



THE ROAD SCHOLAR

COLUMN BY LARRY TATE

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Oops

Late season setback slows down senior editor

Three issues back, I wrote about the danger inherent in any sport, including ours, and ended the piece by saying, "Have fun while you can." Boy, has that come back to haunt me.

About six weeks after I typed that column, I was finally able to again sit at a computer relatively comfortably. The reason? A serious big-time smack to the ground that left me unconscious, with a few minutes of amnesia (I don't remember the incident at all), and nine fractures to seven ribs, a dislocated shoulder and ripped rotator cuff, a grazed (not quite "punctured") lung, and a "stretched" femoral nerve.

The lung turned out to be okay and the ribs are knitting well, although the shoul-

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der and leg still hurt like hell, and seven weeks later I'm finally able to start doing some physio. The medical people weren't kidding about how long it would take to heal up.

Anyway, I was having fun up until the crash, for sure. My normal vintage racing partner (Ian McQueen of Wolf BMW in London) and I had decided to try the new Cayuga-based SOAR racing group in its – and our – last event of the season. Another friend and Canadian Thunder racer, Dino Paron, had liked previous SOAR events and offered his BMW R1200S for the three of us to share in the three-hour endurance race that was supposed to be a fun, low-key end to the season.

And so it proved, with the bonus that we were actually pretty well up in the standings when a much faster rider cut a pass on me a little close and took out my front wheel. At least, so I'm told by spectators. The last thing I remember in the race is going by the finish line and seeing starter (and SOAR organizer) Ken McAdam reaching for the flags, thinking that I was on the last lap, and was that first beer ever going to taste good. The next thing I remember is waking up face-down in the grass thinking three things: 1) WTF happened? 2) Man, my shoulder hurts. 3) Hell, I hope Dino's bike isn't too bad!

As it turns out, it was indeed the last lap, and there were two more corners and a dash to the line left in the race, which really capped the irritation value when I found out a day or so later (hey, we still finished seventh out of 24 starters).

The bike wasn't too bad, and with some help from a couple of friends, some trick welding by Ian, and a few bucks on bits and pieces, Dino had it back together for the last RACE event only two weeks later. More than I can say for myself; although I managed to drag myself out to the track all three days of that event, I was only good for a couple of hours each day before I had to head home for morphine and a nap.

A week in three hospitals followed by a week of sleeping about 18 hours a day will do that to you, I've discovered.

So, one of the first things my wife said to

me when I got home was, "Well, is that about enough of this racing nonsense?" (she didn't say "nonsense"). Lord knows I can't blame her; she's been very patient with me and my bikes since I first met her (hell, she was the general manager of Shannonville at the time; she should understand!), and of course bears the brunt of the occasional pains and inconvenience involved.

And while I understand and want to be fair to her, I'm not sure about quitting. Lord knows I'm no genius racer, but I love doing it and I love the people and activity involved with it. I've been racing for nearly 30 years, officiating for almost as long and believe me, it's seriously in my blood.

My own doctor just laughed at me when he walked into the examining room. He rides himself, although he doesn't race and has hurt himself enough falling off bikes and roofs and playing hockey that he could relate to how I was feeling. His only comment, really, was that he'd recommend taking a lot longer to recuperate than I wanted to hear. For ribs, the consensus seems to be they'll knit in six to eight weeks, but Andy, quite a bit younger than I am, says he broke some ribs and a shoulder several years ago, got back into hockey three months later, and at the first body-check everything that he thought was healed broke in the same places.

You know, I absolutely have no interest in going through that month after the accident again. His, and the physio's recommendation was that I not race for a year, just to minimize the chances of another whack. That's not to say I can't street ride, or be on track for teaching – which I also love – or maybe the occasional track day to sort of keep my hand in, but I'm not likely to be healing like I was 20 (or 30 or 40 or 50...) anymore either. So I think I'll take his advice for next year – and keep She Who Must Be Obeyed a little more comfortable as well – by avoiding the serious effort even a half-assed shot at racing requires.

So the plan is to do some more casual touring and road riding next year, and teach at my usual schools. Really, how bad is that?