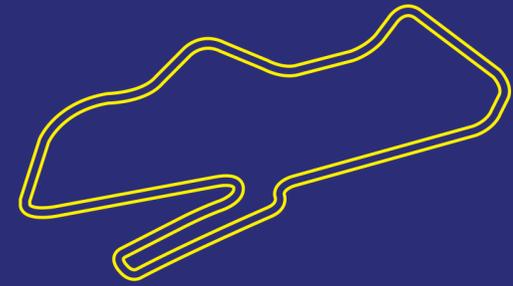


Brad JONES
TWELVE



12

DONINGTON //
ROUND 11



For the penultimate round of the British Superbike Championship we headed to Donington Park, this time using the full GP circuit, and this is one I enjoy a lot.

With some recent track knowledge gained from the World Supersport Wildcard experience I was raring to get the weekend underway and hit the ground running.

FP1- based off what we learnt for the wildcard we ran a very similar set up, just a few minor adjustments to cope with the harder that we have to use in British Supersport.

A very cold and wet morning saw a start to the weekend with some greasy conditions in the first 30-minute free practice session. Donington is notoriously known for its lack of grip in the wet. Therefore, I wanted to take my time in building into a pace and not take any massive risks early on.

The suspension technician made the bike soft to give me some feel with the surface and chassis. Immediately on my opening laps I could feel the grip wasn't great.





Lap by lap increased my pace knocking off around 0.5 of a second a lap until I got to a point in where we needed to improve the bike. With 8-minutes of the session remaining I entered the garage and we softened the bike more to give me more feel but mainly to allow me to turn the bike to apex a little easier. With a quick 'pit-stop' it allowed me too to squeeze a few more laps in to improve my lap time further with a 1:46:3 placing me 3rd to end the opening session of the weekend. A positive start to the weekend with good feel left me feeling confident for FP2 and any other wet sessions to come over the weekend.



FP2- fortunately the rain had cleared off...for now! We had a dry track which was perfect as Saturday was looking like a dry day therefore, we needed some dry track time to dial the bike in. I wanted to get out as soon as the session commenced so I could make the most of the dry laps. The advantage of getting out early in the session meant I had some clear space on track which was vital. From the opening laps I had a good feel with the bike and got down some competitive times early on. However, after 6 laps I found some areas where we needed to improve, and these areas were in fast corners on the circuit meant there was a lot time to be found.

The biggest area for improvement was down through turn 2 and 3, this was down to the rear end being too stiff which meant it was just pushing out on the tyre and generating spin. Not only was this taking the best out of the tyre but most importantly it was slowing me down. After 6 laps I entered the garage, we could see from the data it was stiff in the rear.

We took off some preload on the rear shock which would soften it and in doing that it would give me a bit more edge grip which was exactly what I was after. From the first flying lap after that I could feel the improvement and immediately improved my time getting down to a 1:32:5. Unfortunately, my last three laps were interrupted by slower riders meaning I couldn't string a clear lap together. However, I ended the session 2nd fastest and just 0.3 off. This was a positive end to day 1 and I knew there was some time left in myself and the bike which gave me some good confidence going to qualifying.



Quali going into this 25 minute qualifying session we made some fairly big changes. The main one being the gearing. I needed to more punch off the hairpin and first gear had to be used. In altering the gearing we shortened the wheelbase which in affect stiffens the shock as the swingarm has less leverage. Therefore, this is quite a drastic change and one we had to be confident would work as we couldn't revert mid-session. Although conditions were a bit chilly it was still great to get a dry session in and see what times we could get down to. Initially the gearing felt like a great improvement and I got down to some low 1:32's quickly.

However, as the laps went by and I carried on knocking tenths off my lap time I began to suffer with rear end feel and spin. At first, I tried to think why that would have been, but during my pit stop for the second tyre my crew chief explained how we took some preload off the shock to maintain the grip to accompany the shorter wheelbase. Furthermore, this meant it was simple fix and my first flying lap was into the 1:31:9's putting me 2nd with 6 minutes remaining. I got into a rhythm and rattled out some more consistent times which replicated our race pace but unfortunately, I didn't improve my fastest lap and got pushed back to 3rd. Taking the positives and we achieved a front row which was essential for race 1.



Race 1- this race was very important for the main reason that my teammate could win the championship. I wanted to keep it open and to do this I would have to win the race. Being on the front row I put myself in a good position to get a good launch and charge into turn 1. I did just that I plunged into turn hot on the heels of Jack, he ran a little bit wide opening a gap which I didn't need asking twice to take. Leading the first lap, I had a great feeling with the bike and was very eager to keep applying some pressure to Jack. Lap 2 and Jack had worked his way past, he had some strong pace, so I wanted to stick on him to get in a fast rhythm and breakaway from the rest of the field before I started showing a wheel and making any passes.





I settled into a fast pace lapping in the low 1:32's lap after lap and even stuck a few 1:31's. As we got down to around 4 laps remaining Jack was starting to put some time into me, I dug in to try make sure he didn't breakaway and keep the pressure in hope that I would keep the championship alive. He was very strong through Craner Curves and The Old Hairpin; I would pull some time back in the sectors 3&4 but ultimately Sectors 1 & 2 was where I was losing to much time. I didn't feel comfortable at the top of Craner when on the side of the tyre in 5th gear, I had a lot of spin and the rear was always trying to breakaway meaning I couldn't commit. This had a knock-on effect and killed my momentum going through The Old Hairpin and up the hill to McLean's. Being fast corners there is a lot of time to be won and lost in these areas. Jack edged away from me in the closing stages to win the race which put pay to any hopes of the championship. However, I secured 2nd championship which was a great achievement. Some areas to work on for race 2 but I wanted to make sure it we improved them so I could take everything to race 2 and put in a strong challenge for race 2.



Race 2- going into race 2 with the championship decided and 2nd place in the championship secured, there really wasn't anything to lose and I wanted to take the fight to Jack to claim second victory. Starting the race in the middle of the front row this time a holeshot was essential. With my motocross experience I got the start nailed and grabbed the lead out of turn 1 once again. For this race we made minor changes to the bike, so I knew what feel to expect.

With a clear track ahead me and a pack of eager mad men behind me and I had to put the hammer down, I immediately got the hammer down and settled into a good pace with some more low 1:32's. My pit board kept saying Jack was right behind me. I expected him to come by and try push the pace further within a couple of laps. However, 8 laps complete and he still hadn't worked his way past. At this point I just kept watching my lap timer and aimed to maintain a consistent pace and not make mistakes.

With 9 laps remaining Jack showed a wheel and proved he wanted to get past and make an escape. Eventually he worked his way past, this time I wasn't going to shadow him! I retaliated with a outbreking manoeuvre. For 4 laps we battled hard, I tried everything to not let him get away. He managed to complete 2 laps defensively and up the pace by a couple tenths meaning he slipped away from me as used most of my tyre trying to keep him at bay. Another P2 and enjoyable battle put a close to solid weekend.



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