



ON TRACK

by David Podolsky

The Spoiler

Riding with front-end chatter is risky business, especially when battling a very fast teen racer

The Chicken Hawk Racing team and I have been preparing for the AMA Sports Grand Championships by hitting local races; our Ducati 1098S race bike and I have been improving our form race by race.

In September we headed to the Championships at Mid-Ohio Sports Car Course. This is a "winner take all" event and the race winner is National Champion. This is one we wanted to win — to take home a National #1 plate with the big twin Ducati. I checked the lap times from last year to get an idea of where we needed to be and 1:36 would have us up front. Since it is a track I like, I was going well right away and was into the 1:36s in practice. I felt good and nervous thinking we had a shot.

At this event the AMA crowns a Horizon Award Winner to honor the rider who not only performs best at the Grand Championships, but also shows the most promise for making the leap into the pro ranks. As a result, there were a lot of teenage racers looking to make their mark.

Set up across the way from my pit area was another rider on a Ducati 1098S, 14-year-old California rider Tyler Odum, who was racing three different bikes during the weekend. Tyler was quick: 1:35s in practice, a second faster than me and everyone else. Could experience triumph over youth and exuberance?

I knew I could find another second in the race, maybe two. If I got away fast early on

there was a chance to run and hide, but in the practice right before the race we scrubbed in a new front tire and all of a sudden I had chatter coming from the front tire, which is when the tire rapidly skips across the pavement. We started checking things and realized we had forgotten to bleed down the tire pressure after the tire was mounted and it was about seven pounds too high. Sure that was the problem, we calmed down and got ready for the race.

From the front row I got a good start. I entered turn one in second and quickly made a pass under brakes after the long back straight where we hit speeds of about 168 mph. Now in the lead, I tried to get away and put my



This Öhlins fork kit had transformed our front end — too bad a broken bushing let us down today."

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head down pushing into a couple of corners, but still the chatter was there! I tried to ignore it and push hard, but the confidence in the front was not there. I saw later that I was only running high 35s and low 36s: virtually the same as my practice times.

Only a lap later here came 14-year-old Tyler! I hated seeing that teenager go by and I tried to stay glued to his tail: The Spoiler! Over the next two laps he squeaked out a couple of seconds on me as I fought the front-end chatter. Then I had Scott Rosey attempt to make a pass on me and I closed the door as I hit the apex. He pushed by entering one of the turns and I was able to re-pass using the power of the Ducati on the back straight. Tyler meanwhile was extending his lead. I had to push hard in the tight turns knowing this was where Scott was gaining on me and I did my best to trust the front tire and ignore the "patter, patter, patter" of the chatter.

Entering turn eight, in the section called "Madness" because of its quick elevation changes, the chatter was so severe I actually heard the tire go "EEEE, EEEEE, EEEEE" as it chirped across the pavement. The front began to tuck and the lean angle was way too much. I said to myself, "I'm crashing, I'm crashing," as the right side foot peg and rear


brake started to scrape on the ground. The foot peg and my knee took some weight off the front tire and it gripped again, making the bike stand up and gain traction. Scott went right by and I thought to myself, "Third place is good," feeling lucky to be on two wheels and knowing I couldn't fight back.

I rode the rest of the race trying to focus and not slow too much and brought it home in third. We were happy but also disappointed. It turned out that a bushing in the front suspension had cracked in two and was interfering with the front suspension. I think we would have had more for Scott and made it an interesting race if that had not happened; however, I would not have had anything for young Tyler. I guess in a way

I'm lucky Tyler was there. If he wasn't out there running 1:33s I probably would have been crushed thinking our suspension problem could have cost us a National Championship. As it was I was only fighting for second.

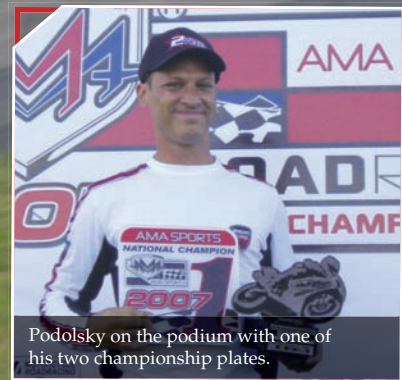
I did manage to redeem myself in the Lightweight Superbike classes riding a hand-built 4-stroke Grand Prix-style bike that my Crew Chief Erik Madsen built for me to ride. Riding against other small displacement bikes, we won a couple of races and took home two National Championships. Not shabby after all.

It was really refreshing to see so many fast kids like Tyler taking their racing seriously and to the next level, giving promise to the future of American roadracers. Tyler didn't win the Horizon Award; it went to 17-year-old Zac Chapman. Tyler still has a couple of years to compete for the honor.

We left for the long drive home happy, but still hungry for the win we wanted on the big Ducati. As they say, "Wait 'til next year..." 



David Podolsky is sponsored by Chicken Hawk Racing competing in the AMA Sports, WERA and AHRMA series and has won 11 National Championships aboard Big V-Twins and GP machinery



Podolsky on the podium with one of his two championship plates.



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