

CORRY CORNER



jackcorry45@gmail.com
I'm on facebook
@arai45

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17 New St.
Skerries
8494073

'I don't like to see any pushy parents at the races roaring and shouting'

AFTER last week's column, which featured controversy and the politics of road racing, it was nice to sit with a family of a very talented young rider and see what their plans are for 2021.

It's a season that will be held under the auspices of the IMC, who ran a shortened but successful championship last year.

Finnan Wherity is a class 11-year-old who is in school in Balscadden, and he topped off last season by winning the Road Racing Ireland Junior Gearbox Championship in fine style. To sit with a young rider is pleasure, just to see what makes them tick and where they get the enthusiasm to keep going week in week out.

'I started on a Moto X bike in the garden and I went with my dad to a race meeting at the White River track and loved it, and I just wanted to have a go,'

he said.

Finnan's dad Shane is also a very keen competitor, and while his early roots lay with road racing he left that scene after the tragic death of Martin Finnegan, as his dad Shea was very much involved with the Martin Finnegan Supporters Club.

'Jamie and I used to race in the Pit Bike class, but that was after doing Moto X for a few years, and we got fed up with the dirt and having to wash everything down after a race meeting.'

'We actually went to White River to watch one of the races and we just got talking to people and decided that we wanted to have a go at this type of racing as it looked great.'

'We got two pit bikes, and while Finnan was only five at the time he was still out on a bike around the field as well as a bit

of BMX. Once he was coming to the races to watch Jamie and I racing, he just wanted to have a go. He could see the kids on the Mini Motos, and once he reached the age to go racing we got him a bike.'

'He started on a second-hand Polini, and that's when he raced against young Cameron Dawson, who was the champion at the time.'

'It was a hard start for him as in the second race he got wiped out by one of the top riders going through the chicane at Aghadowey, and he was literally spread everywhere.'

'I asked Finnan, did this crash not turn him off racing after such a hard reality accident?'

'No it didn't. I was a little nervous after that for a few races, but after that I had no bother.'

Shane added: 'He didn't get hurt, as he had no warning as



Finnan Wherity will compete in the IMC championship this year, supported by his dad Shane. Photo: Jack Corry

such, but while he was quiet for a short while after that he started getting better, and then a few podiums came his way. Really the big change came after he won his first race in the wet in Longford.'

When I asked Finnan could he remember his first win, his

reply was: 'Sorry no.'

I asked Finnan were there bragging rights when you go to school on Monday morning after a successful weekend? 'No, we don't really talk about it as most of them are football heads, and that is all they talk about.'

Shane said: 'A number of his close friends will ask how he did, but he has made so many friends since he started racing between Ireland and the UK, and once he got his first win he started getting better and better.'

'We got him a better bike for the new season as he only had the second-hand Polini. The new bike was a Blata, and once he gelled with that he was making great progress.'

'Once Cameron Dawson moved on to a bigger class he got a win, as Cameron was the only rider quicker than him. Finnan won every race for the following two years, with the exception of one, and that was a mistake that he made himself, but winning 58 races on the bounce was a great achievement in itself.'

'In 2018 he was Irish and Ulster champion, as well as winning the Ace of Aghadowey, and the following year he again won everything. The only ones he didn't win were the meetings that we didn't attend as we decided to go to the UK to compete in the British Championship.'

I asked Finnan how did he find competing at the higher level

in the British Championship? 'I kinda liked it in England as the battles were great and tougher, but I enjoyed the closer racing. I won two races in the UK and a few podiums as well, but in the first year it was tougher as we didn't do all the races, but I was in the top 10 which I was happy with.'

Shane added: 'It was a huge step up and scary for me, and we nearly came complacent as he was used to winning at home, and the only one that would put up to him was his brother Max, or his cousin Dylan who also raced at the time. It was a different ball game in the UK.'

I asked Shane what was the story with Max who seems to be semi-retired and a competitive rider? 'He hasn't given it up, as he takes it as it comes, and while Max is dynamite on a bike he is so fast and a real Marc Marquez. It's all or nothing as he would wipe lads out - he just comes and goes.'

'There was one thing about Max. We went to the UK one weekend and he decided that he wasn't going to race. He stayed in the truck, didn't do the Friday practice or the Saturday qualifying, and people were asking me was he not with you, and I just said that he is in the truck with no interest.'

Then on the Sunday morning he woke up and said that he wanted to race and I said are you for real as you haven't even

qualified, and would have to start at the back of the grid. 'At that meeting there were 26 or 27 bikes on the grid, which was massive. He was allowed to start at the back, and he finished in fifth place and literally sawed through the grid, which was unreal.'

'Then the next day he just wouldn't bother, and that's the way he is. Finnan is far more consistent and he looks forward to racing at the weekend.'

We spoke about bike preparation. 'It's a lot less with the bigger bikes, as the workload with the minis is massive. They are on such a fine edge as everything on them is so small. Even the chain is small, and if you don't keep them spotless it will tighten and grip. They are so unforgiving - they are either going or not, and while they are savage quick you literally have to strip the bike even during lunchtime to make sure everything is ok. As there is no suspension everything rattles loose on them.'

'In 2018 he was fifth in the British Championship and battling for third right up to the last few rounds, but you are up against kids that have three bikes and five engines, and we were getting the engine done after every round just to keep the power right, and we still couldn't stay with the quick lads.'

'It was a lot more expensive for us, as the competition could just hop in their van or race truck and drive through Eng-

land, whereas we had the extra expense of ferries, and then you have the furthest track away which is Lydd down near Dover in Kent. The cost to us for each round worked out at €1,500 to €2,000.'

'We are lucky that we can get a number of rounds out of a set of tyres, and you get addicted to it, but Covid had spoiled everything.'

We spoke about the family atmosphere of the IMC and the way it has transformed over the past few years, and especially last year when they were the only organisation that ran a championship season. 'They are well organised and there is a good buzz around the paddocks, and the British Championship is the same. The only exception is that they are solely kids. The effort to run a championship here last year was great, and the kids get to race as well.'

'We normally go to Spain to test in March as the track days are organised through the British Championship organiser, and go to tracks that the BSB teams go to like Cartagena which is a great break, especially in the sun. 'This year will again be different, but the IMC are able to run events without needing paying spectators through the gates, and they were very strict on the amount of people that were allowed into the tracks last year, which is also great. 'We see some parents in

the UK that think their sons are going to be the next Moto GP star, and want to see them in Moto 3 before they are 12 years of age, and this is not going to happen. I don't like to see pushy parents on the side of a track roaring and shouting at their sons, and thankfully this doesn't happen here.'

'They seem to forget that this is a speed sport and it is up to the rider to use the throttle the way they want, and not get them hurt.'

'We know of a family who remortgaged their house with the hope that their son will be racing in Moto GP, and this is not going to happen. We look at this as a hobby, and we want to keep it that way.'

'I couldn't believe how much Finnan got to know the bikes as he was like a test rider, and he proved me wrong.'

'For one, he never crashes. There was an incident in the UK in the Mini Moto as his bike looked a little slow, and I am like, are you going as hard as you can, and he said to me, no dad it's not right.'

'I couldn't find anything wrong and said to him that it's in your head. Sure enough I went that evening to the dyno. The bike started no problem and I put it up, and he was right as there was a problem with the coil and the ECU as it was only doing a blip.'

'He said to me, I told you as this only seems to happen mid-corner. So that was it - I now

have to listen to him. 'He isn't the kind of kid who doesn't put the visor down, and to hell with it. He is confident, and he showed this to me down in Tipperary when he lashed me and his godfather out of it, and I thought I was fast as he would just dive under you, and away with him.'

'We don't have much sponsorship, but I would like to thank Eamon Mulligan, Dave Molloy - who looks after his engines - Putoline helps with oil. Graham Byrne is Finnan's godfather and looks after sponsoring the team clothing, and the bike graphics. 'My own dad is also there, as well as the bank of Mammy and Daddy.'

'What a pleasant morning listening to a family whose commitment to racing and encouraging a young rider is paramount, and yet there was no airs and graces about Finnan. He was just sitting back and taking it all in. 'I have seen first-hand the talent that oozes from Finnan as he goes about his business, and races with such confidence that it will take him once more to the top of his class this coming season.'

The buzz around IMC paddocks is there for all to see, and yet it is still a sport where determination is plain to see, once the visor goes down. Finnan has been winning races for years against older riders, and still holds lap records at a few courses. The future is bright.

Baylon's badge venture to aid Chest, Heart & Stroke charity

BAYLON McCaughey is one of the most respected photo journalists in Ireland, who helps so much with this column and is a former rider who had a great career.

Unfortunately his health has not been great over the past two years, as a non-smoker and non-drinker, but he has been very lucky to have the right medical people to look after him.

I caught up with him to see his latest venture and he said: 'As most of you may well know, I have been fortunate over the past two years to have received excellent attention from cardiac personnel. Thanks to their unfailing care and aftercare treatment, I feel much better.'

'I would like to show my gratitude by giving something back to Chest Heart and Stroke, so I have decided to sell a badge, of which a percentage of sales will go to CH&S. The badge design has been approved by all the relevant authorities and are now available to order.'

'The badge carries the same design of my crash helmet that I used when racing, and this was based on my childhood hero Brian Steenson, who was sadly killed at the 1970 Isle of Man TT races, which coincidentally was my first visit to the TT races.'

'I've no doubt that the

motorcycle fraternity will support this worthy cause.'

A former competitor at off-road and tarmac events for more than 35 years, Baylon is a past Irish Short Circuit champion and winner at his local road race the Cookstown 100. He is also a renowned photographer and journalist and has also been involved in the MCUI(UC) Training Schools helping younger riders, and more recently set up the Baylon McCaughey Scholarship with the Irish Minibike Championship Pit Bike racing series.

A popular person amongst all road racing and short circuit riders, officials and marshals North and South, Baylon has always been very supportive in many fund-raising events over the years. Now it is our turn to show Baylon our support, by purchasing a badge or stickers in support of his named charity, Chest Heart & Stroke.

The Badges sell at €6 each (including P&P) and €7 in the Republic including P&P. Stickers are also available at €1 each. Please use the friends & family option while paying through PayPal, and don't forget to leave your name and address for postal requirements.

The PayPal address is baylonmccaughey82@gmail.com.

Keep'er lit!

Stickers supporting CHEST, HEART & STROKE

€1.00 EACH, (+€1.00P&P, Free P&P if ordered with Badge(s) (ROI P&P €1.50) PayPal: baylonmccaughey82@gmail.com

Please use the Friends & Family Option AND Don't forget to leave your name and address for postal requirements!

The badge that Baylon McCaughey is selling for the Chest, Heart and Stroke charity.



Finnan Wherity takes a quick look over his shoulder to see where the opposition is on his way to three wins in the Junior Gearbox class in Athboy last summer, and also the championship. Photo: Jack Corry