Majority of the races are won or lost in a thousandth of a second. So concentration is number one; number two is to learn from your mistakes. So many people have problems with either the way they ride or how they stop and they don't seem to try hard enough to eradicate those problems. The third one is to know how to handle your bike when you have a problem, when there is a crisis, when maybe the bike starts going out of control. Everyone can ride a bike quick, which is not difficult; you just open the throttle and go as fast as possible. The point is what do you do when you have a problem and that is what makes people fearful, they don't know or don't have the ability to control the bike when it is going out of control. And, fourth is to know your limitations as in anything else in life. If you feel your bike is going to go out of control and you are not quite up to it, roll off the throttle, get off the throttle, that is how you do it. It is not a matter of life and death, but it will be unless you keep that in mind.

xBhp: Have there been any untoward incidents with you during your career?

Ian King: For me personally very little, luckily, touchwood. But unfortunately some of my friends have been killed on the race track. I have had a very close friend who was killed in a race against me when he was out of control at the top end, came into my lane, hit the wall and the resulting trauma killed him. Personally I had a faulty fuel line in place once and as a result I suffered third-degree burns and had to have plastic surgery. But that's the worst thing to have happened to me. Unfortunately that was a very odd and unusual occurrence, the fire; we had an explosion on the bike, which was because of the fuel line and I had a choice whether to jump off the bike or stay on the bike because the bike was on fire and I was in a sort of a fireball and the choice for me at around 200 kmph was either I jump off and suffer further injuries and damage the bike probably beyond repair or to stay on it long enough to slow the bike down to be able to jump off and try to protect both myself and the bike but then suffer more burns. I chose to stay and got burnt. But lived to tell the story.

xBhp: You mentioned two very unfortunate incidents where one of your very close friend was killed and you yourself suffered serious burn injuries. How hard was it for you to come back to racing after those tragic incidents? Did you ever think that you are going to leave the race? How did you convince yourself to stay in this profession?

Ian King: I never thought of giving up racing after those incidents at all. For example, the fire incident was something which was out of your control and it makes you more determined to make sure that those kind of things don't get repeated in the future. I was racing pretty quickly after the fire. We had the bike repaired. I missed a few races of course. Regarding Chris (the guy I mentioned), when he died, it made me determined to make sure that the reasons behind his unfortunate accident were not to be suffered by anyone else. There are a number of reasons why Chris suffered a fatality. I worked very hard. I was on the governing body for motorcycle sport in Europe at that time and we sort of endeavored to find rule changes and track changes to make it safer for people so that that sort of accidents couldn't happen again to the point to which nowadays irrespective of someone coming in my lane and hitting the wall if they did, it would not be possible for this sort of accident to happen again now. So that was the determination.

xBhp: So Ian, is this your first time in India?

Ian King: No it is not. I have been here a number of times, not for sporting reasons though. I come over here for some sort of business perspective from time to time. I was over here earlier this year and actually I will come back again in February.

xBhp: How important is the crowd support during the race in boosting your overall confidence?

Ian King: I think it plays a great role in my motivation, not so much should I say that I need it to win or I need it to compete at the highest level. But what I need it for is to know that other people also appreciate and share a passion for something that I have spent so much time and money on and it is very nice to meet so many people from all walks of life, from all trades and colors, who all share a common pleasure from what we do. So I just love having people come up to me and talk to me and ask questions and I always find time where I can answer all these people even when I am in the middle of a very tense race situation.

xBhp: So you must be pretty familiar with the traffic situation and the way people drive here, particularly the two-wheeler riders?

Ian King: Actually I should say that the people I see riding on these roads everyday would make fantastic drag racers. I think their reactions are fantastic. They have to be so aware of everything going on around them. It is odd for a guy coming from somewhere like UK the first time to see people pulling over in the middle of the road and expecting the other guy to stop. Most people here put their faith in other people rather than themselves and I think that is the great thing about people here, they have almost like a sixth sense in terms of being aware of what is going on around them. It is amazing to see that there are not many more accidents. On the other side, speed has always been problem. All of us have been on the road and we have been speeding from time to time because we are either late for an appointment or late for something or more importantly we just love speeding and of course, the problem is that the road is not really the right place to do it. Although I did it when I was younger, I tend to hope that people will take their, should I say, excessive riding speed to the race track. I do not want to see people killed, injured, hurt, or go beyond their limitation. However if I were to say that I never speed, that would be not quite true.

xBhp: How and when did you start that you are going to be a drag racer? Did you start from traffic-signal GPS?

Ian King: My passion has always been motorcycles. I don't really care for cars very much. I have always had the best motorcycle I could afford and whatever money was left with the car. The main thing is that when I was young, when I was about 5 or 6, I used to watch these motorcyclists come down the road to pick up their girlfriends, and I thought these bikes were pretty cool. I remember seeing a yellow Ducati 750SS and a Honda 750 F1, which was a Phil Read replica, which was special. And I thought these bikes were so cool and when I was 8, I was in the Boy Scouts and I was taken on a day trip with my fellow Boy Scouts to a drag race pretty near to where I live, Santa Pod, which is still my local track. And I was just blown away by the spectacle of the noise and the speed and everything. That sort of cemented my interest in drag racing. When I was 12, I built my own bike. I went to the local refuse site. I found an old bicycle frame, I found a Garelli scooter engine, an old Suzuki 50 tank, and some wheels and I sort of drafted these together with a basic welding kit and that was my first bike. So that really showed how interested I was in bikes. On the weekends, I used to work in a motorcycle shop and when I was 15, I bought my first bike which was a Honda 750, which was only because I had spent so much time working and saving all my money for this big bike. The craziest thing was that I wasn't old enough to be able to ride it legally; you have to be 17 to ride a bike that size. My mother and father were horrified when I bought this bike home and of course I promised them that I would not ride it until I was 17. But of course as soon as they were out of the house, I was trying to ride it. I wasn't really able to ride that bike because it was too heavy for a young kid at 15 and I remember riding it to school. I don't know what possessed me that someone wouldn't record me, you know the teachers were there. They knew what age I was. They knew that there was no way I could ride 100+ mile per hour bike even then on the road. So eventually I had to put it away in the shade and leave it for a couple of years until I was old enough to ride it. In the meantime, I bought a 50 cc bike and went through the licensing. Eventually, I actually sold that bike before I was old enough to ride it.

xBhp: So which bike do you own right now?

Ian King: I have 2 street legal bikes. I have been through all the sports bikes; I have had Ducati 916, 996, 998, 999; Suzuki GSX-R1100 and 1000. I have had a number of large bikes but for some reasons I have started to develop a passion for older bikes, I mean bikes that were superbikes in my youth. So now I actually own a Laverda Jota 1000 that is actually a 3-cylinder bike from Italy. It is a late 70s-80s bike. At its time, it was "the superbike" of all. It was like having a Ferrari of motorcycles. I had one when I was younger, but I just had to have one when I was a bit older. But I have to tell you it is the worst bike in the world to ride. You don't realize how nice modern bikes are compared to bikes from that era, but it is a great bike; people look at it, the sound is amazing. And the other bike I have is a Triumph Trident, another 3-cylinder bike. I think you can see a pattern developing here. I like unusual cylinder configurations. But again, the Triumph Trident is from the 70s. It is sort of an American export, choppery style bike. It is not really the chopper, but the Americans like swept back handlebars, teardrop tank and things. So they are really my 2 road bikes for now.

xBhp: Which is the country where you've got the best crowd support?

Ian King: Every country I go to has a different culture and different types of crowd. Just because you have big crowds like if we race in Germany, there will be 60-70 thousand people watching us, it doesn't mean necessarily the best, it just means it is one of the best. I think all the spectators in all the countries I have been to, it is hard to choose one. But what I would have to say and it sort of sounds a bit clichéd because I am here talking to you in India is that I have never known such an interested and more informed group of people such as the Indian guys and girls that I have met so far. Irrespective of the fact that they have probably never seen anything like this before, the level of questions, technical, very intelligent questions about how and why and actually sort of suggesting that they really know the answer in most cases; it is amazing. And the enthusiasm so far is great, so I just can't wait for any opportunity to run in front of some of these people. The other thing is that I hope to help, in conjunction with Gulf oil, to actually develop the possibility for people to actually have their own drag strips across India for them to go out and be able to race against their friends on their bikes and not race on the road. We really should keep racing on track on the track. I don't want to come over as though I am holier than anybody else. I have obviously been in position where I have been speeding over the limit before, but I have always held this within my area of capability. The main thing is that there are too many deaths on the roads and we have to do something to ensure that that doesn't happen and that we can actually decrease that sorrowful trend.

Gulf Pride 4T Plus, yep thats me! I go into the darn bike and ensure that its stupendous engine keeps working at those insane RPMs and speeds. Its a tough life!

xBhp: So is there any message you would want to give to young Indian motorcyclists who indulge in illegal road racing and stuff?

Ian King: I want to encourage them in their enthusiasm for speed because that is obviously something I love, but the thing is that the best way to develop their skills and their capabilities is to actually push the authorities where possible to try and get their own facility, their own drag strip, their own race track, or whatever it may be. Work on that with all their effort and their enthusiasm in supporting those sort of activities and then they really can find out the thrill of high speed racing because clearly trying to get to high speed on roads that weren't built for it, you are never going to achieve what you really want in terms of finding the thrill that there is to go as fast as you possibly can in a safe environment.

xBhp: You have achieved so much in the field of drag racing, is there still anything that you want to achieve? What is your ultimately goal in life?

Ian King: My main aim is to inspire enough other people that will enable the sport of drag racing to grow because it is a sport that once you are involved in it, it is so addictive that you won't ever want to walk away from it. It is hard to explain. I have done road racing, I have participated in car racing, grass track racing on cars and bikes, but drag racing is by far the most rewarding sport you can imagine. It is also the biggest motosport in the world, so it is not just me who believes that. And if we can do things such as bring drag racing to countries such as India and as we are doing across the Middle East now with new tracks being built in Abu Dhabi, in Qatar, and in Kuwait, I think it is the most perfect sport for India. I would love to be able to come over here and race against some Indian guy on a Top Fuel Bike in the future.

xBhp: What are the main engineering challenges you have in front of you when you are developing a Top Fuel Bike?

Ian King: The main thing to say is that we have an excess of power. Power is not the issue. We can make more than enough power than we need. The problem is that power is nothing without control as they say, and really it is about being able to find the best way to transfer as much power to the track as possible without spinning the tire. Now of course if we were in other motosport, we were allowed traction control, that would be an easy job, but in drag racing it is quite heavily regulated in our class where you can't use computer controlled systems where the bike would react to an on-track condition. For example, traction control would be that case. In traction control, once the ECU senses the slip of the tire, then it stops the slipping, but in our case we can't do that. So we have to have a lot of experience and understanding in how to set our clutches up, our gear box, and our fuel systems ensure that the right power is applied at the right time on the track. So really that is the thing, I mean developing the best clutch and fuel management system possible.

xBhp: The Top Fuel bikes complete the quarter mile in about 6 seconds. How big is that number when we compare it to a production bike, for example Hayabusa.

Ian King: A standard Hayabusa , I am not 100% sure at this precise stage, is probably able to cover the quarter mile in around 9 seconds and probably at a speed around 120 miles an hour. So the difference between 6 seconds and 9 seconds at 120 miles per hour and 240 miles per hour is enormous. If you put the bikes side by side, it would almost be like watching the Hayabusa go backwards. So it is very hard to explain, but it is just immensely more powerful and more surging thing that happens with the Top Fuel Bike.

xBhp: Which production bike according to you can make a great drag bike?

Ian King: There are a number of bikes that can actually do it. If you look at the quarter mile times achieved, most of the hyperbikes at the moment are all capable. The Hayabusas are very popular and have been for street drag racing, which is slightly odd because it is actually a sports tourer rather than an out and out sports bike. However, it lands itself perfectly because it is a very powerful bike irrespective of not being the ultimate sports bike. So basically anything that has a high power output, that has a reasonably long wheelbase, and has what I would pass as a little bit slow steering is good. It depends on the class. We have classes for bikes from 50 cc all the way up to no limits of cc. So every class has probably a better bike that would be the prime bike for that class.

xBhp: But if you were to choose just 1 bike other than your Top Fuel Bike, any bike, any class, which bike would you pick for drag racing?

Ian King: I think the BMW S1000R, but then very quickly I would want to put a turbo charger on it.

xBhp: Apart from the physical and mental strength, do you seek any spiritual strength, like saying a prayer before the race?

Ian King: No I don't say a prayer but as a fact I always believed that there is something greater than us, whether it be spiritual, hope, or otherwise. In general terms, I think that the faith my family has in me is good enough for me to prepare myself for the next race. I have been blessed in my life with a fantastic family, fantastic friends and followers, a great race career, and great passion that I share with many other people and there is a faith from that perspective where you are sharing the common understanding and I think it is just about something that none of us can quite put our fingers on, but we have to respect the fact that there are bigger and more powerful things than us.

xBhp: Who is your favorite sportsman in the field of motosports?

Ian King: My current favorite sportsman or living sportsman is Stirling Moss. I know he was a car racer, not so much the bike guy, but the reason I admire him is that in an incredible career that actually only ended last year, this guy is in his 70s or 80s now and he has been racing since so long. It is absolutely incredible to see that this guy had so much passion that he continued to race all of his life and really only just stopped now. It is impressive in that he was racing at the top level when he was younger. In those days if you see old news footages of him, black and white, with open wheel cars, at that time people were being killed in every race. You have to remember how dangerous Formula 1 was then. It was very rare that a race would go by without someone dying. For him to survive all of that and to have such a fantastic career is commendable. His Formula 1 career ended reasonably early because he had a bad accident but still to continue racing in different formula and still be going now is fantastic. On the motorcycle front, and unfortunately passed away some years ago was Barry Sheene. Barry Sheene was the epitome of the sort of playboy sportsman. He seemed to have everything; he had the looks and he had the fans, particularly the female fans. He was a great racer, and he just had such a fantastic charm and wits about him. Everyone used to know Barry Sheene, they still know Barry Sheene and even the current racers like the current best and fastest motoGP riders will look up and say Barry Sheene was our idol and the same goes for me. The interesting thing about Barry Sheene is that one of the members of my team, Martin Brookman, who is over here in India with me, he actually was a Grand Prix mechanic in those days and he used to work with people like Barry Sheene. So there is actually a connection there between us.

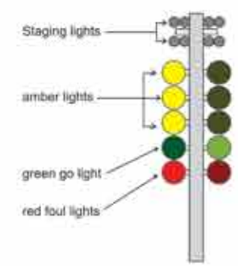
Ian King

A Brief Guide to Drag Racing

Drag racing, when simplified, can easily be termed as the most basic form of motor racing or any kind of racing for that matter. You start from standstill at point A and have to reach point B in the shortest possible time. In motosports terms, it is a competition in which specially prepared automobiles or motorcycles compete two at a time to be the first to cross a set finish line, from a standing start over a measured distance, most commonly a quarter-mile (402.3-metre / 1,320 ft) of straight track. The winner is decided on the basis of the time consumed by him/her in covering the distance from start line to finish line, and the top speed achieved by him/her.

Each race is actuated or started with the help of an electronic device comprising of a series of vertically stacked lights in different colours, called the ChristmasTree. The name Christmas Tree is given to this device because of the multicolored lights. There are 2 types of Christmas Tree used worldwide depending on the class, and they are – Pro Tree and a Full Tree or Sportsman.

A Christmas tree



The tree is made up of three major sections. At the top of the tree, there are 2 sets of double yellow lights for each lane. The top set of yellow lights is called the Pre-Stage light. It indicates that the rider is close to the (and approaching) the starting line. The second set is called the Stage lights. It indicates that the rider IS on the starting line and is supposed to be ready to race. These lights automatically change to indicate the bike's position and this is how ithappens. There are 2 light beams just a little above the ground across the track in each lane. These light beams fall on a photocell across the track. These photocells are connected to the Christmas Tree and the time measurement device in the control tower. When the light beam falling on these photocells is interrupted by the tire of the racing vehicle moving across, it gets activated and sends a signal to the Christmas Tree and the control tower that the vehicle is either in the pre-stage zone or the stage zone. For example, when the front tire of the bike crosses the first beam, the pre-stage beam, it blocks the beam falling on the photocell temporarily, which sends a signal to the Christmas Tree and lights the pre-stage bulbs, which means that the vehicle is approaching and is close to the to the start line. And, when the bike crosses the second beamXXXXXXXXXX

The next section is the three amber starting signal lights. In Sportsman class, these amber lights will light up simultaneously; approximately half a second apart, with the green light coming in the end indicating the rider can start the race. In the Pro Tree, all three amber bulbs will light simultaneously, with four-tenths of a second delay between them and the green light.

If the rider leaves the start line before the green light comes on, it indicates a foul start and the rider is disqualified. The rider can also be disqualified if he leaves the lane boundaries or if he or his bike touches the guardrail or any fixtures on the track such as photo cells. At the finish line, there is again a light beam and photocell unit, and when the front tire of the bike obstructs the light beam, it indicates that the bike has crossed the finish line and the time is recorded.

The time taken by the rider between the start and finish line is called the elapsed time. But the winner is not just declared on the basis of the elapsed time. The elapsed time is only a measurement of the performance. The winner is the first vehicle to cross the finish line, i.e. the lowest total elapsed time + reaction time. The reaction time is the time difference between the green light coming on and the vehicle leaving the start line. The rider leaving the start line quicker than the opponent rider is said to have the 'holeshot advantage.' So a relatively slower bike on the track can actually win the race if its rider has quicker reflexes than the opponent. For example, if rider A leaves the start line as soon as the green light comes on and the rider B leaves in half a second later and if both the riders cross the finish line together, the rider B will be declared as the winner.

The top speed of the vehicle is measured in the final 66-feet stretch of the track also called the 'speed trap' and ends at the finish. In each competition, 2 racers are pitted against each other, in the qualifying races or "heats." The winner of a heat moves to the next level while the loser is disqualified. The winners keep moving to the next level until only 2 racers are left in the competition. These two best racers then compete against each for the final race. Although drag racing is a worldwide sport, both United States and Europe can easily be called the Mecca of the Drag Racing for the infrastructural support and fan base they have provided to this sport.

Drag Racing Categories

These machines evolved from standard road legal cars and motorcycles into the specially designed high technology machines at the cutting edge of the sport today. In order to encourage new people into the sport, various classes have been established for beginners using road legal cars and motorcycles through the novice levels with controlled modifications riding up to the absolute premier classes, Top Fuel Car and Motorcycle categories. The Categories have been listed in the same order from beginners to novices to professionals:

Beginners

9.50 Bike : Predominantly for on-road motorcycles with road legal tyres only (no slicks), this class has minimal technical rules but requires all riders to run no quicker than 9.5 seconds on the quarter mile whilst aiming to cross the finish line first.

Low-Budget Professionals

a. SuperStreet/ProStreet Motorcycle: For petrol fuelled machines with a stock looking appearance and road legal tyres only (no slicks), Turbo / Supercharged or with Nitrous Oxide injection.

b. Funny bike: For extreme machines with an exaggerated stock (original on-road) looking appearance. Turbo/Supercharged and/ or with Nitrous Oxide injection.

100% Professional Sports

a. Pro-stock Motorcycle : For normally aspirated petrol fuelled machines with a stock looking appearance and handicapped by minimum weights for a bike plus rider.

b. Super twin : Reserved for twin cylinder machines running Nitro methane as a fuel, normally aspirated or supercharged.

c. Top Fuel Bikes : The quickest & fastest class, reserved for machines running Nitro methane as fuel, with in-line 4 cylinder super-charged engines.

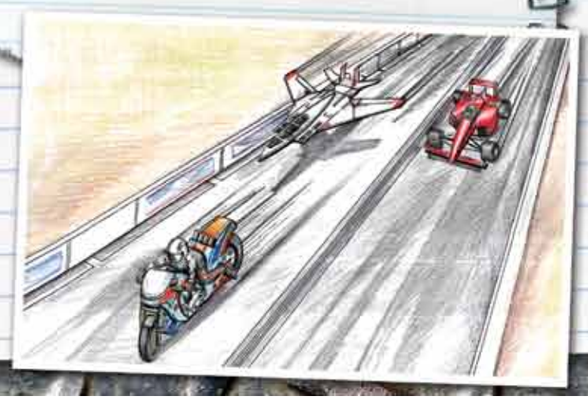
Major Championship Series in Europe

1. ACU Drag Racing Championship : The Auto Cycle Union (ACU) founded in 1903, is the governing body for all Motorcycle Sport throughout the UK. The ACU / UK Drag race Championship are the only officially recognized series for motorcycle drag racing in the UK and are the pinnacle of the National sport.

2. The FIM / UEM European Championship

The FIM/UEM Drag Racing Championship is the absolute pinnacle of the sport in Europe. It is the only truly International championship in the world with riders of many nationalities competing in various countries throughout Europe in front of crowds of up to 60,000 spectators.

In India, drag racing is unfortunately nowhere even close to where we can call it a 'sport.' A few enthusiastic youngsters practicing on an empty stretch of road and a lot more 'over-enthusiastic' morons at traffic signals in your city is all you see in the name of drag racing. Of course, there are a few organized events too but they are very few and far between. We sincerely hope that with the events like the Gulf Top Fuel Drag Bike demo, the awareness level about this sport will increase and it will get a place in the Indian motosport scenario that it deserves.



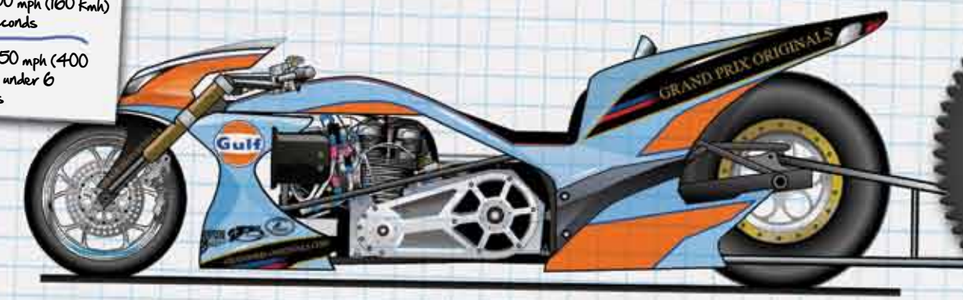
1000 @ 1500 Horsepower (More than an F1 Car)

0 60 mph (95 kmh) in 0.7 seconds

0 @ 100 mph (160 kmh) in 1.1 seconds

0 @ 250 mph (400 kmh) in under 6 seconds

Gulf Racing Top Fuel Motorcycle



Specifications

- Estimated 1500 Horsepower depending on tune
- Purpose built Puma engine, with aluminum cases and billet steel crankshaft
- 1584cc inline 4 cylinder
- 12V DOHC billet aluminum cylinder head with aluminum bronze hemispheres
- Supercharged, over 430 liters of air and fuel into the engine per second
- Fuel injected, consuming over 15 gallons of Nitro methane per minute
- 8 inch three plate multistage clutch
- Fuel injection / clutch management by electronic, hydraulic & pneumatic systems
- 14 inch dia rim shod with a 31 inch wide rear slick tyre
- Puma Engineering Chrome Molybdenum chassis, 102 inch wheelbase
- Full aluminum bodywork
- Braking by two 4 piston calipers at front, 6 piston caliper at rear and parachute assisted
- Onboard multichannel data logging and analysis system

Trivia

1. They are the fastest accelerating machines on two wheels on the planet and will out accelerate all vehicles from a standing start (except for Top Fuel Cars) including Formula One Cars and even Thrust SSC and F14 Jet Fighters.
2. These machines cost in excess of $120,000 USD to build.
3. They have four cylinder purpose built engines, are supercharged, fuel injected, and consume over 15 gallons of the explo 1sive fuel Nitro methane every mile.
4. They run sophisticated clutches with multiple stages of pressure controlled by electronic, hydraulic and pneumatic control systems.
5. They have a gearbox with two ratios. Gear changes are made by pushing a handlebar mounted button.
6. It is hard to describe the awesome spectacle of a Top Fuel machine in competition. The sight and sounds of these machines as they reach speeds of over 240 mph in around five seconds has to be seen to be believed. Engines are pushed to the brink of destruction as the vehicles fight for grip as they try to apply their awesome power to the ground. With only one tyre through which the motorcycles grip the ground, the task of controlling the awesome power is immense.
7. The machines pull over 3g of acceleration (more than an astronaut experiences at take off) from the start line and lift the front wheel off the ground. Struts with small wheels at the back are employed (wheelie bars) to prevent the machines flip ping over. The only way to steer the bike with its front wheel off the ground is for the rider to hang his body off the side to alter the balance. The skill and bravery of the motorcycle riders is paramount in attaining competence in this, the most powerful sport on earth.
8. These huge motorcycles are an astounding spectacle; even standing still they look fast. It takes a special breed of person to ride them.