

# Riding at the Motor Ranch



On Sunday the 7<sup>th</sup> of May I flew out of Sydney destined to ride arguably one of the world's most famous dirt tracks. I was on my way to a little town called Tavullia in Italy which is home to the Motor Ranch owned by MotoGP star Valentino Rossi. I was very excited to turn laps on what most riders will tell you is dirt track holy ground. I'm going to try and put to words exactly how cool this experience was.

Along with 5 other Yamaha riders from around the world I was invited to attend the VR46 Master Camp from the 10<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> May. The "experience" offers elite riders the chance to gain valuable training from some of the world's best riding instructors, medical and fitness staff.

Landing in Bologna after 28hrs of traveling time had not dulled my excitement one bit. I was so keen to get out and ride but first we had some media commitments to take care of. I was met by the VR46 crew and the other riders at the airport and bused to Cattolica on the Italian Adriatic Coast to our motel which would be home for the next week. I had met some of the riders previously from my time competing in the Asian Road Racing Championship, but some of the guys were unknown to me. As I would be riding, racing, training and yes, competing against these guys over the next week I was keen to gauge myself against them.



The VR46 guys had us do some interviews and a photoshoot on our first day which gave us a chance to get to know everyone and to meet our support staff. Yamaha had supplied me with an interpreter to help me for my entire visit which defiantly came in handy at times as my Italian is well, non-

existent. All the riders were put through probably the most intense physical examination I have ever had to ensure we were 100% ready to ride.

Day 2, and we were about to ride! Tavullia is located inland from the coast and the drive out is amazing. The weather was perfect and I admit, I was nervous. I certainly didn't want to make a fool of myself in front of the crew or Yamaha bosses. The first glimpse from the road of the Motor Ranch only added to the excitement. On a practise day spectators crowd a viewing area to watch the action from afar hoping to catch sight of Valentino, but also some of his famous invited guests.

Lined up were 6 new Yamaha YZF250s ready for us to ride. Unfortunately we had to go through an induction process that gave us the run down on how everything would work so the bikes (and riders) would have to wait just a little longer to hit the track.

It was also our first meeting with Marco Belli who would be our instructor over the next few days and who is also the one responsible for designing this sensational track for Valentino Rossi. Creds...this bloke has plenty. Marco is a three-time English Flat Track Champion and two-time American and European Flat Track Champion and a great guy who was patient and extremely helpful.



The track.....WOW. It incorporates an oval section and additional sections than can be added to mix things up a bit. The surface is like nothing I have ridden on before, having an asphalt base with a dirt surface that could be described as sand. Contrary to what you might think, it has a huge amount of grip but the surface does change each and every lap so you are working hard on the bike each lap to find the perfect line. Just because you hit that corner this way the previous lap, doesn't mean you can do the same the next lap. The track is located on the side of a hill and offers undulating lines which challenge a rider.

The Bikes. Yamaha YZF250s are the weapon of choice with only minor modifications which includes 19" wheels, over sizes front brake and not much more. They are perfect for the track offering enough power to have fun and to carry some serious speed.



Over 4 days we were lucky to have riders from the VR46 Academy come ride and race with us at the Ranch along with Marco Belli. The highlight however was having the man himself, Valentino Rossi come out on Saturday to ride, and ride he can. The guy is so fast on the dirt and has amazing control of the bike. All the VR46 Master Camp riders, including myself, thought we were lapping fast until we saw what Vale and the Academy riders could do. To say these guys made us look like amateurs would be an understatement. To see the speed, to watch them bang bars and all at just a “training” session was something I will remember forever

After 4 days of riding the track we lined up to race each other to see if all the things we had been taught had made us better riders. To add some excitement the VR46 Crew threw the VR46 Academy riders in with us to mix things up a little. To come away with a 3<sup>rd</sup> place and a medallion was just the icing on the cake for me. To ride what I would describe as the best dirt track I have ever ridden would have been a memory for life and a memory I will cherish.

The dirt track events were only a part of what we were able to do over the 5 days of the VR46 Master Camp. Riding Misano on the Yamaha R3 and setting the fastest lap was a highlight, as was winning the Go Kart Challenge but nothing compared to meeting GOD. Valentino Rossi was very generous with his time and spoke with us at length about a number of topics.

I want to thank Yamaha Motors Japan, Yamaha Motors Australia, VR46 Master Camp and Valentino Rossi for making the trip possible. Not just anyone can rock up and ride on Vale’s private test track and I feel very honoured to have been invited. I look forward to the day I can go back.





Ciao

Brando

**YRD**



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