

66 WEDNESDAY 1 FEBRUARY 2012  
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MotoGP News

# Stoner on top of the world... and

► Father-to-be, two MotoGP titles in the bag and still mountains to climb

By Colin Young

Life is sweet right now for the Aussie outback racer who came to the UK as a 14-year-old to chase his MotoGP dream.

Now 26 and blissfully married to Adriana, Stoner is brimming with enthusiasm for the next phase of his life.

By mid-February the pair hope to have welcomed their first child into the world.

And Stoner, already deep into his personal preparation for the 2012 MotoGP season, can't wait. Both for the baby and a crack at third world title.

Stoner says family life will not slow him down and that he is ready to separate his private life from his uncomplicated racing mantra – to win races.

"Life could not be too much better than this," he said. "Finishing out last year we were going to have a child and then winning the championship was fantastic."

"We have a baby on the way so no matter what happens on the track, off the track it is going to be fantastic."

Relaxed and refreshed during a pre-season alpine holiday in Verbier, Stoner appears at ease with life and his increasingly impressive racing achievements. His second title win in 2011 came in his first season at Honda and he is planning that it won't be the last.

"I am still the hunter," Stoner declares

**Finding out last year that we were going to have a child and then winning the title was fantastic**

CASEY STONER

**Stoner with Adriana who is expecting their first child next month**



from the lounge of a holiday chalet in the Swiss Alps.

"I've got to go out and try to take the championship again. This year is a completely clean slate and I'm going out to try to take that number one again. Everybody says there is huge pressure being world champion but I find there is a lot less. Once you have won a couple of championships you can just go for it when you race. No matter what happens this season I won't have the same level of pressure and I won't have to put the same pressure on myself to try to do it again for a third time."

In six seasons Stoner has won 33 GPs, more than any other rider in the same period, and he has dismantled the perception that the great Valentino Rossi is an untouchable force in MotoGP.

Rossi has won 26 races since 2006 and the pair are two-all in championships won.

It is now Spanish charger Jorge Lorenzo, as he showed in 2011, whom Stoner reckons is the man who delivers the pressure to perform at every race.

"On our best days I think Jorge and I probably do have that little edge," Stoner said.

"But as we saw last year Dani Pedrosa can still be extremely fast and depending how they feel, some of the others guys are also up front."

"But Jorge and myself are there every week, we are always getting the podiums and the good results, and doing that is how you fight for championships."

"If Dani can run closer to the front when the conditions are not perfect and be consistent then he can fight for the title."

"But almost every year with Dani there has been another factor, either an injury or a slump and he has lost points and been out of contention."

**High altitude holiday**

Stoner's first child will be born in Switzerland where he lives during the European season near Lausanne. But with an early return from a brief holiday in Australia to prepare for the birth, Stoner headed for the hills for a pre-season holiday and training camp.

Along for the ride was best buddy Chaz Davies, the 2011 WSS Champion.

"Chaz was my first mate when I went to the UK racing 12 years ago and this is a rare opportunity to catch up because we are in different championships now," Stoner said.

Leeds Camier was also supposed to join us but he was busy. Being in the Alps is also good for training with the altitude and Chaz and I have been out skiing and snowboarding. Chaz is a snowboarder. I'm a skier although I also do some snowboarding. We are just out to have fun, but I'm pretty good on the skis. Skiers and snowboarders don't usually mix but I do both. The snowboarders are always bitching about skiers but for me skiing is a lot more fun."

Baby talk has also been a big part of Stoner's pre-season preparations. He is



Stoner during his pre-season holiday in Verbier, Switzerland



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testing Honda's new RC213V in Sepang this week and plans to be back in Switzerland for the birth.

"I am cool with all the baby stuff, I'm ready for that," he said. "My cousin had a baby girl only five months ago and we have spent a lot of time with her and she is a beautiful little girl."

"We have the messy organ and with Adriana at home in Switzerland I won't be too far away at the European races. And once the baby is settled after a few months she will come to the track with the baby."

Earlier in his GP career Stoner was based in Monaco but he quickly fell out of love with that glistening concrete jungle.

"I just love Switzerland and the way of life here," he said.

"I lived in Monaco for three years and hated every day. It is too small for me, there is no freedom. There is no wilderness, it is just there for the image and tax reasons."

"In Switzerland everyone is so pleasant and there are so many different things

# it's getting better



**Valentino will say anything he can to try to put down what myself, my team and Honda have done**

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to do with a lot of countryside. We live in a little village, about an hour from Geneva airport, and we are right on a stream, it is awesome. It's as outback as you can get in Europe. I can even fish for trout in the stream plus go mountain bike riding and, in winter, skiing and snowboarding."

Stoner reckons that if he wasn't a professional bike racer then being a fisherman would be his ideal occupation.

"I love fishing, that would be a great job," he said.

If there is a downside to Switzerland it's that Stoner doesn't have any motorcycles in his garage. Play time on bikes is reserved for his farm in Australia.

"Unfortunately, I've no bikes in Europe, just in Australia.

"I've got a motocross bike, a Honda 250F, and a Montesa trials bike – I love them. And I've got a Honda CB1000R which is great. I just go cruising on quiet roads with nice turns. On the road I am just a cruiser although I don't get to ride as much as I would like. I do all my racing

on the track. On the road I just want to be comfortable and ride for fun."

And what about cars? "A Range Rover is our family car in Switzerland," said Stoner. "I love that car, I swapped it for the BMW that I won and I've been very happy with it."

"It rides beautifully and it's good in the city and has got plenty of room. It's a diesel engine which is good for Europe."

**Rossi, Ducati and the Stoner legacy**

There are some high stakes being played out in 2012, not least Ducati's bold gamble to regain their reputation as winners when Stoner was on the red bikes.

Stoner's legacy at Ducati is the benchmark and undeniably the biggest challenge of Rossi's career.

Stoner knows what it took to win on an often beastly Desmosedici.

In four seasons with the Bologna squad Stoner won 23 grands prix and the 2007 title.

At Ducati's annual Wrooom team launch ski show in Italy Rossi referred to Honda's big budget spend on an "incredible" bike for the 2011 season.

"Valentino is going to say anything he can to try to put down what myself, my team and Honda have done," Stoner said.

"Honda did not spend a lot of money, they are not a stupid company. They haven't got to where they are now by spending money in the wrong areas."

"Honda was more or less the same from the end of 2010 although the gearbox changed. But I had the same bike from the start of the season. Honda already had a very good package and maybe it was just someone fresh from the outside who could come in, make the difference, and not be afraid of it."

**Breaking GP news**  
www.motocyclenews.com

WEDNESDAY 1 FEBRUARY 2012  
www.motocyclenews.com 67

Triumph Speed Triple R first ride  
Go to page 2

MotoGP's emotional return to Sepang  
Go to page 64

## Q and A with Casey

**WHAT DO YOU THINK ABOUT DUCATI'S CURRENT STRATEGY OF AN ALL-NEW JAPANESE STYLE BIKE, PRESUMABLY WITH A BIG BUDGET, FOR ROSSI IN 2012?**

"Unfortunately, Ducati put themselves in a very difficult situation because if Valentino doesn't win then it is the bike. He and everyone else will blame the bike even though the bike is capable of winning. At the beginning Ducati said they didn't want their bike to become a Yamaha, that they wanted to keep the Ducati heritage and make it like a Ducati. As usual, they have eaten their words. Now Ducati are saying they need a bike more like the Yamaha and easier to ride, and for me that is not the right way to go. If you want a bike like a Yamaha then go and ride a Yamaha. If you are going to have a Ducati then ride it like a Ducati. If Ducati do become competitive it is still not a Ducati, it's basically then designing a Yamaha with Ducati branding."

**CAN VALENTINO AND DUCATI TURN IT AROUND AND WIN THIS YEAR?**

"I don't know. Maybe they will keep chasing something they will never be able to find again, if they are trying to make it like another bike. Maybe Filippo [Perezoni] will come up with something and make a huge step forward but we have yet to see that. Ducati is going to have to work harder than last year and come up with something. We know Valentino is fast enough, he just needs to learn to ride the bike."

**VALENTINO HAS SAID THAT FOR HIM TO WIN IN RACES IN A SEASON AGAIN, LIKE HE DID AT YAMAHA AND HONDA, MAY NOT ONLY BE DUCATI'S PROBLEM BUT ALSO HIS PROBLEM, BECAUSE HIS RIVALRY IS YOUNGER AND STRONGER NOW. DO YOU AGREE?**

"Everyone has to realise that it is not just me, Jorge and Dani who are beating Valentino. Last year it was Ben [Spies], it was

Marco [Sic] and Andrea [Dovizioso], a lot of guys beat him in races last year. In some of the battles which he would normally win he lost a lot of them, even Cal Crutchlow beat him. A lot of the overtaking moves he was trying he would crash and nearly take people out. There were a lot of uncharacteristic things about Valentino last year. The Yamaha obviously made Valentino feel completely safe and it shows how good a bike the Yamaha was for him to do what he did in the past, and that he cannot do now. His rivals are a lot stronger now but on the right machinery Valentino can still be competitive."

**IN TERMS OF RECOGNITION IT'S BEEN YOUR 2011 TITLE WITH HONDA WAS THE HIGH POINT IN YOUR SIX YEARS IN MOTOGP. WAS 2011 YOUR BEST SEASON SO FAR?**

"Definitely. Back in 2007 everyone was saying that the bike [Ducati] or the tyres was the reason I won the title. And it was really only Valentino and Dani who were real competition. Now there is Valentino, Dani, Jorge, Ben and Andrea – there are a lot of riders up front now so last year's title was a lot more rewarding to win. In previous years, I was not getting a lot of recognition for what I was doing and how hard I was working. It took the fact that Valentino and I changed bikes and he went to Ducati, where I had ridden for four years, and went to my dream team at Honda to show what I was capable of. And to show that

I could have been fighting for the championship in all the previous years and maybe had another championship to my credit, it hadn't worked out that way in the past so I just have to live with that."

Stoner just needs to learn to ride the Ducati!



Stoner enjoys a game of pool with best mate, WSS champ Chaz Davies