

## Racing the Vintage Superbike CB-X at Phillip Island, Australia

January 24-27, 2008

By Dr. Tom Marquardt

Australian officials of the M.A. (Motorcycling Australia) came to Columbus for official AMA-FIM-MA business and they set the timing to coincide with our large event, Vintage Days at Mid-Ohio, July 2007. They wanted to observe our organization (AHRMA) and the operation of our largest vintage event with specific interest in our Superbike class. An invitation was made to get as much participation from the Americans as possible at the "International Challenge" for 1973-1980 superbikes at Phillip Island in January! This is a team challenge, "Australia against the rest of the world" at their largest vintage event at their premier track. Several of our top competitors showed interest in going but details of assistance and organization were lacking. The attitude was "we would love to have you come but you are on your own". I decided to give it consideration as a once in a lifetime experience. I obtained an entry form and contact information but no offers of assistance from any direction were coming in. I let the dream of going recede as unaffordable.

We had a busy and successful Barber Motorsports event with the CB-X heavyweight and the CB-550 middleweight superbikes. I came to the conclusion that every good thing that has happened in my life has come from me making the effort and making it work. This would be a once in a lifetime opportunity, so I got the ball rolling on the trip back from Alabama. My experience sending the Yetman CB-77 racer to Japan for the "Time Tunnel" event October 2002 with David Roper riding laid the ground work to jump in and get started on this great adventure.

I had several tasks to complete to pull this off so I needed to prioritize the order of attack: 1) post-Barber preparation and repair 2) crating and shipping 3) race entry and documentation 4) racing licensure and AMA release for a foreign event 5) ground support and transportation in Australia 6) air transportation for the two of us to get to Melbourne and back.

These tasks required dealing with multiple, international bureaucracies: 1) Colorado State and Grand County governments 2) US customs 3) AU customs 4) FIM-AMA-MA 5) Phillip Island Circuit (the race promoter). Each stage involved multiple hurdles and hoops to jump through. Persistence is the key and not getting discouraged. Racing has always required a single minded persistence but here there were multiple unknowns. It seems it should be easier to do this than it is, as it is left to the individual to "reinvent the wheel" when this has all been done before.

Several individuals were involved to help pull this off: Roland Skate AU (Mr. CB-X, ground support), Nick Smith AU (shipping, thanks to Steve Spencer), Emma Hall AU (Phillip Island Circuit administration), my wife Diana Marquardt (communication, administration support and for going along with this craziness), Bruce Sass (Vickery Motorsports, Denver- crating and US ground support), Perry Clark (big-bore engine parts, shipped to AU for Roland to build a spare "to the rules" bullet), Walt Schaefer (Michelin tires, Alabama), Val Agostino (Sun Enterprises,

Denver CB-X parts). Financial assistance came from ICOA, **Randakk's Cycle Shakk**, Dan and Beth Green, Mike Myers, Stan and Pearl Friduss, Nick Cosco and Flori Gruenwald.

Post-Barber, pre-AU preparation needed to be handled soon after returning from Alabama. The crate needed to be shipped to L.A., to get through customs and on a boat to Melbourne. I had been black flagged on Sunday for excessive "smoking". This turned out to be oil dripping on the right side header collector presumably from a leaky oil cooler line under the clutch housing. While attending to the oil line I noticed a crack in the clutch housing in front of the rear engine mount lug. With time being short I decided to have the case welded while installed in the frame. A quick test up "racer road" showed good results so off to the big unknown we go! A new set of Michelin race tires, tall gearing and a general detail tidying-up finished the job.

Shipping involved a van trip to Denver to stuff the racer into a ZX-6 crate (surprisingly a good fit after dropping the front end 4 inches) with riding gear and a precision selection of minimally needed tools and spares. It was trucked to Long Beach before Thanksgiving.

Documentation was handled by providing original bills of sale (chassis and engine numbers, thanks to Dr. Bob Tipton), affidavit of ownership (notarized), a statement from Grand County government stating non-street legal vehicles cannot be titled in Colorado (US customs requires a title to export) and I obtained a carnet (passport for the stuff). All original documents were sent to US customs by courier to then be sent on to AU customs in Melbourne. Unbelievably the paperwork never makes it to US customs, so the bike is on the dock in LA "missing the boat". Our tight schedule just got tighter. A duplicate carnet was issued (another \$300 on top of \$500 in the first place) and several phone calls and e-mails later the bike gets on the last boat to AU that will make it in time. The stress level at this point was a bit high.

Race entry and documentation has gone well. The organizers have offered free entry and ground shipping from Melbourne to Phillip Island. The sanctioning body requires detail pictures and origination of all parts. The VFR-1000 forks and brakes are "too new" for their rules but we can run to our rules. Their class structure allows 1300 cc, slicks and formula style chassis and fairings?!! I wasn't aware of the 1300 cc rule until after the bike was on its way hence the mad scramble to send an 1170 cc big bore kit to AU for Roland to build up. The more I heard about what I was facing for competition the more I stressed about showing up with a knife to a gun fight.

Meanwhile, I am fighting it out with the AMA-FIM regards my international license. The Australians require the FIM document for "insurance" reasons (poor at best as it turns out). Along with the usual expected notarized documents and payments they require a treadmill EKG-stress test (\$400 to \$600!) for competitors over the age of 50. We have a friend in the business in Louisiana (thanks Dr. Jon) who can help out but this adds to the logistics and delays. After a fair number of faxes, e-mails and phone calls we finally get this hurdle sorted out and my FIM license arrives in early January with weeks to spare. I applied for the license in Mid-November. Then it is the competitor's responsibility to contact the AMA to obtain a release to compete out of the US with all the official FIM event numbers, dates, titles, and location sent to the event organizers in Australia. Apparently international bureaucracies cannot

communicate without the mediation of an amateur individual who does not have any experience doing any of this.

While dealing with all the details, holidays (plus working a bit to pay for all of this)! Diana was stricken with acute appendicitis, just when things seem to be sort of falling into place. Better for it to be two weeks before Christmas than over there while traveling! Surgery was in Denver, which is 2 hours away from home. It all worked out OK but just added to the drama.

Ground transportation was coming together and falling apart at the same time. Roland was having trouble finding enough time off to support Thursday-Friday practice and Monday engine swap and re-crating (we planned to install the big bore engine after Thursday practice for Friday qualifying and racing). The lateness of the bike's expected arrival added to the confusion. Phillip Island agreed to ship the bike to the race track from Melbourne but it would be more convenient to have the bike shipped to Roland's to uncrate and final prep, if we can get it to the island. So, even the "simple" tasks are creating extra stress and problems.

Air travel was Diana's task. She went all around the internet trying to sort this one out. The situation went from we would get there without the bike making it, to the bike is definitely on its way but the people may not make it! Absolutely nothing is going to work out easily. One option was to lay over in Fiji for a couple of days (ideal, \$1,000 per person) but that was no longer available two days later when trying to book the reservations. The best LA to Melbourne direct was \$2,400+ a person. She and the travel agent settled on a \$1,900 alternative routing through Hong Kong adding 8 hours to a long ordeal. It looks like we are on our way!

We found ourselves driving to Denver January 18 to fly off to OZ. "Can you believe it? We are actually going to pull this off!" Diana thought out loud. Three months of effort, tension, drama and hidden surprises did in fact seem to be coming good. Traveling went well enough. We managed to make all of our connections with a seat waiting for us every time (Denver to LA was over booked 23 seats!) We even had time for a much appreciated shower at Hong Kong's beautiful new airport. Roland was waiting for us at Melbourne customs except my luggage didn't make it. A few last minute parts and tools in there had me concerned. Plus Roland informed us that the bike had not yet arrived at his house which had me more concerned.

There was increasing tension regards stories of expected competition ("the Brits showing up with 160 horsepower formula one monsters") and it had just been announced that Wayne Gardner would be riding an ex-works 1200cc Formula one Honda twin-cam four. I expected keen competition but I was increasingly aware of having jumped into the deep end. Wanting to up-hold American honor I was determined to make a good showing. I was anxious to get to the island for Thursday's practice and to figure this place out.

Diana and I had wonderful accommodations and hospitality at Roland and Karen's home out in the country east of Melbourne. We were able to acclimate to the time zone changes, jet lag and staying left while driving on Monday. Diana was to go up to the Snowy Mountains for a two day horse adventure and needed to familiarize herself with her borrowed transportation and practice new driving skills. We visited the Healesville wildlife sanctuary 35 km north driving "Uncle Bob", the Nissan diesel UTE (small pick-up with a flat bed) that Roland and Karen kindly loaned us.

The sanctuary is a world renowned, indigenous species haven for all the interesting animals Australia is famous for. We got to pet a tame Wallaby and hang out with some locals. I drove up to Healesville and Diana drove back. It was the kind of experience that makes you appreciate the safety of the race track! We did manage to get lost on the way back and so got to see more of the vineyards, orchards and horse country around Roland's property.

Diana was off to her horse adventure Tuesday (8 hours driving "Uncle Bob" in the bush) and the shipping agent called to confirm the CB-X racer delivery that afternoon. My anxiety level dropped many points when it did arrive after lunch in good condition. I got busy getting it out and returning it to track ready condition.

I needed to add sprocket protectors as per Aussie rules, and attend to several details, organize tools, parts and battery charging. I was ready to go now. Mercifully my errant luggage appeared that evening as well. The planets lined up and this was going to happen after all.

Roland and I spent Wednesday attending to final tasks: obtaining race fuel (100 octane aviation leaded, \$10 a gallon), detailing the big bore replacement engine ((1) heli-coil, valve clearance check, engine mount mods to fit my chassis), organizing his work truck-race transporter and getting everything loaded. Their rules allow tire warmers so we borrowed some from a modern super sport racer nearby and we were set to go. It was an hour and a half to Phillip Island so we planned an early start to be there by 8:00 AM. Racers operate the same way all over the world.

I managed to sleep well Wednesday. With much enthusiasm and emotions running near redline; we were off to start the whole reason for this great undertaking. We got to the track slightly later than we hoped but all the preliminaries went better than expected. We bumped the bike off and were ready to practice in group 2. I was about to get geared up when they announced group 2 would be going out first!?! The same confusion we get over here. Missing the first session really was a setback as I had not been on the bike since October and this was one of only four sessions we would get. I was feeling slightly behind when we finally did get out (7 groups in the rotation) but I was confident in my ability to learn new tracks pretty quickly. I had seen several MotoGP and Superbike races on TV and had watched on-bike and in-car footage on You Tube but the real deal was much different than I was ready for. Track knowledge was the key as it was mostly blind exits of long, fast left-hand sweepers with two slow speed rights and two high speed rights (turn 1 heading to Phillip Bay; talk about visually distracting and the "hayshed" kink). The bike was working great and by the end of the second (6) lap session I had a reasonable idea of where to go. A lot of improvement was needed however.

The start of the third (and last) session was settling down when I was trying hard to stay with a faster local. Suddenly he came in to pit-in unexpectedly early (which is also the entry to the slow hairpin right "Honda" corner). Rider disorientation, bumps and panic braking conspired to toss me off while still going straight?! Fortunately I was pretty well slowed down at that point. But unfortunately I got tangled up with the bike in an awkward, semi-high side dismount. I pulled muscles in my right hip-pelvis area which caused me problems putting weight on it to

walk but was otherwise not too bad. "It's just a flesh wound!" Roland did all the heavy lifting to get loaded up and we headed back to his shop.

Our original plan was to come back to swap the 1170 race motor for Friday qualifying. Crash damage repair now took precedence plus my "stock" engine was acting just fine. We had a flattened megaphone, damaged seat mounts and number plate mounts, dirty carbs, and a disassembled front master cylinder reservoir to repair. My "crash guards" on the crank end cap and cam ends mostly did their jobs but got pretty used up in the process. We had to replace the crank-end cap and re-JB weld these junk yard cases. Thanks to Roland, Karen and Jake we got it reloaded about midnight for another early departure in the morning.

It was difficult to lay flat, roll-over or stand but I was able to dress myself and sitting was not too bad. I had to pass a physical exam with the FIM doctor to allow re-entry. I could squat comfortably without assistance and that was good enough for him. I carefully squeezed into my leathers and made it through the morning session (tentative and sloppy) but proved the bike was 100%. The next session was the first transponder timed attempt. My out lap went as usual and my first flying lap felt good and was my best effort yet. While grabbing the brake for Honda hairpin it locked-up without warning (at high speed this time) and I slid off on my right hip and shoulder. I came to rest on my right hip and was so uncomfortable I couldn't move to get on my back or all fours. I was ordered to the hospital for X-rays this time. It was not likely that I would pass another physical with the same doctor as this morning. I also reluctantly decided that I'd had enough. What a silly ending. The CB-X faithful in Australia were very disappointed that I had made an early exit. It was getting a lot of attention as usual. Robbie Phillis (ex-world superbike) was all over it and wanted to ride it badly! I gave it my best effort and came up short of the "Cinderella" story I had envisioned.

Our planned two week Australian tourist experience turned in to rest and recovery at Roland and Karen Skate's. They treated us like family which after almost three weeks we had become. I had time to read Tony Foale's updated chassis text book completely, at least. We spent two days at Steve and Heather McKernan's in Euroa (1979 and 1981 CB-X's) before heading to Sydney to fly out. International airports are unbelievably large places on crutches. We got back to serious winter in the Colorado Mountains.

I am finishing writing this in early April. The bike is in LA stuck in customs. Apparently the carnet isn't working as well as expected. My trusty CB-X racer has been in a box all over the Pacific since mid-November 2007.

I've had two months back home working, recovering and thinking. My initial frustration and depression have resolved. I am doing well physically. Don Quixote was right, "The magic is in the doing and trying". Whether we succeed or not is secondary. My friend David Roper sums it up "If it were easy, everybody would be doing it". On to the next project-adventure!