



PRESS RELEASE



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MEET ROBBIE SYLVESTER - RACER TURNED TEAM BOSS WHO HAS DEVELOPED RACING'S BIGGEST NAMES

FEW PEOPLE HAVE HAD THE INFLUENCE ON ROAD RACING THAT ROBBIE SYLVESTER HAS HAD.

In 1982, the Pontefract man began racing and after a brief break to play rugby league, he enjoyed a career which saw him race across the UK and beyond before a crash in 2006 brought an end to his time on top of a bike.

Since then he has run his own race team, VRS Racing, which has seen him give riders such as Glenn Irwin, Paul Jordan and Jamie Hamilton their road racing debut.

Robbie said: "We came to TT all the time, I've been coming since '79, so we came here all the time but I ended up running the dyno up in the paddock, that was my dyno.

"So I got to work with all the top lads, Joey and all them.

"I used to paint bikes as well, so I ended up painting all their bikes, painting Joey's bikes and different lads' helmets.

"So when I came back racing again in '99, 2000, I started racing within the KRC series.

"We were running the team and that back then, and then I ended up doing mechanic-ing with McAdoo, with Ryan, that all came through the Micron gig here.

"I was doing all the stuff here with Micron and that and then I did 3 seasons with them.

"Then I rode for them in 2003 here at the Manx, I came here on McAdoo 600 and I had Simon Beck's old 750 and I built one from Simon Beck's stuff after Simon sadly passed away in '99.

"I worked with McAdoo, rode with them, but I've got Chris Walker's World Superbike engine in my 750.

"So I came here and did the Manx Newcomers in 2003, and we did that, um, with Ucci, and me and Ucci and a lad called Martin Farley had entered us for the team award.

"Unfortunately, Martin crashed at Alpine and we didn't win the team award, but we were on for it.

"I didn't ride at all in 2004, came back in 2005 to the TT and went really well.

"I was 16th quickest overall, 8th quickest at Longlown.

"Real good lap times, we were over the 120s, so we were well happy.

"Came back in '06 and unfortunately had a crash.

"So the crash put me in a wheelchair for five and a half years."

While in recovery in the hospital, Robbie was in a bed next to fellow rider and friend Keith Stewart, the idea of running his team started.

"He [Keith] lost his ride because he were injured and he didn't have any bikes, and I got bikes, but I were injured and I couldn't ride.

"So that's how it started.

"We started then, we put Keith on, and then we run Keith for a couple of seasons.

"I was going through masses of operations back then and, I were in and out of hospital, in and out of hospital.

"So I've just ended up building up from there and getting everything, you know, looking after different lads.

"When Keith went, we then took on Craig Atkinson, who owned Charlie's.

"We run Craig for quite a couple of seasons as well and with the input from his brother-in-law, he helped us and we bought Connor Cummins' 600 and we bought a truck and everything and managed to be able to do the stuff the way we are.

"Since then we've run lots and lots of top riders.

"I brought Glen Irwin into the sport, into the road racing scene, he rode for us at the Ulster, but through all my contacts from painting bikes and race preparing bikes with the tuning and everything, you know, we've had a lot of lads have come to us over the years and said, can you build us a bike? Can you do us this? So we now provide a service where we'll provide the bikes and all the service for them to be able to run them.

"I don't make any money out of the job, it's just a case of their funding us to come and be able to look after them.

"But I do absolutely everything, right down to making the shirts, I paint the bikes, I make the decals for the bikes, I do the shirts.

"We'll mechanic the bikes, Slick does the engines for us because I just haven't got time to do them and all the rest.

"I was up at Slick's here the other morning at 1 o'clock dynoing the bikes, middle of the night, just trying to get everything ready for this."

When not running his race tea, Robbie works as a teacher for SEMH children.

Robbie is running six bikes in this years Manx Grand Prix and Classic TT races with riders Charlie Hopkins and Lee Stanaway with the main aim of ensuring that his riders go out and enjoy the course.

He said: "I don't care who it is, whether riding for me, you know, I've worked with lads who have won it here, you know, we've been on the roster and we've won TTs.

"I'm saying with lads who will finish at the back end, I just want them to come home happy.

"They come home with a smile on their face next Friday and it's a new race day, we put it all back in the van and we go home, everybody's safe, I'm happy.

"I'll do whatever I can to get them as far up the roster, you know, the ladder as we can, right?

"But at the end of the day, that's down to the riders, and if we can just give them the tools to do the job."

In a career which has seen him lap at over close to 120mph, he says the Manx remains one of his favourite events on the calendar.

He said: "I rode the TT, I did the TT, but I still like the Manx and I had the opportunity when I came in 2003, my gearing were wrong, completely wrong.

"I know, flat out everywhere, absolutely flat out.

"But I got Ryan Farquhar, as a mechanic, in for me, and I'm saying to Ryan, this gearing's not right.

"He's saying, no, no, no, you won't pull that gearing you want to put on.

"He had the lap record at 123 on the 600 at that time, 123.5 and I was doing like 106s, and he's saying, if you're running 106, you're not going to pull that gearing.

"So we left the gearing as it was, and on the Friday, the last Friday before we raced it, last practice day of practice, we did change the gear and I went out on it and I thought I got to Ballachane and I thought, nah, I've got it wrong here, so I'm going to pull off at Ballacrane and come back on the back roads.

"But when I came into, um, the last right-hander before Ballacrane, I caught this lad up so fast I had to go down the outside of him.

"And I'm like, right, if I brake now, he's going to go in the back of me.

"So I'll do a lap, the 750 sat at the back, and then we'll pick it up and we'll go.

"And I wasn't coasting, but I rode round steady away.

"And then when I come on the mountain, everything started to come together. I'm like, I'll go for another lap.

"And I got stopped at 13, somebody come off at 11, sorry then I got stopped on the mountain because there was sheep on 33rd.

"So I just picked my way through them as well and then I got to the Nook and the person on a spinal board at the Nook, I had to stop while they got him on and then walk through there.

"I still did 106, and I thought, do I go with the big bike or do I go with this?

"This is not my bike and I don't want to smash it, so I rode the 750, I did 109.98 in the race and said, right, I've done 110, I'm happy.

"I withdrew from the rest of the races, plus what had happened to Martin.

"I said, right, next year I'm just going to fly, it didn't cause me to not race, but it made me think and my wife were in tears and all that.

"So I said, right, no, we'll park it and I'll look after Johnny Burrows and I'll make up for Johnny.

"So I didn't come back in '04.

"When I came back in '05, I did 118.5 from a standing start on one of the first nights of practice on the big bike and Winston McAdoo phoned me and said, look, just do the practice, pull out, make an excuse, you can't ride, you pulled your back, something, anything.

"He said, just don't ride and come and I'll put you out at the Manx on my bikes and I was like, no, I says, I'm here for myself, I'm only here for myself.

"So I really appreciate the opportunity of it but I'm gonna ride them, and I rode them and to this day it's not a regret, but I wish I'd have come back with McAdoo and won at the Manx because I think it would have given me a bit more prestige.

I" don't think it would have made any difference if I'd have come back the year after and spankled or something anyway.

"I love this event. It's so friendly. The people from the Manx Grand Prix, everybody that's, you know, the club and everything have done really well."

Charlie Hopkins, one of the two riders for VRS Racing this year, is competing in his second Manx Grand Prix in the Sportbike and Junior races.

The 35-year-old said: "I've been racing about six years, started semi-thrill with the pit bikes then a good pal of mine were a double Manx Grand Prix winner here, Craig Atkinson, and started doing a bit of track riding with him, and then one thing led to another, ended up bloody racing myself.

"I've been coming over here for about ten years with Craig, pit boarding for and stuff, and area I live in, guys like Deano's is from Bradford, David Jefferies were sort of who I'd spent my youth looking up to because they were a pal of my dad's.

"I've grown up around bikes, just because of the area we're in, my dad rode a bike, never raced a bike but no racing heritage in family or anything like that.

"In lockdown, everyone chose something to do, so I bought a bloody pit bike and then six years later you're here."

Charlie's teammate, Lee Stanaway, is also entering his second season at the Manx Grand Prix.

Charlie, who began racing eight years ago and came to the Island for the first time in 2018

He said: "I'd never seen anything like that before and you come past me and just burst into tears.

"After that, I've just been hooked, like I cried my eyes out and ever since then, it's been a drive to drive to get here.

"My first year was last year, we came on a bike I built, more me and Paul, an SV650 Super Twin and now we're back with VRS Racing and Robbie Sylvester with Z650. We've got two of them and CB350 K4 given by Kevin Flynn.

"I feel like a bit like a fish out of water because it's like I'm looking around and looking at the setup that I've got and all the mechanics here and Robbie is just a wealth of knowledge.

"It's brilliant and I keep trying to pick spanners up but they just keep saying, no, they sit down, put the kettle on.

"So I'm not used to it, you just feel a bit alien but I think if the weather breaks it's gonna help a lot.

"It's the best feeling in the world, it's therapeutic, that's why I do it.

"You can feel the bike, you can't hear the bike, you can't hear anybody talking, you can't hear any birds, there's nothing.

"It's just so peaceful, it's just incredible, you find yourself, I think, in those moments.

"Yesterday I was out at the crack of dawn before the roads closed but in between here and then, it's every day is just an onboard or watching it or talking about it or thinking about it.

"There's not a day goes by where you don't think about it.

"I'm an engineer surveyor for a job, I run my own business and I do a load of inspections of lifting gear.

"So it's like a bit of a dichotomy, so I'm a health and safety inspector by day, and then I go racing on the Isle of Man."

You can spot Robbie's brightly coloured bikes in the paddock and see Charlie and Lee in the Sportbike and Junior races on bikes number 30 and 35.

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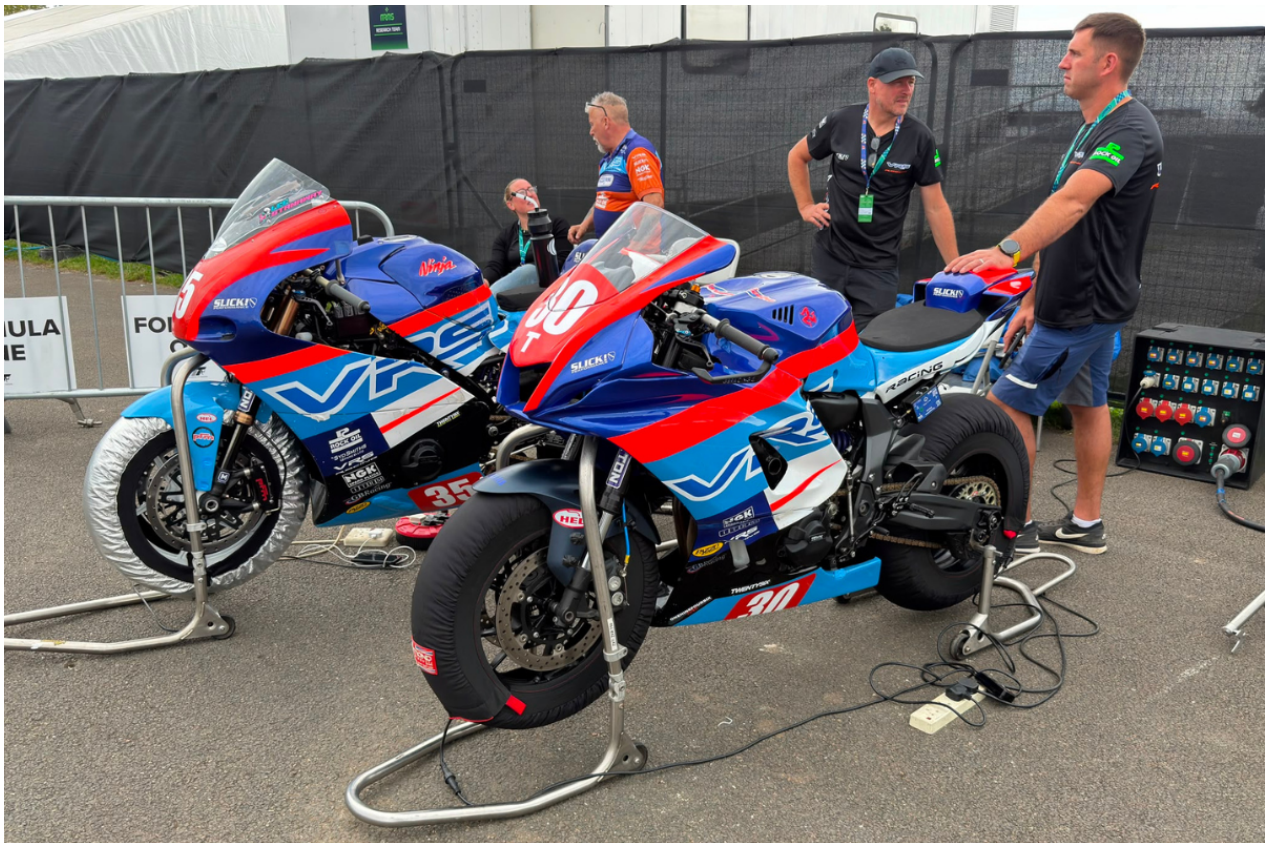
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