WORLD SUPERBIKES AND MOTOGP: A GLOBAL SPORT TOURISM PHENOMENON

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Abstract

World championship level motorcycle road racing became an international sport tourism event when MotoGP began in 1949. In contrast, the world superbike championship only began in 1988. MotoGP has been perceived as the pinnacle of motorcycle road racing with the world superbike championship perceived as second best for riders who cannot compete at the MotoGP level. Despite this, spectators throughout the world still flock to watch these exciting contests between charioteers on two wheels. For both MotoGP and world superbike championship races, spectator attendance figures generally show increases over time due to the close handlebar to handlebar racing and the sometimes spectacular crashes that result from the intense competition. Countries that have circuits used by these two world championships benefit financially from sport tourists due to the attendance of spectators, participants and race teams as well as volunteer officials. Motorcycle road racing is demonstrating more environmental awareness with the introduction of Moto2 class in MotoGP and the electric motorcycle championship, the TTXGP in 2010.

1.1.1 Keywords: MotoGP; World Superbike; road racing; sport tourism; sport marketing; e-motorcycle

INTRODUCTION

Sports tourism is the fastest growing sector in the global travel and tourism industry, and accounted for US$600 billion or more than 10% of the international tourism market in 2008. The direct benefit of hosting an international sporting event to a destination is cash, and the indirect benefit can be years of follow-on tourists (World Sport Destination Expo, 2009). In addition, international sporting events serve to showcase the host city and nation to the world. One international sporting event that is gaining worldwide popularity is that of motorcycle road racing where participants engage in close handlebar to handlebar combat on two wheeled chariots.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF MOTORCYCLE ROAD RACING

The roots of motorcycle road racing can be traced back to bicycle track racing on Velodromes in the 1800s (USA Cycling, 2004) where motorcycles were used to pace riders. Further development of the internal combustion engine led to more powerful motor cycles and races for motorcycles were held in Velodromes and dirt speedways at both indoor and outdoor venues. Motorcycle racing also occurred on public streets
and this led to the modern sport of motorcycle road racing on bitumen circuits, either on public streets such as the Isle of Mann Tourist Trophy (TT) race which started in 1907 (IOM Government Department of Tourism and Leisure by Duke Marketing Ltd., 2009), or on specially constructed circuits such as the Losail International Circuit built in 2004 (QMMF, 2008).

THE HISTORY OF MOTOGP

MotoGP began in 1949 and has been termed the oldest motorsport world championship (MotoGP. Com, 2009b). Initially, there were four solo classes for 500cc, 350cc, 250cc and 125cc. There was also a sidecar class that lasted until 1996 when sidecars left to form the sidecar world cup. The motorcycle manufacturers of Mondial, MotoGuzzi, Gilera and MV Augusta dominated in the 1950s with MV Augusta dominating the 500cc class from 1958 to 1974. Japanese motorcycle manufacturers such as Honda, Yamaha and Suzuki entered this competition in the 1960s although escalating costs saw only Yamaha remaining at the end of that decade. From 1963 to 1977, Giacomo Agostini became one of the most successful riders in the sport after winning 15 world titles in 14 years and having 122 grand prix victories (MotoGP. Com, 2009a).

In 1973, Barry Sheene, who went on to become a World Champion motorcycle road racer, felt that the public image of motorcycle racing was of grubby men with dirty fingernails, who were oily, greasy and wore shapeless black leathers (Barker, 2003). Barker (2003) attributed part of the increase in spectator attendance at motorcycle races to Barry Sheene, who was seen as one of the first motorcycle racers to use the media for the benefit of the sport as well as for his own advantage.

During the 1990s, Australian Mick Doohan won five consecutive world MotoGP titles before retiring due to injuries in 1999 (Doohan, 2001). As the 21st century approached, a new champion appeared, Valentino Rossi. He won titles such as the 500cc on Honda, 125cc on Aprilia, 250cc on Aprilia and MotoGP titles on both Yamaha and Honda motorcycles (MotoGP. Com, 2009c). By 2009, at 30 years of age, Rossi had claimed his ninth world title and his seventh MotoGP title (MotoGP media, 2009).

THE HISTORY OF THE WORLD SUPERBIKE CHAMPIONSHIP

In 1988, there was a newcomer to the world motorcycle road racing scene, the world superbike championship. It has always been seen as a poor relation of MotoGP and as “as a kind of elephant's dying ground for has-beens and riders who never made the cut” (Noyes, 2007, p. 1). The world superbike championship began using modified road bikes that were available to the public and was dominated in the 1990s by Ducati and Carl Fogarty (Durham associates group 2008). Carl was world champion four times and won 59 races. At the beginning of the 21st century, Ducati carried on this winning formula with Australian Troy Bayliss who finished his career with three world championships and 52 race wins (Bayliss, 2008).
SPORT SPECTATORS

The international passenger survey in 2007 showed that UK residents made 1.5 million trips abroad to watch sport. This represented 2.2% of all overseas travel and comparing the average figures for 2006/07 to figures from 2000/02, the sector showed a 50% increase (Gray, 2009).

Within the European community, more companies are offering sports tourism packages, with a diversification from existing destinations and new high-profile events appearing all over the world. When combined with the opening of budget airlines offering new cheap routes for weekend breaks, the sport tourism sector is booming. Motorsport appeals to couples or singles, corporate clients as well as an anniversary or birthday present and sport tourism operators get around half their motorsport business through agents (Gray, 2009).

MOTOGP SPECTATOR ATTENDANCE

If MotoGP is perceived to be the pinnacle of motorcycle road racing for participants, then many spectators should be attending race meetings to watch the world’s best racers in action. From 1998 to 2003 (See Table 1), spectator attendance at two rounds of MotoGP showed a decrease namely Jeréz (42%) and Mugello (8%), while Donington Park (8%) and Sachsenring (39%) showed an increase. The weather in 2003 was not a contributing factor to the attendance decline at either Mugello or Jeréz.

TABLE 1. SPECTATOR ATTENDANCES AT MOTOGP 1998 AND 2003

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jeréz de la Frontera (Spain)</td>
<td>206,000</td>
<td>121,324</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mugello (Italy)</td>
<td>79,400</td>
<td>73,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Donnington Park (UK)</td>
<td>65,000</td>
<td>70,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sachsenring (Germany)</td>
<td>144,000</td>
<td>200,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Six days before the final round the MotoGP series at Valencia in 2003, 95% of tickets had been sold with predictions of a full house of 120,000 fans by race day (Dorna Sports, 2003c). It is interesting to note that the cheapest of the spectator zones still had 20% free capacity with less than a thousand seats left (Dorna Sports, 2003b). This indicates that motorcycle race fans are not pricing sensitive. It is also unusual for such a large number of fans to attend what could be considered an anti-climax as the MotoGP and 125cc World Champions had already been decided and hence only the racing of the 250cc class would result in one rider becoming a new World Champion. In addition to TV coverage, the MotoGP also featured in local sports papers such as the Gazetto della Sport in Italy with the sport of motorcycle racing appearing to be as popular as Formula One, football and the Tour de France (Motorcycling Australia, 2003c).

During the 17 rounds of MotoGP in 2005, average attendances were 120,000 spectators or 2.04 million for the year (Crash.Net, 2005). The 2008 MotoGP attendance figures totalled 2.4 million spectators, the largest in the 60 year history of the sport, and the average weekend attendance was 134,000 (LCR Honda MotoGP Team, 2009), an increase of 17% in three
years. In addition, the three MotoGP events in Spain were watched by 650,000 fans in 207 countries receiving live broadcasts and there were 4,338 hours of live broadcast. At a MotoGP event, there can be as many as 511 media commentators from 57 television stations across 28 countries (LCR Honda MotoGP Team, 2009), making this a truly international spectator sport, making this a truly international sport event.

WORLD SUPERBIKE CHAMPIONSHIP SPECTATOR ATTENDANCE

Despite the lower perceived ranking of the World Superbike Championship, spectator attendances in 1998 were 52,000 at Monza, Italy; 64,000 at Laguna Seca in the United States of America; and 104,000 at Brands Hatch in Great Britain (Fédération Internationale de Motocyclisme, 1998). By 2001, spectator figures for the World Superbike Championship had increased to 90,000 fans at Monza (73% increase); 91,000 at Laguna Seca event (42% increase); and 122,000 at Brands Hatch (17% increase) (Formula Xtreme, 2001b). Spectator figures for this race series have increased over time (See Table 2) and indicate satisfaction with the motorcycle racing as a spectacle.

Table 2. Spectator attendance figures at motogp a & world superbike races by country

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Race track</th>
<th>MotoGP ‘98</th>
<th>MotoGP ‘09 Race Day</th>
<th>Superbike ‘98</th>
<th>Superbike ‘09 Race Day</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>Phillip Island</td>
<td>103,700</td>
<td>50,094</td>
<td>51,000</td>
<td>69,300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Netherlands</td>
<td>Assen</td>
<td>142,000</td>
<td>96,152</td>
<td>70,000</td>
<td>76,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Great Britain</td>
<td>Donington</td>
<td>65,000</td>
<td>89,977</td>
<td>56,000</td>
<td>61,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>Mugello/ Monza</td>
<td>79,400</td>
<td>81,000</td>
<td>52,000</td>
<td>118,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>Sachsenring/Nürburging</td>
<td>144,000</td>
<td>98,000</td>
<td>41,000</td>
<td>42,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Republic of San Marino</td>
<td>Imola/Misano</td>
<td>52,200</td>
<td>55,000</td>
<td>44,000</td>
<td>65,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Spectator attendances may be affected by the different tracks raced in each country based on the spectator facilities at the track or the excitement of racing according to the track configuration. All countries except Australia, Italy and the Republic of San Marino showed more spectators attend MotoGP race days than World Superbikes (See Table 2). Despite the small population in Australia of slightly more than 22 million in March 2009 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2009), world standard motorcycle racing is very popular, with spectator attendances at Phillip Island being similar to races held at circuits in Europe (See Table 2). It is important to note that although many figures used in Table 3 came from, where possible, official web sites for MotoGP and World Superbike, they should be treated cautiously. For example, through observation by the author, at Phillip Island in 2009, the number of spectators for the MotoGP required five grandstands to be erected specifically to seat the MotoGP spectators. In contrast, the World Superbike Championship had no grandstands. In addition, the time needed to disperse the spectator traffic after the conclusion of the MotoGP
racing suggested that the attendance figures for World Superbikes are actually for the three
day event and not just race day.

MODERN MOTORCYCLE ROAD RACING

By the turn of the century, MotoGP could be viewed by outsiders as a glamorous spectacle
with “multi-million-pound transporters and hospitality suites, worldwide television coverage,
hosts of glamour girls… luxury motorhomes for the riders to relax in and even more
luxurious cheques with which to buy them” (Barker, 2003, pp. 52-3). For the 1986 season
Wayne Gardner as a professional rider was offered 750,000 AUD by Lucky Strike Yamaha to
change from Rothmans Honda (Hartgerink, 1987; Pollard, 1996) but this pales in comparison
to the rumoured offer to entice Valentino Rossi to move from Honda to Yamaha for a two
year contract worth 17.5 million USD in 2003. The signing of a two year sponsorship deal
with Monster Energy in 2009 earned Valentino Rossi 2.5 million Euros with an additional
bonus of an additional 0.5 million Euros as a result of Rossi winning the 2009 World
Championship (Bikerholic, 2009). In 2010, MotoGP will be raced over 18 rounds while
world superbike (wsbk) will have 13 rounds. While there are many countries in the rounds
used by both world championships, races often take place at different circuits in that country
(see table 3).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>MotoGP</th>
<th>WSBK</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Qatar</td>
<td>Losail</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>Montegi</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>Jerez And Valencia</td>
<td>VALENCIA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>Le Mans</td>
<td>MAGNY-COURS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>Mugello</td>
<td>MONZA AND IMOLA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Great Britain</td>
<td>Silverstone</td>
<td>DONINGTON PARK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>Assen</td>
<td>ASSEN</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catalunya</td>
<td>Catalunya</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>Sachsenring</td>
<td>NURBURGRING</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United states</td>
<td>Laguna Seca And Indianapolis</td>
<td>SALT LAKE CITY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Czech republic</td>
<td>Brno</td>
<td>BRNO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>San Marino</td>
<td>Misano</td>
<td>MISANO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hungary</td>
<td>Balatonring</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malaysia</td>
<td>Sepang</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>Phillip Island</td>
<td>Phillip Island</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portugal</td>
<td>Estoril</td>
<td>Portimao</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Africa</td>
<td></td>
<td>Kyalami</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Motogp.com, 2009, Federation Internationale de Motocyclisme, 2009)

ECONOMIC CONTRIBUTION

In times of economic crisis, it could be argued that expenditure by individuals and public in
sport tourism would likely be the first area to suffer (weed, 2009). However, despite the
current economic financial crisis, it could also be argued that sport tourism presents an escape
from the harsh reality and provides psychological benefits to both participants and spectators.
Sport tourism is now a tool to make and achieve many things - to generate significant
revenues, create thousands of new jobs, regenerate urban infrastructure, and to develop or
reappraise entire destinations (World Sport Destination Expo, 2009). Statistics available from
Australia and the United Kingdom can be used to estimate the economic contribution to the economy resulting from holding world class motorcycle road racing.

**VICTORIA, AUSTRALIA**

The Motor Cycle Grand Prix event conducted in 1997 in Victoria was estimated to have contributed $54 million to the Victorian Gross State Product and $3.7 million in additional taxation receipts. In 2000, the Premier of Victoria announced that the Australian 500cc Motorcycle Grand Prix would have the same economic impact as in 1997 of $54 million (National Institute of Economic and Industry Research (NIEIR), 1997) while FIM Superbike World Championship’s economic impact of $17 million was based on attendance figures of 30,000 (Office of the Premier, 2000). Increased operating expenses and decreasing sponsorship revenue were partially offset by increased sales revenue for the Motor Cycle Grand Prix (Victorian Auditor-General's Office, 2003). However, the Victorian Government still needs to subside motor sport events through Government grants (See Table 4).

**Table 4:** Net operating cost of staging the Formula One Grand Prix and Motor Cycle Grand Prix (million AUD)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>2002-03 Actual</th>
<th>2001-02 Actual</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Formula One Grand Prix</td>
<td>12.7</td>
<td>10.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motor Cycle Grand Prix</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>5.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total net operating costs incurred by the State (a)</strong></td>
<td>19.4</td>
<td>16.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*(a) Reflects the operating deficiency incurred by the Australian Grand Prix Corporation for the year, after excluding government grants.*

(Victorian Auditor-General's Office, 2003)

**UNITED KINGDOM**

The Cinzano 2004 British Motorcycle Grand Prix event (MotoGP) took place at Donington Park from the 22nd to 25th July 2004, with research based on a survey of spectators attending the event and consultations with representatives from organisers, racing teams, media, sponsors and site retailers. A survey by the East Midlands Development Agency in 2004, found that there were 70,034 visitors (excluding hospitality) to the MotoGP weekend making 118,500 attendees. The target market for MotoGP in the UK was aged between 35-44 years old with 1% attending from overseas. Attending MotoGP was the only reason for visiting the area for almost all (92%) spectators. Amongst those who visited for other reasons, the most common of these was visiting friends and relatives. A high proportion of spectators indicated that they would watch the MotoGP race (92%). Just over half (56%) of spectators undertook other activities outside the circuit whilst attending the MotoGP with shopping being the most common activity. Within 25 miles of Donington the event generated a net increase in expenditure in the economy of just under £10m and supported the equivalent of 242 FTE jobs for a year. This represents income or value adding of around £3.5m for the local economy (East Midlands Development Agency, 2004). Therefore the economic contribution of an international sporting event does have a significant impact on the local community.

**SPORT TOURISM ISSUES**
Sustainability relates to the triple bottom line consisting of environmental integrity, social equity and economic efficiency dimensions (Smith, 2009). Most research has focused on the economic impacts of sporting events with little research concentrating on environmental and social issues. It is important to note that some researchers have argued that sport tourism should be banned due to moral, ecological and social reasons (Dimeo, 2008) due to the contribution that international travel and sporting competitions have on the world climate (Collins, Jones, & Munday, 2008). In terms of tourism, the environmental impact is due to many components such as transport, accommodation, restaurants, activities and entertainment and retail shopping (Becken & Patterson, 2006, Dubois & Ceron, 2006). Tourism transportation accounted for 80% of French tourism global warming footprint while in the United States of America, transportation caused 76.50% of the total CO2 emissions from the tourism sector (Dubois & Ceron, 2006). However, it is unlikely that event organisers and stakeholders are aware of the contributions to climate change (Otto & Heath, 2009) and there needs to be a call for more appropriate management strategies and guidelines (Fyall & Jago, 2009). However, motorcycle road race organisers are beginning to be aware of the environmental impact of the sport.

**MOTORCYCLE ROAD RACING GOES GREENER IN 2010**

MotoGP is going greener with the introduction of the moto2 class in 2010. This new 4-stroke category replaces the 2-stroke 250cc class and is intended to be a cost effective class. In addition, all moto2 motorcycles will run 600cc Honda engines and Dunlop tyres (MotoGP, 2009b). However, even better for environment in 2010, will be the first zero carbon, clean emission motorcycle event, THE TTXGP 2010 championship (Superbike News, 2009b). The electric motorcycles (e-motorcycles) will have four races in the UK, three in north America and four in Italy and the final round will be held in Spain in October (TTXGP, 2009). In 2009, e-motorcycles first competed at the Isle of Man (TTXGP, 2010) and were demonstrated at MotoGP events in 2009.

**MARKETING AND SPECTATORS**

Motorsport all over the world is as much a commercial activity as a sporting activity. All sports have been affected by the intensive commercialisation of sport since the 1950s on an international scale. Sport as a whole has become increasingly subject to the demands of the market, with advertisers eager to associate themselves with race spectacles and promoting racers (Shackleford, 1999). The speed, power, masculine daring and excitement of motor racing are used as marketing tools for products including deodorant, beer, cigarettes, shock absorbers, oils and the motorcycles themselves (Tranter & Lowes, 2005).

The rise of sports as entertainment has provided events for spectators to view in person or to watch via free-to-air and pay television (Department of Industry, 1999). Marketers are quick to take advantage of advertising their products or services where they can be seen by their target audiences. For MotoGP and World Superbike Championships, those spectators may either be trackside or watching on television. In 2003, motorcycle fans in Europe watched MotoGP races held outside their country. The British GP for example, was watched by 1.5 million British viewers and had a 23.2% market share (MotoGP, 2003c). In addition, 3.8 million Italian viewers watched the British GP which represented a 34.3% market share while the home Italian GP at Mugello captured a 40.9% share or 6.2 million Italian viewers. In Spain, a 23.4% market share was enjoyed by Televisión Española while the best market share arose from the screening of the Spanish GP in Jerez with a 28% market share. In France, the
French GP was watched by 1.7 million viewers and had a 15.5% market share (MotoGP, 2003c). Spectator figures, either as a trackside spectator or watching motorcycle racing in one’s home on the television attest to the popularity of watching international standard motorcycle racing. For sponsors of motorcycle racing, the attendance and viewing figures for MotoGP and World Superbike Championship races will encourage them to continue their sponsorship and may also serve to entice other sponsors to see motorcycle racing as a genuine marketing opportunity. 

Benefits also accrue to sponsors as in 2001, as a result of Ducati Corse’s campaign in World Superbikes, Ducati received a 41 per cent increase in the overall visibility of the Infostrada logo and a 31 per cent increase in TV presence. This was due to an Australian Troy Bayliss winning the World Superbike Championship on a Ducati, and to Ducati winning the Constructor’s title. In monetary terms this increased visibility was worth around Lit.2.5 billion with the TV presence adding a further Lit.1.3 billion (Formula Xtreme, 2003h).

**CONCLUSION**

Sport tourists see the World Superbike and MotoGP series as the pinnacle for motorcycle road racing with both championships increasing their spectator numbers over time. Motorcycle road racing is becoming more environmentally sensitive in 2010 with the introduction of 4-stroke engines in Moto2 class and the introduction of the e-motorcycle championship. However, in order to participate in world class racing, motorcycle teams and their equipment still need to travel around the world to perform at local venues thus adding to the environmental issues.

**REFERENCES**


