

ADRIAN ARCHIBALD

THE QUIET MAN

Adrian Archibald was part of the TAS Racing fabric back in the early Millennium years, taking his maiden TT wins with the Moneymore based team in 2003. Those Formula 1 and Senior TT top steps, were followed up by a third TT victory in 2004, when Adrian again collected the coveted blue riband Senior event on Mona's Isle.

His solitary North West 200 win was aboard a TAS Racing Superstock machine in 2003, with many other victories being recorded at national and international events, most notably, an Ulster Grand Prix Superbike win, also in 2003.

A quiet man by nature, we caught up with the father of two [Aaron, 15, and Eva, 9] who celebrated his 50th birthday just last summer, to discuss his life in racing and that punctuated tenure with TAS Racing, which brought about much success, and as is the way in racing, a little bit of heartbreak.

WORDS: PAUL LINDSAY

PHOTOS: DOUBLE RED PHOTOGRAPHIC / TAS ARCHIVE



» YOU RETIRED FROM RACING AT THE BEGINNING OF THE 2013 SEASON, AND UNLIKE SO MANY FORMER RIDERS WHO TURN UP TO MANAGE TEAMS, WORK IN THE MEDIA OR FREQUENT THE PADDOCKS AS GUESTS – YOU SIMPLY WALKED AWAY. HOW DIFFICULT A DECISION WAS THAT?

Adrian: It really wasn't that difficult for me if I'm honest. I was originally just taking a year out and never went back. Melanie and I just starting doing other things like cycling and taking Aaron to football. Aaron has competed for two years in youth cycling and I got back into it myself as did Melanie, who now works from home as a self-employed crafter.

» YOU JOINED TAS RACING IN 2003 AFTER MANY YEARS RIDING PRIVATE HONDA MACHINERY, BUT IT WAS A SUCCESSFUL PARTNERSHIP ON THE INTERNATIONAL SCENE. HOW DID IT COME ABOUT?

Adrian: I'd been speaking to Philip Neill in 2002 and I think it was between myself and John McGuinness for the ride. It worked out well on the TAS Suzukis. It's hard to believe this is their 20th year in racing, but they've had some great success over the years and I've fond memories of working with both Hector and Philip, and the boys at TAS Racing. They gave me the machinery I needed to win at the TT and we've remained friends ever since. I wish them every success in the future.

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▶▶ THE 2003 TT SAW YOU TAKE A SUPERBIKE DOUBLE AND YOUR FIRST EVER WINS ON THE ISLAND, BUT IT WAS IN DIFFICULT CIRCUMSTANCES. YOU'RE A MODEST MAN BY NATURE, BUT DID IT DILUTE THE JOY OF THOSE VICTORIES?

Adrian: It was very difficult. There's no hiding that fact. There were no celebrations afterwards it was a very sombre victory. We had the blessing of the Jefferies family to carry on racing the TT that year, so there was only one way to pay our respects to DJ and that was to go out and win. That's exactly what we did.

▶▶ YOU CAME INTO THAT SEASON IN ARGUABLY THE BEST PHYSICAL CONDITION OF YOUR CAREER. WHAT DID YOU CHANGE AND HOW SIGNIFICANT WAS IT IN FINALLY STANDING ON THE TOP STEP AT THE TT IN 2003?

Adrian: I put a lot of effort into my fitness, working with Joe Barr at the time on my training and nutrition. Outside of that I knew I could win races at the TT and the bikes and the package were good, so it all came together. You need it to click and that year it did.

▶▶ YOU WENT ON TO WIN THE SENIOR TT IN 2004, BUT WHICH OF YOUR THREE SUPERBIKE VICTORIES MEANT THE MOST AND WHY?

Adrian: Winning your first TT is always special, which I did in the Formula 1 race in 2003, but to go on to win the Senior TT the same year, in the circumstances, proved I had the ability and the quality of the package with the TAS bikes. The 2004 Senior TT win was also pretty special, especially as Melanie announced she was pregnant with Aaron between the winner's enclosure and the TT podium. I'm not even sure I was able to uncork the champagne!

▶▶ FROM 1999 – 2001 YOU WERE VIRTUALLY UNBEATABLE ON THE IRISH NATIONAL ROAD RACING SCENE, WHAT MEMORIES DO YOU HAVE FROM THOSE EARLY YEARS?

Adrian: We had a good set up and I had a good team of people around me in those seasons. There were a lot of highs and being the first person to win five races at an Irish national event was always going to be hard to replicate. I returned to CD Racing in 2002 and setting the fastest-ever lap at the Ulster Grand Prix was a good feeling too.

▶▶ LOOKING BACK ON YOUR CAREER, DO YOU HAVE ANY REGRETS. ANYTHING YOU WOULD CHANGE?

Adrian: I would certainly have liked a 130mph lap at the TT. I did 129.7mph on my own private Suzuki in 2009 and lapped the Ulster Grand Prix at over 130mph in 2012.



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▶▶ YOU'RE A JOINER BY TRADE AND UNLIKE TODAY'S CROP OF FULL TIME RACERS YOU WORKED THROUGHOUT YOUR CAREER. DO YOU THINK BEING ABLE TO GO FULL TIME WOULD HAVE MADE A BIG DIFFERENCE TO YOUR RACING?

Adrian: Who knows. But I knew I wouldn't race for ever and would eventually have to go back to the real world. I never saw myself as a full-time racer and it was nice to get back to normal Monday mornings. It's something I did and never really thought about it.

▶▶ BEST DECISION YOU MADE AND WHY?

Adrian: I'm not sure, but probably retiring at the right time. Too many road riders drag it on too long. I am one of the lucky ones who had a good career and was able to retire with no injuries and now have quality of life with my family.



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▶▶ BIGGEST DISAPPOINTMENT?

Adrian: It would have to be running out of fuel with just a few miles to go in the Superstock TT back in 2005. I know Hector was completely shattered at the time and took full blame, but I forgive him. I had something like a 30-second lead and my team-mate Bruce Anstey was gifted the win. Was tough to take at the time.

▶▶ WHO WOULD YOU SAY WAS THE BIGGEST INFLUENCE ON YOUR CAREER?

Adrian: Davy Wood was a driving force and being from Ballymoney, Joey [Dunlop] was inspirational in his low key approach to racing. My Dad Jim taking me to the races when I was young was also a key factor. I also need to say a big thank you to Nigel Henry of Henry Brothers. I work for Henry Brothers but Nigel is a lifelong friend and was a great sponsor to me during my career and also supported TAS Racing. So he was certainly a big influence.

1
Adrian used the number '0' during his famous Senior TT win in 2003, after the team refused to use David Jefferies number 1 plate through respect

2
Behind every great man. Adrian's wife Melanie has been by side the whole way

3
His two lovely children Aaron and Eva in front of Dad's leathers at Ballymoney Museum

4
Success tinged with sadness: in the TT winner's enclosure with Hector and Philip in 2003

▶▶ TODAY YOU AND MELANIE RUN A GUEST HOUSE. TELL THE READERS A LITTLE ABOUT THAT.

Adrian: I do anything for an easy life! It was all Melanie's idea. We opened up two rooms in May 2019 for bed and breakfast. The kids are a bit older now and it just seemed like a good idea. They were rooms we didn't use and with Melanie working from home 'making bits and pieces' it made sense. We were almost fully booked until the current pandemic hit, but we are hopeful it will pick up again. Being just four miles from the famous Dark Hedges [used in Game of Thrones] and 10-15 minutes from the North Coast, it's an ideal location for tourists. We met some lovely people last year and look forward to getting up and running again soon.



If you ever want to tour Northern Ireland and have breakfast with a three time Isle of Man TT winner – give Melanie a call:

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