



Robert Dunlop

1960-2008

To be asked to write a tribute to a great friend is a hard enough task but to be asked again just 2 weeks later to repeat the task for another great friend is heartbreaking, especially when the family have already lost one son who was without doubt one of the greatest road racers in the world. I mean of course Robert's brother Joey.

Firstly my condolences to Louise his wife, and 3 sons Michael, William and Daniel, the wider family circle, and especially May - Robert's mother.

I first met Robert on a pile of coal in a shed in Armoy when visiting Joey. Who was building a special 125. To see it in the shed involved climbing over a pile of coal. I well remember Joey said to me "this young wean will be a great 125 racer", and added with a grin, "one day he will maybe give me a hard time"

Suffice it to say I gave Robert his first works ride on Honda when with Joe and another he rode an NSR 250 road bike for the Honda team in the Isle of Man Manufacturer's production race in the early 80's. We later joined forces again in the JPS Norton team when once again he showed his amazing skills in handling motorcycles of differing sizes and shapes. Sadly our next association was when I was the expert witness for Robert at the case in the

High court to negotiate compensation for the terrible injuries he received in the Isle of Man crash at Ballough.

His first outing on the Norton was on a cold day at Snetterton and the first time through the Russell's chicane the Norton spat him off and broke his collar bone. In the Norfolk and Norwich A & E department he showed some of his great spirit and determination. He was very embarrassed about the mishap but assured me he would not be beaten by it and how right he was! He went on to score numerous wins and podiums on the Norton whilst at the same time jumping in and out of his leathers, as he went on to win the 125 British championship on John Kennedy's 125.

It is from this British Championship or the TT that most of your readers will have seen Robert perform but his road racing career was just as prolific. Racing recently with the after effects of his Isle of Man crash, he was and still is the rider with the most wins at the track at where sadly he lost his life - that of the NW200. The horrific accident that he suffered in the Isle of Man I firmly believe cut short a Moto GP career. He had already tested for a 125 engine builder at the British GP and was in line to test for another. His exploits at the European championships had brought him to the attention of the Moto GP Teams.

Indeed one of the first messages I received following Robert's death was from Mike Trimby of IRTA expressing his sadness at the shocking news.

Robert had a great sense of humour and he and his 125 mechanic Liam Becket were the Morecombe and Wise of the paddock in 1991. They liked to enjoy their racing and off the track never really took anything too seriously. I well remember when at the British GP, his machine was rejected at scrutineering as underweight, he represented it 5 minutes later with a big G clamp on the swinging arm sticking out at 90o The scrutineers did not spot it and he got through. (The next outing at Assen he was weighed after the race and disqualified) his comment - "I left the G clamp in my other leathers!"

Road and circuit racing has lost yet another Hero; a wonderful father, husband, son and friend. The hundreds of thousands who saw him race, The thousands at his funeral and the 200,000 + who saw the amazing race on 250cc machines on Saturday at the NW 200, when the Dunlop spirit showed through once again as Michael won the race "For his Dad" as he said afterwards, Those thousands will never forget him and nor will I. RIP

Barry Simmons
Photograph by Stephen Davison