

INTRODUCTION

This isn't a definitive story of my life, at least in so far as other people will have different recollections and interpretations of many of the episodes I describe. Mechanics and team managers will have their own perspective on me as a racer and team-mate; Jim Moodie, and many others I'm sure, will have their own views of some of our tussles on the track. My mum will always regard me as barely fit to look after myself, let alone a family; and dad, bless him, if he were alive, would still be wondering if I was ever going to grow up and get a proper job. To my sisters I'm probably still the gobby kid that got under their feet as they were growing up.

Many of the events described are decades old, so if my memory of them is faulty I apologise now for any offence caused or credit overlooked. While in repentant mode, maybe I should also say sorry to the owners of all the bikes I've crashed, blown up or otherwise trashed, all the mechanics who had to follow me round picking up the debris, and any riders I may have knocked off their bikes at any time. It wasn't on purpose.

But, as well as I can make it, this is a candid and honest account of the first 42 years of my life. You, the reader, may already have your own impressions of me, as racer, commentator, or prat-around-the-tracks. Whatever that impression is, I hope it includes the notion that I had a lot of fun doing it, and still do. I hope you have half as much fun reading about it.

This is also my chance to say thanks to the many people who helped me through my life and racing career. At the top of that list is my wife, Andrea, a constant ally for over 20 years. To my family – every one of them – I'm equally grateful for all their support, and for knocking me

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down a peg or two whenever I might have needed it. To my own family I'd add Andrea's, especially her late mother, Barbara.

In the world of racing, I have cause to thank people almost beyond number, but several of them deserve special mention. Dave Leach first inspired me to begin racing and showed that even a callow Yorkshire kid could aspire to hacking around race tracks. Pete Moore was a priceless source of information, encouragement and amusement in my early racing days. Without his input I very much doubt I'd have had any professional racing career at all.

Mick Grant spotted whatever potential I had, drove himself half-batty trying to harness it, and remains a valued friend to this day. Later in my career Rob McElnea played a similar role and was the person I instinctively turned to for advice. The entire Belgarda Yamaha team, for whom I raced for the last three years of my career, made racing an absolute pleasure and showed that even at the top level you can be competitive and still have fun. I'd also like to thank all the mates I've made within racing, especially the ones I may have had a bit of a go at in the following pages – and especially Carl Fogarty, for his friendship over the past 20-odd years and, not least, his generous foreword to this book.

From my extensive medical history I have to thank Tony Milling, orthopaedic surgeon, without whom I would definitely not be walking straight; Dr Smith, the pelvis man, without whom I might not be walking at all; and Dr Carter, who treated me for Hodgkin's disease, without whom I'd be dead.

For the book itself, I have to thank the staff at Haynes Publishing, particularly editorial director Mark Hughes whose idea it was that I should write it, copy editor Ian Heath, senior editor Flora Myer for her usual calm efficiency and support, and James Robertson for his design and page-build work. And finally, I'm especially grateful to Mac McDiarmid for helping me write the book and for drinking my Scotch.

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