

Around the TT course with Mike Crellin

In the same way that some people think it is a great idea to get into a particular market just when everyone else is selling out, I decided to start racing at 37, an age at which most racers had quit. So I knew time wasn't on my side and, having served my apprenticeship in the MGP, I always thought that I'd do just the one TT and that would be it.

As it turned out my very first was 1999 and my last in 2008. In that time I competed and completed 14 TT races, ranking 44th in the all time number of finishes (one ahead of Giacomo Agostini!). I still fool myself (though not very convincingly) that I could still ride, but the game has continued to move on and the bar set too high for me now to clear.

Still, at least I am a has-been as opposed to a never was...

My twist on a "A Week in the Life" is then a "Lap in the Life" and the parts of the course that carry some special meaning. I'm going to look at those sections that are the most memorable for me, give the feel of brute speed, the most exhilarating, and then just the most enjoyable. Here we go...

Most memorable - Rhencullen at the end of Kirk Michael

A fast jump and wheelie at Rhencullen 1 after the petrol station, then flick right past the cottage and then left to go over Rhencullen 2, jump and wheelie all the way down the hill. Good fun as long as you get it right, and those that have seen the Dan Kneen crossed up landing there in 2012 can see how it could all go seriously wrong. Anyway, this particular section rates as the most memorable for me as I crashed heavily there in 2004 when I didn't even make the right hander and went straight into the cottage wall. Manx stone walls are built to last and whilst it was hardly marked, the same wasn't the case at all for me. At least I got a free helicopter ride. My brother John had crashed there as well, a good 20 years earlier, and my follow up effort prompted a call to have it renamed "Rhencrellin".

Sheer speed - Quarry bends and Sulby straight

There are of course many parts of the course that rank as fast, but for me it is the straight. Through the bends themselves you can actually hear the revs rise and fall as the bike rolls from side to side and the tyre contact profile changes, and it's hard work to make it change direction at such speed. Then onto the straight itself and pin the throttle for over 10 seconds. Time for a rest at least as there is no need to muscle the bike around, but you do need to keep well tucked in out of the windblast. The trees overhead merge together to form one big green tunnel and the horizon disappears into a speck, albeit one that moves towards you bloody quickly. The barely perceptible kink towards the end is now a very real bend and then coming down from +180mph to about 40mph for the bridge means you are pulling more than 1g in deceleration (good workout). Very easy to run on, but at least there is only a hedge waiting. Plus of course now a large fanzone stand of spectators to enjoy the spectacle.

Exhilarating (aka Scary) - I have this down as Ballacrye jump. But there are lots of other contenders!

Out of Ballaugh and flat out towards the left hander, then it is critical to get the bike completely upright and grip the tank hard with your knees before you hit the jump at +140mph. Even though you are only in the air for about a second, at that speed the distance before landing is well over 60m. You really do need a steering damper here as if the bike isn't bolt upright (which isn't easy as you are still correcting from the corner) the results are really, really scary with the bike landing crossed up, you getting ejected up out of the seat into the wind blast, and the bike weaving down the road for several hundred metres.

Finally, the most enjoyable – The start/ finish straight!

One of the best parts of a race like the TT is not doing it any more (ie finishing it still in one piece), and for me at least coming out of Governor's dip for the lap time and accelerating up towards the Grandstand was a great feeling. Then I've crossed the line and am about 5 minutes away from a very cold beer. Having said that, the very last time in 2008 was incredibly bittersweet and the following morning I was thinking how good it would be to do it one last time . . .