



# Wake up call

Weary Szoke sweeps Superbike opener

By John Hopkins

**M**IRABEL, QC – There were many reasons Jordan Szoke was excited to be at Circuit ICAR to begin his bid for a fifth straight Parts Canada Superbike Championship. One of the biggest was it represented a chance to catch up on his sleep.

A bit of shut eye had been in short supply for Szoke in the lead up to the May 28-30 event on the 2.8km airport circuit just north of Montreal. The 31-year-old was adjusting to the responsibilities of being a team owner as well as rider, things like paying the bills, ordering supplies, looking after travel arrangements. It had been a grueling spring, making wins in the Parts Canada Superbike and Pro Sport Bike races especially sweet.

"It's been so exhausting, I can't explain all the hours I've put in," said the six-time Canadian Superbike champion after his all-time leading 30th career win in the class. "I'm rusty; I'm not at 100 percent. I'm still making mental mistakes. I haven't been on a dirt bike since ice racing season. That's a long break, it's not normal for me. This takes a lot of weight off my shoulders."

Many observers were curious to see how Szoke would adapt to life following the highly publicized demise of his four-year relationship with Canadian Kawasaki Motors, which had yielded four straight titles in both the Superbike and Pro Sport Bike divisions.

Searching for options in a motorcycle economy beset by financial woes, the Brantford, ON veteran elected to go it alone this

year. He acquired Honda CBR1000RRs and CBR600RRs and hired his old friend Scott Miller from Fast Company to act as crew chief. The two had teamed up in 2002 to win a Parts Canada Superbike Championship running Suzukis.

Primary sponsorship for the effort came from Ciclo Werks BMC, a Waterloo, ON-based bicycle shop, and Hamilton motorcycle dealer DeWildt Honda Powerhouse. The support from Ciclo Werks BMC, in particular, was key in Szoke being able to hire Miller's tuning expertise.

Szoke himself, however, invested a lot financially into this venture.

"I've put all of my savings, my earnings, I've mortgaged my house to do this," he pointed out after taking the fastest time in Pirelli Superpole qualifying for the Superbike class, and earning the first \$500 Inside Motorcycles Pole Position Award of the new season.

Szoke's history with Honda is a checkered one. He broke onto the national scene

in 1997 riding a privateer CBR600. He was snatched up by the Canadian Kawasaki Motors factory squad for 1998 and won his first national Superbike title before taking the number one plate to Honda the following year – rather ironic given the events of the past winter.

Szoke rode the CBR900RR in '99 and the impressive RC51 twin the next two years, but despite lots of race wins he couldn't snag the Canadian title and left after the '01 season. He was back on the red bikes in 2004 and '05, but was not competitive on the early incarnations of the CBR1000RR and managed just a single win over two years. Following a frustrating '05 season he was picked up by Kawasaki and revived his career with his streak of four straight Superbike crowns.

If Szoke wasn't particularly fond of the earlier versions of the 1000cc Honda, he has no such concerns with the present model.

"It feels like a race bike," he said. "The only bike I think that was wicked like this was the RC51."

Szoke was also very pleased with the CBR600RR Sport Bike. The Waznie Racing team made minor changes to the motorcycle over the course of the ICAR weekend, and Szoke's biggest issue was trying to decide which of Pirelli's DOT tire options to use in the race – the SC1 or the newer SC3.

Szoke is not a man who lacks motivation at the best of times, and the events of the past winter have certainly made him eager to prove a point.

"I think a lot of people were counting me out," he said after Superbike qualifying at ICAR. "To be fastest here is a relief after all the bull I've gone through this winter. My goal is to be quicker than I was on the Kawasaki at every track this year, in case there are any doubters. The Kawasaki was a great machine, but I'd like to take some credit too. I think I can win on anything."

For a while on the opening weekend the worry wasn't so much whether Szoke would be able to win on the Hondas, but that he would be so dominant as to make a farce of the Superbike and Pro Sport Bike races. In Superbike practice on Friday afternoon he was over half a second clear of the next best rider, Kevin Lacombe on his Lacombe Racing Suzuki GSX-R1000, and no one else was within a second of the Waznie Racing machine.



(Top) Szoke seemed to get a kick out of Christie's first Pro podium. (This photo) Martin and the BMWs were the surprise stars of SuperPole qualifying. (Opposite Page) Szoke's Honda debut couldn't have gone better.

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