

# Two Racing Fans Visit **MACAU**

By **Chris Hartman**

**M**y first experience with the Macau GP came nearly a decade ago, when I caught it on what was then called Speedvision TV. Never did I think I would have an opportunity to attend this famous event, but when a racing buddy invited me to join him for the 2009 edition, it was an easy decision. Better yet, the opportunity to document our trip for *Roadracing World* provided us with nearly unlimited access.

While I admit your average racing fan couldn't enjoy this same type of access, much of what we enjoyed in Macau can be appreciated by a standard ticket holder. The sights and sounds during the four days of racing action in Macau can actually be enjoyed by anyone within earshot of the famous Guia circuit, as the race circuit is literally made up of city streets that get closed down at 7:00 a.m., and reopened at the end of each day's racing activities.

After my initial excitement, I immediately turned my attention to the logistics of getting to Macau. It proved far easier than expected, thanks to the unique nature of Macau's location and history. While Macau is considered part of China, it was actually under Portuguese control up until 1999. This pays off big for the casual visitor, as gaining access doesn't require a visa—at least for Americans—and the European feel of the city makes it easy to get around.

Located just off the Guangdong Province of China, and a 45-minute ferry ride from the Hong Kong airport, most identifications and markings around the city are labeled in Chinese, Portuguese and English, making it easy to identify major landmarks. This was especially evident in airports and ferry terminals, where international travel can often prove daunting. I was always able to find the right ticket counter, make it through customs without difficulty, and even locate the hotel shuttle. When in doubt, I just mingled with a group of gentlemen dressed in BMW jackets, assuming they were heading

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in the same general direction I was.

After meeting up with my friend Craig Swinehart at the hotel, we immediately set out for race control to retrieve our press credentials. Wearing our bright pink "Press On Course" vests, we jumped right into the action and headed for the race pits. And that's when the

unique nature of the Macau GP first hits you. There aren't many events that have both motorcycles and automobiles headlining during the same weekend. So for a pair of well-rounded racing enthusiasts like us, we had to wipe the drool off our chins as we walked amongst Superbikes, World Touring Cars,



*Ian Hutchinson (8) leads Rico Penzkofer (13), eventual race winner Stuart Easton (7), Simon Andrews (12), American Jeremy Toye (57), Steve Mercer (17) and others during an on-course session in Macau. Photos by Chris Hartman.*



*(Above and Right) Two views of Californian Jeremy Toye (57) in action aboard his Lee's Cycles Honda CBR1000RR Superbike on the street course in Macau, leading a couple of other riders through a left-hander and about to scuff his shoulder on a steel barrier in a right-hander.*

Formula 3 open-wheelers, and even local support racers ranging from Honda Civics to Lamborghinis.

The Macau GP is run over four days, with Thursday and Friday providing several practice sessions for each class competing. There is always some on-track action during the day. The atmosphere is very casual during practice, making it much easier to get within arm's reach of both man and machine. The support pit area was essentially an underground parking garage, so it was great fun watching mechanics bleed brakes, adjust dampers, and in the case of the Bufoiri GT team apparently assemble 50% of a racecar during a mad dash literally minutes before final tech inspection.

The main pits—housing the World Touring Cars, Formula 3, and Superbike teams—provided a bit less access, albeit with a much calmer atmosphere. Professional factory teams, hidden behind stacks of race tires, were calmly going about their typical pre-race procedures. Most cars were receiving minor shock or

spring changes, alignment checks, or programming changes via laptop connections from ECU engineers. The Superbike pits were far less spacious, with four bikes sharing a space about the size of a single-car garage, making for tight confines.

After the excitement of pit action, we immediately set out on course to snap some pictures. Being total rookies, we just followed the security barriers and asked for directions from course marshals. Despite the pink vests and picture ID hanging around our necks, we found the best form of communication to be a bright smile, and a "hello" and "thank you." More than a few times, a course marshal would change his mind and let us step over barriers after a quick showing of appreciation on our part.

Almost immediately, we found ourselves scared out of our boots thanks to the incredible site access afforded us. We were hiking along a section of course on the outside of Curva R, the last corner leading onto the start/finish straight. Touring Cars were on track, and we found ourselves frozen at cor-



ner exit, with Civics and Integras running to within inches of a guardrail that stood just less than waist high. We of course were standing immediately behind the guardrail, at the absolute wrong spot from a safety aspect. I'm not sure we even managed to turn on our cameras before we both decided to get the hell out of there!

And that's how that first day of practice treated us. We hiked around the course, stopping at several key corner stations that proved great for taking pictures, absolutely amazed at how close we were to the racing action. We must have looked dumb and happy, because all the cornerworkers took a shine to us,

and would point us to gaps in the fence—where there was fence—and even escorted us across the actual track surface during red-flag periods to get to better vantage points.

Proving our biggest triumph of the event, but not realizing it at the time, a corner station chief gave us directions to get from the Curva Dona Maria to the famous Hairpin corner. Instead of walking around the course through a busy section of commercial buildings, he told us to simply jump the guardrail and walk along the track during a 10-minute red-flag session. So we did just that, following him down the track. After a few hundred feet, he began to motion to us to hurry up, as the session was going to get started sooner than later. As he ran back up to his station at Maria, we began sprinting down the racetrack with cameras around our neck, having our own little Grand Prix. We

were helped back over the guardrail at the Hairpin by a course flagger, who greeted us with much laughter to the sight of two crazy Americans running down the track.

Showing just how green we were at this type of work, we of course packed no water, no food, and wore no sunscreen. So we ended day one thirsty, starving, and a nice shade of red. This of course called for dinner and a night out on the town.

The European flair of Macau really begins to shine when you take in the sights and sounds of

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(Above) Workers tied rudimentary foam pads onto steel barriers before each on-course session for motorcycle racers. (Below, Right) Spectators pack a covered grandstand to watch multiple races at the Macau Grand Prix.

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the city, especially at night. There is a fantastic fisherman's wharf located just across from the main pits, with a surprising selection of restaurants. Macau is also proving a destination for well-known casinos, so if you like to gamble or take in any number of buffets, you'll be pleased. Luckily for us, a beer garden was also open, so we got to sample several selections of European ales on draft.

One thing that caught us off guard on several occasions was the bizarre time schedule. I'm a man of habit, so I'm used to eating at times only Westerners think is normal. Pubs and restaurants in Macau aren't open for lunch at noon, nor are they typically open for dinner at 6:00 p.m. Everything opens much later, and stays open

well into the night. The same thing happened the following day when we went on a hunt for AA batteries. We found that a typical drug or grocery store isn't open before 10:00 a.m., yet a small shop in a busy electronics row was open at nearly midnight.

The following morning, we packed up our gear, including several bottles of water and two bags of locally produced jerky, something Macau is apparently famous for. We returned to the Hairpin just in time for a Superbike practice session. The sound of three dozen Superbikes ripping between the tall buildings, slamming on the binders, and leaning it over through the Hairpin is simply breathtaking. As the saying goes, that's when things got real.

Despite the Hairpin being the slowest corner on track, the control necessary to maneuver around this world-famous bend is something to admire. Preceding the

Hairpin is a short, fourth-gear straight. The bikes simply appear from nowhere, with their sharp exhausts biting and echoing as their riders blip down through the gears. With mid-corner speed under 30 mph, most riders pull in the clutch and coast around, and then feather it out on corner exit. Tracking right out to the edge of the guardrail, front wheels lift as the riders change position in their seats setting up for a blast through a left-hand kink that doesn't even appear on the course map. Once again, we found ourselves literally close enough to touch the riders and bikes, and had to step back on several occasions to keep our sanity. A few sessions later, a BMW World Touring Car broke off a left-side mirror on the guardrail at the very spot we were standing!

Having made friends with the cornerworkers the day before, we had great access all around the course, and that included actually helping them between sessions or when a yellow or red-flag condition was sounded. With something like 50 cranes positioned around the course in key areas, organizers were prepared to remove damaged and abandoned vehicles without stopping the on-course action. The crane operators would swap out their lifting depending on what type of car would be on track next. Formula cars required a strap that hooks through the roll hoop, while Touring Cars needed straps that fit onto all four wheels.

Before the bikes took to the track, cornerworkers would jump over the guardrail with a series of soft barriers that looked like twin-sized foam mattresses. The pads

would get tied to the guardrail all around the outside of the corner with a series of red nylon ropes. Luckily, we never had the chance to see how well these pads worked during the course of the event.

The most frantic action would take place when the red-flag horn would sound, or worse yet when a crash happened at our corner. We witnessed several such incidents during the weekend, including a Formula 3 driver stuffing it into the stone wall at Maria Bend during practice. Before the driver could even climb through the gap in the fence—getting assistance from Craig—a cornerworker was on the car securing the lifting straps. The crane lifted the car off the racing surface and onto a grassy area beyond the catch fence, while the track remained hot. Knowing what it's like to stand around in the sun in three-layer FIA driving suits, we quickly rummaged through our backpacks and offered the young driver water, and tried not to chat him silly with open-wheel set-up tips.

The racing action started on Saturday morning with races scheduled for several of the Touring Car support classes. But the real excitement came as the Superbike feature race came up on the schedule late afternoon. By this time we had made our way up to Hospital Hill, with a great vantage point overlooking the course. Perched atop a stone wall sitting some 20 feet above the track, we could hear the bikes leave the starting grid despite being halfway around the circuit. Out of nowhere, the pack of bikes would just launch out of San Francisco Hill corner and drag race up towards the Hospital Hill sequence.



The riders would come through a gentle right-hander leaned well over on the edge of the tire. Those playing it cautious left a couple feet between their bike and the inside guardrail, but more than a few times we saw a shoulder brush the Armco as they sailed around at triple-digit speeds. Riders had to immediately stand the bike up, squeeze on the brake lever and drop down three gears, while running less than 10 feet from a solid stone wall towering above them. Then they would disappear around a tricky left-right sequence and continue uphill to the next corner station.

As the race laps ticked over, it became clear that Stuart Easton was pulling away on his Hydrex IGT Honda CBR1000RR quite handily. But with a few laps remaining, Easton's lead was being cut quite dramatically. I found that I had set my camera aside and was taken in by the battle before me. Luckily, we were right next to a closed-circuit TV camera location, perched above the track in an aluminum scaffold being held steady by sandbags. Because we had befriended the camera operator with our jerky,

he turned his monitor so that we could watch the battle for the lead.

With two laps to go, Connor Cummins, riding a Paul Bird Motorsports Kawasaki ZX-10R, got by Easton on the long front straight. As they came up through Hospital Hill it was tooth-and-nail as Easton took a peak inside Cummings hard on the brakes. But Easton had the patience to follow Cummins around the circuit and snake by under braking into Lisboa Bend on the last lap. He held off Cummins through the next two miles of twists and turns to pull out the victory for a second year in a row.

American Jeremy Toye, riding the Lee's Cycles Honda CBR1000RR, grabbed a top 10, with a brilliant ninth-place finish after having lost a few positions when he ran wide at Lisboa. Mark Miller, aboard the Celtic Racing Suzuki GSX-R1000, finished 12th despite an ailing clutch, holding off 13th-place Mike Barnes, who was also on a Paul Bird Motorsports Kawasaki and who had run off the track after running as high as second. The tough luck award goes to Scott Jensen, who unfortunately spent the race inside the



(Above) American Scott Jensen (61) destroyed his bike in practice and missed the race in Macau; he escaped the crash uninjured. (Below, Left) Workers clean up an oil spill on the course. Photos by Chris Hartman.

broadcast booth, providing expert commentary. After steadily improving his lap times aboard the MotoGP Garage Suzuki GSX-R1000, Jensen had a spill on the fast right-hand Curva R bend. Luckily, Jensen was able to walk away, but his machine suffered enough and couldn't get back on track.

After three days of hiking it around the track, up and down the hills carrying our camera equipment, we decided to spend most of Sunday watching the races from our hotel, which was holding a party outside on the balcony that overlooked the Mandarin Oriental Bend. There were some great races, and a few spectacular crashes, especially in the Formula BMW and Formula 3 classes that can be found on YouTube.

But it was really the motorcycle racers that left an impression on me. The term, "it means something just to finish," gets overused in the racing world, but it really means something at an

event like Macau. Traditional road racing is far different than circuit racing, especially when you're piloting a 200-horsepower Superbike through a canyon formed by metal guardrails and stone walls. Sure, the various classes of race cars were great fun to watch, but the abilities and courage of doing it on two wheels, without rollover protection, a six-point harness, or head and neck protection is awe inspiring. When it comes to Macau, the Superbikes really are ridden by Supermen.

### The Guia Circuit

Originally conceived in 1954, the Guia circuit snakes around and through the Macau peninsula for 6.2 km—3.8 miles—gaining and losing nearly 100-feet of elevation, all on public streets. The first part of the track is dominated by a series of three long

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straights, where it isn't uncommon for machines to reach over 160 mph, whilst running five wide. There is a hard-braking zone into Lisboa Bend that is famous for providing numerous first-lap pile-ups as racers misjudge their braking points.

From Lisboa, the track begins to climb up the center of the city, along narrow roads lined with guardrails and stone walls. The tightest section of course is the famous Hairpin, at just over 20-

feet wide on exit. The Hairpin is so tight that a standing yellow exists for automobile classes—Formula 3 cars simply don't have enough steering lock to make the corner if they were to attempt an inside pass on corner entry.

From the hairpin, the track falls back down toward the Marina area, where the circuit runs around three sides of a reservoir. That last short straight into the Curva R is lined by the reservoir on one side, and the South China Sea on the other. Racers line back up for the long slingshot down the start/finish straight after exiting Curva R, to start it all over again. **RW**



(Above) Florida's Michael Barnes (34) ran as high as second but ran off-course and finished 13th. (Below) California's Mark Miller (10) finished 12th, reporting clutch problems on the Celtic Racing GSX-R1000. Photos by Chris Hartman.



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## .....club racing.....

### WERA WEST...

WERA WEST AT FONTANA, CALIFORNIA, JANUARY 10

## Chris Ulrich Wins At Auto Club Speedway

By David Swarts

**Team** Roadracingworld.com Suzuki's Chris Ulrich gave himself and his 2010 racing program a shot of enthusiasm at the WERA West season-opener at Auto Club Speedway. Ulrich, riding a Dunlop-shod Team Roadracingworld.com Suzuki GSX-R1000K9 AMA Superbike, turned his fastest laps ever on the 2.3-mile, 21-turn infield road course and beat out some strong competition to take a pair of early-season victories.

Ulrich's first win came in the Formula One event. Jeremy Toye got the holeshot off the 25-rider grid on his Lee's Cycles Honda CBR1000RR and led the first two laps, but Toye got out of shape in Turn Nine on lap three and Ulrich was able to take the lead and immediately start stretching a gap. Running laps as fast as 1:25.548, Ulrich was able to pull away and win by 3.2 seconds over Toye, who ran off the track and finished second. Reno Karimian passed Derek Keyes and Brant Wiwi on the final lap to go from fifth to third on his Suzuki GSX-R1000. Wiwi finished fourth on his Suzuki GSX-R1000, and Keyes, who said he was racing his Kawasaki ZX-10R with untested suspension parts, finished fifth.

A rematch between Ulrich and Toye came in A Superbike, and it was much closer. Toye once again took the early lead on his Dunlop-fitted Honda, but the two riders were soon swapping positions.

"I made some changes and it was better," said Toye, who carved 0.8-second off his best time from the first race, "but my settings still weren't right and I was getting out of shape in a few corners."

As he did in Formula One, Toye said he ran wide in Turn Nine, and Ulrich took the lead, maintained it with laps as fast as 1:25.333 (0.6-second faster than he's ever gone at the track before) and won the race by 0.385-second.

"Chris was definitely getting off the corners better than me," said Toye, "and he was riding super consistent and super tidy. I could make up some time on the brakes, but not enough to make up for what I was losing off the turns."

"We had some issues with our brakes," Ulrich said, explaining that his bike's rotor and pad combination wasn't ideal and cost him some time, "but overall it was good. It was a good weekend. We made some progress over

these two days and over the winter, and I'm pleased with the progress and our potential to go faster. Everything we did this weekend we did on the AMA-spec Dunlops to make sure it carries over to when we come back here for the AMA National weekend. Now I'm looking forward to starting the (AMA) season."

Toye finished second to Ulrich in A Superbike, over 25 seconds ahead of Eddie Barajas, who held off Brant Wiwi by just 0.133-second. Veteran Jeff Stern finished fifth on his Honda CBR1000RR.

Toye did not go home winless, using his Yamaha YZF-R6 Superbike (which he said was "tired" and only producing 135 rear-wheel horsepower, down from its usual 143) to hold off young teammate Jimmy Wood; Wood said he and Toye were both making many mistakes that resulted in changes in the lead.

"I thought I could pass him to the line on the last lap," said Wood, "but I dropped the hammer too early coming out of the last corner and the thing spun up and drifted out onto the curb and got out of shape."

Toye was able to beat Wood to the line by 0.120-second. Lenny Hale passed Patrick McCord on the final lap to score third.

Wood later won the C Superstock race on his Pirelli-fitted Lee's Cycles/CCCI Kawasaki ZX-6R, while Hale earned victories in B Superstock and B Superbike.

AMA regular Taylor Knapp started from near the back of the grid in all his races but managed to finish second in C Superstock and B Superbike. Knapp rode a Latus Motors Racing Ducati 848 in preparation for an assault on the 2010 AMA Daytona SportBike Championship. Latus Motors Racing also fielded AMA veteran Steve Rapp on a Buell 1125R at Auto Club Speedway, and Rapp finished sixth in Formula One and third, just behind Wiwi and Keyes, in A Superstock.

Former Red Bull AMA U.S. Rookies Cup Champion Benny Solis, Jr. made his 600cc racing debut on a Graves Yamaha YZF-R6 on the weekend. The 15-year-old Californian crashed while running fifth in the C Superbike race, but bounced back to finish sixth in the 26-rider C Superstock sprint.

Emerging talent Lex Hartl held off Andre Ochs to take home first-place trophies in 125cc Grand Prix and Formula Two. Ochs was 0.4-second behind Hartl in Formula Two and just 0.013-second back in 125cc GP.

The event drew a large turnout of riders and enjoyed unseasonably warm weather in the high 70s.

### RESULTS

**FORMULA ONE EXPERT:** 1. Chris Ulrich (Suz