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PROMISING DEBUT FOR RAPID HONDA IN BSB SEASON-OPENER

ROUND 1 | NAVARRA



After a productive test at Donington Park earlier in the month, the Rapid Honda team kicked off its first, full season in the Bennetts British Superbike Championship at the “Circuito de Navarra”. Nestled in the heart of Spain's northern region, the track hosted the opening round of the season as part of MSVR’s takeover of the facility.

With new sponsors onboard for this season - notably title sponsor Rapid Training - coupled with Honda UK supplying us with last season’s factory bike, we’re poised to make a big push compared to previous seasons. In Franco Bourne, we believe we have an up-and-coming talent who in time, and with the right environment and support, can reach the upper echelons of the sport.

As such, our aim for Navarra was simply to break into the Top 15 and score points. Every year the field seems to get more and more competitive in BSB, and the margins ever finer, with an abundance of fast riders on top-quality machinery.

Things didn’t get off to the most auspicious of starts however on the second day of official testing at Navarra on the Thursday preceding the race weekend, when Franco washed out the front of his Fireblade at Turn 4 - a quick left-hander... The bike did its best to escape the confines of the Navarra circuit, barrelling dramatically over the tyre wall on impact.

The damage was extensive: the only items we could salvage were the front forks, front wheel and swingarm...



Needless to say, Chief Mechanic Rob “Hollyoaks” Farmer and the crew really stepped up and worked tirelessly through the night to rebuild the bike ready for the half-day session the next day. Take a bow lads!

As a result of the time lost repairing the bike, we started the weekend’s action on the back foot as it meant that come FP1, Franco hadn’t had as much time to familiarise himself with the track as the other competitors. Half a day is a life-time in motorsport testing terms; it allows a rider the time and freedom to explore the limits of both track and machine, try different settings/parts, perhaps follow a faster rider to see where they can improve...

Even so, Franco was happy with the base setting of the bike and finished P14 at the end of the session, narrowly missing out on getting through to Superpole (the fastest 13 riders from FP1 automatically go through to SP). He sat out the majority of FP2 to save himself...

Unfortunately, once again it was a case of close but no cigar in Qualifying. The increase in track temperature didn’t play into our hands, with Franco ultimately unable to go that vital few tenths quicker to seal a top-three spot - remember what we were saying earlier about fine margins?

He qualified fourth (translating to a P16 grid start), half a second behind FHO’s Josh Brookes (25) in third. It’s worth noting that the No.54 was still ahead of the likes of established stars such as Storm Stacey (79), the Honda Racing UK pair of Andrew Irwin (18) and Dean Harrison (5) as well as Danny Buchan (83).



The races themselves were somewhat odd affairs, and in truth, for the most part, uneventful. In Race 1 Franco got away cleanly but the Navarra track proved to be a tough place to pass at, and by the halfway point he was detached from the group of riders ahead and defending his 15th position against Buchan. Unfortunately arm pump meant he'd concede places to Billy McConnel (3) and Irwin in the latter stages to cross the line in 17th (by that point Buchan had dropped back).

We made a few adjustments to the bike for Race 2, but we didn't achieve the gains we hoped for and once again arm pump hindered Franco in his bid to challenge Stacey for 15th – instead, he found himself slipping back into the clutches of Alex Olson (75) but despite his ailing condition, he held the IWR Cummins rider to retain 16th.

All in all, a solid enough start to the campaign with Franco taking an early lead in the R&G Newcomers mini-championship which is exclusively for full-time rookies.

Some points on the board would have been ideal but Navarra is something of an outlier on the calendar and we think we'll fare better once we're back on familiar UK ground.

See you at Oulton Park!



Matt Bainbridge (Team Owner): “Overall I am really happy how both Franco and the whole team performed. It’s a long time to be away from home and families so I appreciate everyone’s efforts. Its easy to forget this is only our third proper season supporting Franco, and in that time we have gone from Stock 600, through Stock 1000 and here we are in British Superbikes!

“Looking around us on the grid, we had established teams and riders all around so we are doing something right. Points would have been amazing, but before the weekend I just asked Franco to have some solid finishes, get some more experience and that is exactly what he did - and to top it off he was first Rookie in both races, so we can’t really have any complaints at all and go into Oulton Park confident we can push on some more.”

Franco Bourne: “That was a really positive weekend overall. It’s a shame about the crash and losing the track time during the test but we made up for it and only just missed out on Superpole - we will definitely get our chance at that later in the year!

“In the races I was battling with Danny Buchan, Andy Irwin, Billy McConnell, Storm Stacey and a few others - those guys have loads more experience than me so to be in the mix with them was great. I learnt a lot from the whole time away and can’t wait to get stuck in at Oulton.”

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