

Q&A MARC BONGERS

BMW MOTORRAD MOTORSPORT DIRECTOR

“ I HAVE BEEN PERSONALLY FASCINATED WITH RACING SINCE I WAS A KID. IT NEVER MATTERED IN THE PAST IF IT WAS CARS OR BIKES AND I’VE BEEN INVOLVED IN RACING FOR OVER 20 YEARS, 10 OF THOSE IN SUPERBIKE.



Full Gas caught up with BMW Motorrad Motorsport Director Marc Bongers, to discuss the development of the BMW S1000RR during lockdown, the route forward for the project and the World Superbike team’s plans for the remainder of this season.

» SO MARC HOW DID YOU SPEND THE BREAK OVER THE PAST MONTHS DUE TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC RESTRICTIONS?

MB: After getting back from Australia following the first race, we were soon faced with the lockdown and I spent three to four weeks in my office at home. BMW has taken many precautionary measures in our offices, so we could get quickly back to our working places. For all of us it’s been a bit strange not being able to travel for so long and even to be at home at the weekends. I must admit it has been great to spend so much time with my family, which was nice, but just a shame there was no races to watch on the Sundays.

» IN THE SBK SEASON-OPENER AT PHILLIP ISLAND THE BMW DID SHOW A LOT OF PROMISE, ESPECIALLY IN QUALIFYING. WHAT ARE YOUR RETROSPECTIVE THOUGHTS ON ROUND ONE?

MB: To come away from the season-opener with a new lap record and a pole position is very pleasing. On the other hand it was disappointing that we couldn’t carry that speed until the end of the race and the chequered flag. Places inside the top ten are not our target, but it was a real shame that Eugene was declared unfit to race, but it was the right decision. We are looking forward to seeing what he can do in the upcoming races, but we pretty much expect both our riders to be level in terms of results.

» HOW DIFFICULT HAS IT BEEN TO PREPARE FOR THE SEASON, NOT KNOWING WHEN IT WOULD RESUME?

MB: After Australia we were prepared for the second race at Qatar, so in a way we were ready, but after that it was difficult to re-plan the development and the travel in the current circumstances. The races were first re-scheduled to start in May, then June and now July, and in hindsight it would have been better, to have postponed them right away to August or September. But we have re-planned most of it now.

» WHAT HAS BEEN BMW’S MAIN FOCUS PRIOR TO THE SEASON RECOMMENCING AT JEREZ IN JUST A FEW WEEKS’ TIME [JULY 31- AUGUST 2]?

MB: We have used the time to do some substantial work on the electronics. We’ve also been in the wind tunnel and will come up with a couple of new packages including a new fairing and a new cooler. This time has also been spent comparing our performances against the competition from last year, to see in which areas we need to focus to make the next improvements.



Marc with BMW Motorrad Motorsport World Superbike riders Tom Sykes & Eugene Laverty



Marc riding out to see the affected fire regions in Australia with members of the SBK Team



Marc with BMW Motorrad CEO, Dr Marcus Schramm at Phillip Island

▶▶ **WHAT HAVE YOU LEARNED ABOUT YOUR RIDERS TOM AND EUGENE?**

MB: They are both very gifted riders and both very different personalities, which is fun. We haven't seen a lot of Eugene yet, due to only having competed in one race, but we expect him to be up there with Tom. It's important to have them at a similar speed to push the project forward. They both have a lot of experience on different bikes as well, and we still need that input at this stage of the project.

▶▶ **WHAT DIFFICULTIES, IF ANY, DOES THE CONDENSED CALENDAR WITH ITS BACK-TO-BACK WEEKENDS THROW UP FOR YOU AT BMW?**

MB: It is certainly more difficult and a bigger challenge in terms of logistics and staff. It would be best if we could pack the whole racing family into a large vehicle and spend a month or two in Spain. Unfortunately that's not possible and we have to travel. For the promoter Dorna it's probably best, but for us it's more difficult. We need to calculate the worst case scenario with spares, as there is just no time between races to re-order or re-machine parts. Last if not least, if the performance is not there or a rider sustains an injury, there is simply no time to recover, so it is clearly more challenging.

▶▶ **IS THIS A LONG OR SHORT-TERM PROJECT IN WORLD SUPERBIKE AS A FACTORY TEAM?**

MB: As our CEO, Dr. Markus Schramm stated, this is a long-term project and the clear goal is to be on the top of the championship. We have used this time away from racing to push the development and it was clear that we still have a gap to the top. I am convinced that we will get stronger out of the down period, but at the same time our competitors probably haven't had holidays either! But yes I hope we come out stronger.

▶▶ **WHAT ARE THE STRENGTHS OF THE CURRENT S1000RR PACKAGE?**

MB: As an engineer myself, I believe the shift-cam is a real state-of-the-art bit of engineering. It's impressive that such a complex system, which has to shift in just a few milliseconds, can be implemented on a production motorcycle. This has a massive advantage in road use and we also use it in World Superbike and it clearly has an advantage there as well. It's a magnificent combination of power and torque, which currently only the BMW has.

In other areas of the bike in terms of chassis, which also includes national championships like BSB and IDM, many riders are well impressed by the handling of this bike. We had a lack of top speed last year but we've already made some good steps throughout the development and this year we are not so far off. We are convinced we will see more speed throughout the season with several updates. The outright speed of a motorcycle comes from many areas and is all about how you use the tyres and how you use the engine, the gearbox and electronics. Many components. We are anxious to find out ourselves but we have a package of updates that will push us in the right direction.

▶▶ **TELL US A LITTLE ABOUT THE ELECTRONICS PACKAGE ON THE S1000RR – IS THAT ALSO DEVELOPED IN-HOUSE?**

MB: We are the only manufacturer in the World Superbike paddock who uses the same ECU as we use on our road bike. Clearly yes we continue to develop our own electronics and have our own structure in place. We work very closely together with production in this area and our standard ECU is the only ECU that can operate the shift-cam. There are synergies with the production, which is important to us and it's the same system that is used on the S1000RR on the road; it's just that we have add-ons on the software to fulfil the specific needs of racing.

▶▶ **HOW ARE RIDER NEGOTIATIONS GOING FOR 2020 WHEN OTHERS HAVE ALREADY MADE ANNOUNCEMENTS? ***

MB: For Kawasaki I think the choice was fairly easy as they had the option to take the five-times world champion. The other option is the current championship leader so I'm sure it was not too difficult for them. Obviously for us it is very difficult to judge a rider after just one round, especially on a new bike, but of course they are observed constantly, also during testing. We have started our negotiations with the riders and we will look to get the contracts sorted before the racing resumes.

* Since this discussion with Marc, the BMW Motorrad Motorsport World Superbike team has secured the services of Michael van der Mark for the 2021 SBK season.

▶▶ **WHAT ARE YOUR THOUGHTS ON RACING IN FRONT OF EMPTY GRANDSTANDS?**

MB: Racing in front of empty grandstands will change the atmosphere on track, which is a real shame but it's a situation we have to accept in the interest of everyone's health. I'm just happy that we are able to go racing at all. I hope having the fans in the paddock will resume soon but it will certainly not take away from the motivation of the riders, who I describe as alpha males, always wanting to win in any situation.

▶▶ **ON A PERSONAL LEVEL, WHAT IS THE FASCINATION WITH RACING?**

MB: I have been personally fascinated with racing since I was a kid, but none of my family were into racing. It never mattered in the past if it was cars or bikes and I've been involved in racing for over 20 years. 10 years of that was in Formula1 and 10 years in Superbikes. For me it's the thrill of constant competition and always being under pressure and every couple of weeks you are measured against the others. That pushes us to constantly try

and improve. Of course there are many ups and downs in terms of emotions but that's part of the fascination. On the bike side for me it's the heroic character of the riders. I'm no great bike rider myself but when I'm on track about 15 seconds slower than our riders, I wonder where that time comes from. That's also part of the fascination.

▶▶ **WHAT ARE BMW MOTORRAD'S INTENTIONS GOING FORWARD IN TERMS OF CUSTOMER TEAMS?**

MB: We would clearly like to see more BMWs on the grid. We have negotiations on-going for potential satellite or customer teams. This has always been our strategy in customer racing, that we want to offer our customers the same material that we develop for our factory teams. We do this in the stock as well, and we have corporations with sales companies who offer the customers exactly what we develop for Superbike. We are definitely open to this and are working towards a solution to see more BMWs on the grid.

▶▶ **HOW IMPORTANT IS BSB TO BMW AND WHAT LEVEL OF DEVELOPMENT TAKES PLACE BETWEEN BMW MOTORRAD AND THE OFFICIAL TEAM IN THE SERIES, TAS RACING?**

MB: Next to the two world championships WSBK and EWC, in which BMW Motorrad Motorsport competes with factory efforts, BSB is the largest, and most influential, factory supported national series.

With TAS Racing, BMW has a highly competent and very experienced official partner, who has direct access to factory material and knowledge. TAS is supported by a factory engineer, who mirrors results and findings in both directions, which finally adds to the competitiveness of the entire S1000RR package in all series and last but not least, eventually in production.