

Wayne Rainey and

MOTOAM



By Wes Fleming #87301
Photos by Brian J. Nelson

ERICA



Steve Rapp



Jeremy Cook

Wayne Rainey may never have raced a BMW, but he is a legend in the racing community nonetheless. He won races on Kawasakis, Hondas and Suzukis, but his best seasons (and three consecutive world championships in the early 1990s) were aboard a Yamaha YZR500.

Rainey's racing career changed after a back-breaking crash in 1993 that paralyzed him from the chest down. He shifted to managing a motorcycle racing team and races to this day aboard a hand-controlled superkart. He lives in Monterey, California, in a house with a view of his favorite track, Laguna Seca.

"I had a lot of success there as a racer, and I've lived in the area since 1993—almost 24 years. It's home, and that's my home race-track, so it's impossible to not say it's my favorite. Laguna Seca appeals to me for a variety of reasons. Everyone always told me when I started out, 'Just wait until you race at Laguna Seca,' and it didn't disappoint. I've won a lot of races there, by far more than

any other. Having my home Grand Prix there was one of the highlights of my career. If you can win your home Grand Prix there's nothing that can top that. Winning in front of your fans, family and friends is special. I can count on my hand how many tracks I didn't like. For example, I was never a big fan of Donington Park, but I won my first Grand Prix there. So there's not many I don't like."

After heavy criticism and a very public dispute in 2013 over coverage of AMA Superbike events that conflicted with FIM events, the AMA turned over commercial rights to road racing to a group led by Rainey; this led directly to the establishment of MotoAmerica, which held its first races in 2015. The first season's nine races were chased by nine races in 2016, and 2017 will see 10 race weekends at tracks across the USA from New Jersey to California and from Wisconsin to Georgia.

Rainey says he's partial to the Superbike class, not just because it's the class that helped build his career and win his

championships, but also because it's MotoAmerica's headline event and "the bikes are the fastest, the most powerful and that's where the very best riders and teams should be." He's of the opinion that riders who want to make a career of racing have to rise through the class structure, but their goal needs to be the Superbike class. One of his goals for MotoAmerica is to find riders who dominate at every level and in every class.

When it comes to his other goals for MotoAmerica, Rainey says the aims haven't changed much since 2014. "We want to give our racers an opportunity to race in a series that is competitive and one that helps raise their game to the point where they can compete in any series in the world. I think we have racers now that are capable of going to the next level, and our goal continues to be to make this series good enough for that to happen. I think you can see how far we have come in the first two seasons of MotoAmerica, so we have to continue to push, continue down the same path and get

the series to where it needs to be. We've got to grow our fan base, we have to grow our brand. We've only been doing this for two years, and everybody in our paddock appreciates what we've done, and we're all in it together to make this work. We need them to continue to support, to push it and to strive to make it better not just every year, but at each and every race."

Despite decades of experience in motorcycle racing, Rainey admits that running an entire racing series isn't easy. He says, "As a racer, I showed up to race, and I was so focused I didn't pay much attention to things like how the races were actually run. Now I know and I can tell you first hand it's a big job with many different facets. I think getting the series up to speed so the racing was top-notch, the rules were fair and well received, and the paddock was a good place for people to work again wasn't easy, but it may be the easiest part. The promotion of the events, the marketing, etc. is what's difficult. There's a big push now to try to get our series more exposure and to bring more fans to our races. Once we get them there,

we're confident they will like it and come back the next year, hopefully bringing their friends. As a racer, you wouldn't even think about that. You'd have a schedule and you'd go out on track, and then you were done. But there's much more to it than that. This job never stops. It's seven days a week and 15 hours a day, and it will continue to be that way. That's the way it works. From where we started, we know where we want to be, and it's going to take three to five years to make all this happen. We want riders from everywhere to come to our series because it's the best national series in the world—as it once was."

One thing that has eased MotoAmerica's path is extensive coverage of every race in 2016 from beIN Sports, a sports-oriented network that started in France in 2012 and is broadcast in about 30 countries in North America, Europe, Africa and Asia. beIN shows soccer, rugby, handball, tennis and basketball games worldwide, but in North America the focus skews more towards motorsports, including rights to MotoGP, World Superbike and MotoAmerica as well

as the World Rallycross Championship.

Of MotoAmerica's relationship with beIN, Rainey says, "Our partnership with beIN Sports is one we are really proud of. The TV package turned out to be extremely popular with both our fans, our teams and riders because they did such a great job of showcasing our sport to a growing audience. The benefit to the racers and teams—from top to bottom—is huge because of the exposure to potential sponsors. This TV package can help make them stars and that will lead to bigger and better things for the series and everyone involved in it. The relationship with beIN is important for us, but also for beIN as they want to grow their network into the network where you go to watch MotoGP, World Superbike and now MotoAmerica. We are lined up with the exact championships we want to be lined up with. The fans can go to one place and watch all of those and that's rare to have that sort of collaboration with a network.

"I think you appeal to general motorcyclists by not only offering great racing, but also a great day or weekend of activities for



them,” Rainey continues. “We’re trying hard to offer our fans a full slate of things to do over the course of the weekend at our events so it’s not just about the racing, though that will always be our primary concern. We also think our events are perfect for groups of motorcyclists to ride to together... like a destination for group rides. The fans are also going to have their favorite riders or brands that they root for, and what we’re trying to do is create the rules in such a way that other manufacturers can participate and help us all grow the sport.”

Running a motorcycle racing series isn’t all about TV coverage and doing interviews, though. Rainey has to pay attention to what’s going on with the other major series and the changes the sport’s governing body, Fédération Internationale de Motocyclisme (FIM), institutes from year to year. A big change sanctioned by FIM for World Superbike for the 2017 season involves the gridding procedure for Race 2 - the top nine riders from Race 1 will grid in reverse order for Race 2; so the rider who wins the first race will start the second race from the third row. MotoAmerica decided to wait a season before implementing this change, preferring to see how it shakes out in WSBK before bringing it to their series.

When it comes to other rules, Rainey

says, “We are going on year three and the rules we’ve done for year three were supposed to happen in year four. We didn’t want to push too much too soon, but the reality is that we are a year ahead of where we were supposed to be as far as the rules package goes. The TV package helped drive that. We’ve lined ourselves up with what the World Championship is doing – not because that’s how the FIM was doing it, but because the bikes these guys are riding now are so good now that for us to be judged against the World Championships we needed motorcycles on the same level as theirs so the judging would be fair. The teams and the riders that we have are very close. We also thought to get the other manufacturers in our series we need to have our rules close to World Superbike and thus take away the excuses some of the manufacturers had not to race in MotoAmerica.”

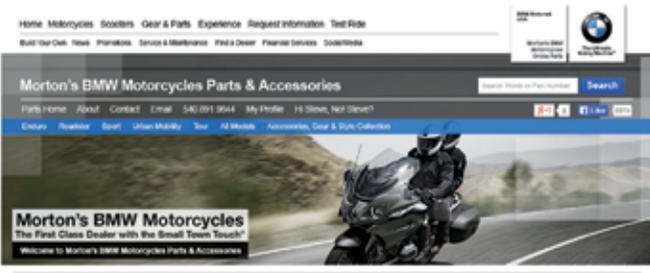
On the manufacturer front, it’s not hard to see that BMW Motorrad does not have a big presence in MotoAmerica. There are only two riders racing BMWs, Jeremy Cook (#81) and Steve Rapp (#15). Rainey says, “We’d love to have BMW have a bigger presence in our paddock. When they have raced, they have done so successfully. We’d like to think that the more BMWs that are in our series, the more exposure that would

give them and the more motorcycles they could sell in this country. They build a bike that slots right into our Superbike class and with some factory involvement they could be a serious player for years to come. BMW has one of the most sophisticated sport-bikes on the market, so there’s not many changes you’d have to make to one to be at the front of the Superbike pack. This could be a class-winning bike with the right rider and an experienced team to help. This is a tailor-made series for BMW—not for them to just be on the podium, but for them to win races.”

Rainey’s enthusiasm for racing and his excitement about MotoAmerica is infectious; during a casual introduction at the beIN booth at the AIMExpo in October, 2016, it was all he could talk about for the better part of a half an hour. His eyes light up when he talks about his series, and his pleasure at the growing success of a series he and his partners have worked hard to build is apparent.

MotoAmerica will race in Texas, Georgia, Virginia, Wisconsin, Utah, California, Pennsylvania, New Jersey and Alabama in 2017. Racing takes place on Saturday and Sunday and more information is available on their website, motoamerica.com. ☺

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