

Race Thoughts – Catalunya, Easter 2007

After three long months of waiting the day finally arrives to race. It's hard not to be nervous before the race no matter what's at stake in the end. I guess it's all about the competition. Training hard all weekend, trying to bring your lap times down as much as possible, and constantly pushing to improve your performance on the track. And on the last day, it's time to race. Everything you worked on for the past two days becomes muscle memory as you mentally prepare for the start. This race is unique because it's the only time we have a running start. This type of race is more difficult because you cannot pass anyone in front of you until you cross the start/finish line following the warm-up lap. As everyone is pushing hard to keep up with the front of the pack it's even more difficult not to lose time on the leader. As the race finally begins everyone gunning for the first corner trying as quickly as possible to pass some of the other riders and move closer to the front of the pack. All of us know that the longer the race goes on the harder it is to catch the front of the pack when you're in the middle. The level of mental focus at this point is unreal. All you think about is the passing the bike in front of you and moving on to the next one. I passed the first few riders within the first couple of laps, but then I caught up to a group of four riders that I just couldn't catch. With each turn it was like a serpentine, I would get close only to have them inch away from me on the next corner. Finally the last of the four riders had a momentary lapse in concentration as he took turn 7 wide, which enabled me to shoot up the inside with my bike leaned all the way over on its side and dragging my knee around the entire corner. I was able to catch the next rider going down the back straight before turn 8 and using late braking to outmaneuver him. I can't remember passing the 3rd rider in the pack, but the 4th rider was the most difficult. The ironic part was that he was also riding a Ducati 999 with the same start number on his front fairing, number 3. On the second to last lap I finally started to close the distance. I pushed as hard as I could coming out of turn 11 onto the long straight and was able to pass him going across the start/finish line. Unfortunately I didn't have the right sprocket set-up on my bike and he was able to catch me before turn 1 because I didn't have enough power to stay in front of him. He pulled along side of me on the outside of the straight and could see him trying to edge me out in my peripheral vision. At that point I decided I would brake as late as I had to in order to prevent him from passing me into turn 1. This was going to be difficult because I was already in the middle of the track instead of the outside, which was going to make it very hard to make such a tight turn while riding hard on the brakes at the last possible moment to keep me in front. As I turned into turn 1 I lost a lot of momentum due to the tight angle and extreme loss of power due to my braking. I remember saying out loud to myself just to hold on until I could get through turn 2 and dive hard into turn 3, which is the long right-hander. I knew if I could hold him off until then he would never catch me. And so, on that final lap (which I didn't realize at the time) I was able to ride with a clear view of track and not a rider to be seen. I finished the race in 15th place out of 36 with a top lap time of 2:06. I was so proud of my performance that day. It was only one year earlier that my best lap time was 2:26 and I started and finished the race in last place, and was lapped by at least the first four riders in the race. Needless to say, I can't wait until Brno! More to follow, so stay tuned!! ;-)