

THE NEXT CHAPTER



He's got a new bike to get to know before starting a new season, in a new class, with a new club; the Bemsee Powerbikes on a 2014 Kawasaki ZX10-R.

LOOKING FOR TROUBLE

We found more issues on close examination that could've caused us big trouble if we hadn't found them. Thinking, 'Oh, that'll be alright' is not enough and trouble will find you and bite you hard, taking big chunks out of your racing budget – best to go looking for it before that happens



Stripped down and mean looking – the ZX10-R looks the ‘Full Monty’!

After a quick test run we spotted water leaking from a hose, the clips were too big and weren't sealing properly, so they were replaced with the correct size; problem solved. It has a full titanium Arrow exhaust system and when removed, we noticed most of the header nuts were loose too. What's more, the brakes were missing the brake pad clips... not good.



Calliper clips were missing

Then we turned our attention to the next most important part; suspension. This bike is equipped with Maxton suspension, front and rear.

Not knowing what had been done to the units, we spoke to Richard Adams at Maxton Engineering in Cheshire; he gave great advice concerning setting up the bike. He said that he'd worked on quite a few ZX10-R's with the shorter rear 3.5 linkage that Ritchie wanted to use. So, the rear shock was sent to him for a service. He re-valved it, and set everything up for us taking into consideration Ritchie's weight. The main change was a much softer spring. He then gave us a detailed spec sheet with all the settings on, tyre pressures and length of swingarm – invaluable technical info. Also included were the measurements to check against when the shock was back on the bike and he was absolutely spot on with static sag and rider's sag.



Just like new – fully serviced shock back from Maxton

He gave his time freely and has been great helping us to understand this new bike with a new suspension system. Anyway, we decided to do the front forks ourselves, with new seals and oil and was horrified to see that hardly any oil drained out of one fork and one seal was full of dirt and grime. Luckily, there wasn't any significant wear on the bushes and cartridge unit, so after a good clean everything was reassembled with the oil suggested by Maxton with the right air gap too. Richard worked out that we should have 10.25 springs in the front, we had 10's in already and when we measured the sag I was very close, so we left them for the time being.



Front end sorted with new oil and seals

He also gave us optimum settings for the front as a starting point; he said that just setting things in the middle is not always the best way. We did what he said, and the bike felt nice and even when we pushed up and down on the tank.

We also noticed that the front head races were loose and when we took off the centre nut – it was only finger tight! Bloody hell, it just shows how much attention you need to give to a newly purchased bike. In fact, there were many loose bolts: side engine mounts – the crash protectors were just spinning round – the shock nut was loose, caliper bolts, the swing arm linkage was barely tight and the rear sets were all at different heights!

The bike was already kitted out with R&G crash protection, but the bolts were too short at the engine mounting points. We spoke to our friend and sponsor at R&G, Alan Garret, who sent us a complete new set. They were indeed completely different, so thanks to him we now know what we need and can tighten them up properly without fear of stripping any threads.

Before we put the fairing back on Ritchie went around everything with a torque wrench, just to be sure. Don't get us wrong, it's not like we've got a bad bike, Ritchie is very happy with it, but there are more demands made on a race bike, that's why you need to go that extra mile on care and attention. Thinking, 'Oh, that'll be alright' is not enough and trouble will find you and bite you hard, taking big chunks out of your racing budget – best to go looking for it before that happens.

So, now, completely satisfied with our work we all decided that a few days in Spain at the Circuito de Velocidad de Cartagena would be perfect to get used to Ritchie's new ride for 2020. He had 3 days to do it and we were really looking

forward to not only setting up the ZX10-R, but also getting some sun for a change!

THE CHRONICLES OF CARTAGENA

By Ritchie Thornton



No Limits Trackdays organise transportation to get the bike to the circuit so we prepared a list of tools to take with us, plus a few spares should we need them. When you think of what we normally take to a race meeting, this by comparison, was really travelling light. With a bit of creative packing, I was amazed at what we could get in and around the bike.

As I waved goodbye to my ZX10-R I started to feel very excited at the prospect of knowing that the next time I'd see it was at a circuit I'd never been to before and in Spain.

When we all stepped off the plane in Alicante it was 17 degrees, the sun was out and when we arrived in Cartagena all the locals were sitting outside in the narrow streets with tapas and beers...this was more like it I thought, but it was all about to change.

Day One:

On Saturday morning it was a very early start. Me and Dad arrived at the circuit to grab a garage and unload all the stuff off the stillage and get everything set up. There was no sound check so once we were organised, with the tyre warmers on, I could relax for a bit until the briefing started.



Ready to go

Track time was from 10 'til 5 and my group was out first. It was a dry track, but very cold so it was steady away to start with. After the three mandatory sighting laps we all gradually increased the pace and the bike was feeling good.

Unfortunately, after about 15 minutes I crashed on a tight right hander. I still don't know what happened. It felt like the front suspension bottomed out, but when we inspected the tie marker it was nowhere near the bottom. Very strange, I felt awful because I took someone out with me. I've never done that before in all the years I've been racing and I was gutted, not only for the damage to my new bike, but even more for the poor guy I connected with. I can only assume that it was something on the track as my speed was slow at that time.

I had to miss the next session repairing the bike: forks twisted in the yolks, front fairing and fairing support bracket, clutch lever, rear sets and gear linkage. Then it started raining. I was desperate just to get on the bike again to test it, so we put the wets in and I managed a full session with no problems. It was pretty much wet all afternoon until the very end when it started to dry up quite quickly. I managed one more session with slicks, but it was a frustrating day!

Day 2:

The weather was still forecast changeable but the majority of the day looked like it might be dry. This turned out to be the best day out of the three.

Cartagena is a great circuit for setting up a bike. Lots of left and right corners and a great long straight. I was surprised at how much elevation there was, looking at on-board footage from other riders it looks flat.

In fact, it's quite the opposite, and has a lot of blind corners. I changed a lot on the front end and I was really working the front tyre quite hard. I ended up making some dramatic changes, but the rear was fine and once I got the rebound set right I was going much faster.

The bike seemed to get better and better and I was really happy with the way my lap times started to improve. Although, with the cold tarmac, I had to be a bit careful, I didn't want to bin-it again.



Somewhere near the pace I wanted to be by the end of day 2...

I was hoping to get my lap times to around the 1:39's, as I thought that would be a respectable pace, but with my rear tyre going off and the temperature dropping late in the afternoon, I knew that I wouldn't be able to achieve that by 5 o'clock when we finished.

It was great fun pushing on with the other riders in the group though, as we chased and learned from each other.



Ten out of ten for the 10-R. I was ready for day 3...

With a new rear tyre on for the last day and the bike handling at its best, I was keen to knock more seconds off to achieve my goal. However, when I was told to raise everything off the garage floor, because we were expecting heavy rain and the possibility of a flood, my heart sank.

Day 3:

It rained all night, and the track wasn't just wet, there was standing water everywhere and it was pretty dangerous. Not many went out, and those that did came back in. Anyway, the rain eased off a bit and eventually stopped, so I ventured out to get a better understanding of how the bike would go in the wet.



I have a new name for the circuit: Cartarina...

The ZX10-R is so much easier to ride than my ZX7-R on a wet track. Although it's a similar weight, it's the way the weight is distributed that makes it feel lighter. It felt like I could really push it – most enjoyable – and after a couple more sessions and one minor adjustment, I felt like I'd got it sussed.

There wasn't much point going out again after that and as the track didn't look like drying out – in fact more rain was on its way – I decided to get the bike packed up ready to be transported home to Blighty and finish early.

Overall, it was a great experience to go to a circuit I'd never been to before, even though the weather wasn't what I really expected. The new bike is great though and I'm really looking forward to racing it now at the first Bemsee meeting in March at Brands Hatch.



Wet playtime over, time to pack up and go home...

No Limits put on a good show for the price, including track time and transport, and with free tea, coffee and biscuits on tap, Dad, Mum and my wife Mandy, were very happy to help out while I was out enjoying myself. Racing can be selfish, but I can't change that, and to be fair, we all enjoyed it and plan to go again next year. Surely, the weather can't be as bad a second time??

Ritchie Thornton

Action Photos: Peter Wileman.

Sponsors for the ZX10R: Maxton, Opie Oils, R&G Racing, Cradley Kawasaki, TA Creative.