

LOOK AT ME, LOOK AT ME!

ANDY WIGAN THOMAS WALK

I'd never had a lash at dirt track. No, despite riding since I was a kid and editing dirt bike magazines for nearly 20 years, I'd never cut a lap around a flat track circuit of any variety. And because dirt track has been a rite of passage for so many Australian riders, it's a bit embarrassing to admit that. I mean, I hadn't been *purposefully* avoiding it. Or had I?

When a mate who'd founded a recreational group of mature-aged circle-work jerks – now called “The Jerkyls” – urged me to sample dirt track during one of his ‘SundaySlide’ sessions at Nepean Raceway, I suddenly felt a strange pang deep in my gut. So maybe I *had* been avoiding it all these years after all. I'd never got nervous before riding a new trail, enduro or motocross track, so why the trepidation with dirt track? Dunno. Maybe it had something to do with those concrete walls in such close proximity to high-speed corners.

Anyway, on a beautiful Sunday morning in spring, the time had come. The boys from The Jerkyls had sourced me a cobbled-together 1976-ish YZ cum IT in dirt track trim, and I was raring to go on the fantastically well-prepped Nepean circuit. I even convinced my missus, Sonja, to come along for the day. She isn't much into bikes, so I sold her on the idea that this infamous track was surrounded by a picturesque gum forest, where she could walk the dog and indulge in a spot of sketching. If I'm honest though, I'd invited her along for moral support as I popped my dirt-track cherry.

The “YZIT250” was an interesting way to introduce myself to the discipline, mainly because its stonking engine was accompanied by non-existent brakes and suspension that felt like it rode on rubber

bands. But, after a few heart-stopping moments, I found some sort of rhythm and even managed to back the thing into the odd turn. Lap by lap, I got a little more daring and sideways. And before long, I was having a ball. Sadly, a flat tyre – which almost pitched me off the thing at the end of the fifth-gear straight – put a premature end to the session. But I'd become a danger to myself and others by that stage, so it was probably fortuitous timing.

Back in the pits, adrenalin finally in check, I ran into Sonja. “How was it, sweetie?,” she asked, more out of duty than interest,

it seemed. “Great!,” I said. And then, because I couldn't help myself, “How did I look out there?,” I asked, pathetically. After an awkwardly long pause, she said, “Umm, a bit kooky.” And she wasn't joking. “Your elbows were down,” she mercilessly continued, “and your head was bobbling around quite a lot.”

Wow, that hurt. “My head was bobbling around? Seriously? Did you even know which rider I was out there?,” I enquired.

“Yeah, of course. The guy in the yellow helmet,” she said, before throwing a stick for the dog and disappearing again,

apparently oblivious to the blue helmet that hung off my forearm.

I didn't know whether I was thankful that she'd been watching another rider the whole time, or pissed off that, after being together for 22 years, she couldn't single me out from the other blokes cutting laps. Or both. But in Sonja's defense, I rarely wear the same gear or helmet two rides in a row. Accordingly, I got my ego back in check and laughed at the fact I'd actually thrown out a ‘look-at-me’ line to her. Thanks to this dirt track caper, I'd clearly regressed to my teenage years. And, damn, it felt good! 🍌

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