PRESS RELEASE

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MGP HEROES - DERRAN SLOUS

TRAVELLING MARSHALS ARE A FAMILIAR SIGHT FOR FANS OF RACING AROUND THE MOUNTAIN COURSE, MADE UP OF EIGHT RIDERS, WHEN CALLED UPON THEY WILL FLY AROUND THE COURSE TO TAKE CHARGE OF AN INCIDENT WHEN REQUIRED.

One of these flying riders is travelling marshal number six, Derran Slous.

The 55-year-old donned the yellow jacket in 2022 but his journey began 21 years earlier in 2001.

Originally Derran didn't start out racing, instead he helped Terry Muir and his son James set up bikes to race around Jurby.

He said: "I think it was 2001 when he turned around and said, 'do you want to have a ride on one of the bikes? Go and get your racing license.'

"Which I did, and I went from there.

"I had a really good run out, first time out I was second to Tommy Clucas out on track, and it was like, yeah, something's going to happen here.

"So next minute I'm flipping racing and it just carried on going."

Derran made his debut in 2003 and showed early pace, sitting third in the leaderboard during practice week before an off at Braddan Bridge.

He said: "It was a stupid error, I shouldn't have gone out but I didn't have that sort of mindset that I tell people to have now which is listening to older people and understanding that they've been around here and they know what they're doing.

"I was so new to it and green to it I didn't have a flipping clue.

"I was just riding off the skin of my teeth rather than the knowledge of things.

"I didn't really do too much homework, but things were going well."

A year later, Derran returned and achieved a fourth place in the lightweight Manx Grand Prix before moving on to the TT.

Sitting in third place in the last ever ultra lightweight TT, Derran made the decision to pit to refuel.

He said: “I ended up 6th, so still a good result but I didn't need to do the pit stop, it wasn't compulsory back then either to do the pit stop and I thought, bloody hell, I could have had a bloody podium in the TT, in my first TT.

“But all wasn't all lost, because I got third in class in the Formula 1 that year on the 750 in the TT there, so that was a good result.”

For 2005 he raced with Slick Performance in Ireland with plans to return to the TT.

He said: “Everything was going really well, I had bikes over here, bikes in Ireland. I was racing in Ireland and just came back to the Isle of Man but my 400 was still in Ireland because I was due to go back to do Tandragee and then it was going to be there for the Northwest as well.

“I came over here and borrowed someone else's 400, and unfortunately the throttle stuck open on it.

“I ended up breaking my shoulder and a few other bits and bobs, so it ruled me out of TT that year, which was a bit of a bugger.”

He would make his racing return at the Southern 100 on his 400 where he would go on to take victory and set a lap record which would stand for four years.

For 2006 he would ride in the TT on a Honda for Dave Molyneux before racing his final TT the year in 2007.
Derran said: “A lot of people said, you got to stay away, you know, if you're going to retire, retire properly.

“Which I did for a while.

“I always kept my license sort of ticking over just in case and in 2013 or 2014 I came back.

“I went out to Jurby for a track day, my times were quite good because Slick was out there and he said that would put you in the top three

“I ended up going back out and in the first race back out there, I got third and then it just started progressing again.

“I went back to the Manx, I hadn't ridden in eight years.

“I was lying in fourth and the bloody gear selector came off on the last lap at Douglas Road Corner so I actually stopped at Ballaugh and coupled together what I could.

“I ended up 14th, so the idea was I was going to come back the year later with the intention of building another bike, but one that was capable of winning.”

However in testing at Jurby, Derran had a high side and suffered a severe bang to his head.

As a result he would go on to race Supermoto where he would suffer another incident which resulted in him breaking his back in two places.

Derran would recover from his injuries and after Covid enjoyed a successful period of classic racing, including a third place at Goodwood for Izzard Racing.

Shortly after this, he would be asked if he wanted to be a travelling marshal.

Derran said: “Tony Duncan came out of the shadows and asked if I would be interested in becoming a travelling marshall.

“I was sitting on the edge whether to carry on racing or do I then back into the sport that I've had so much given to me and I thought, you know what, I'm not getting any younger.

“The older you get, the faster you wear, as they say.

“I felt like I might get some results but I thought it's a long old battle, even when you've got sponsorship, it still costs a lot of money to be racing and I thought let's go T-Ming.

“That was, 2022 and I haven't looked back.”

He called his first year in the role as a “baptism of fire” and it wasn’t long until he was called into action.

He said: “I was up at the grandstand but I got moved to Ballacraine because someone else was dealing with an incident.

“I just got to Ballacraine, I just took my helmet off, and then I got my first shout.

“In training and stuff like that, the biggest thing is to try and keep everything running smoothly, making sure everyone's safe, everyone's okay, making sure the rider is okay, everything's clear, marshals are fine and keep everything running and keep everything going as smoothly as possible.

“Try not to get a red flag scenario or situation called.

“I'm scooting up to the incident and coming around the corner, it was like seeing something out of a film, honestly.

“There was a bike on the road on fire, a big ball of fire.”

“Fuel everywhere, the petrol tank had burst, and obviously we had to get Sam at the time, was showing injuries and we had to get air med in.

“I thought, god, we're gonna have to get the fire brigade out as well and it was like, I'm gonna have to get this stopped.

“They ended up red flagging it. I thought, my first scene of an incident and it's getting red flagged.

“I couldn't believe it.”

He praised the marshals at the scenes of incidents for their ability to quickly manage a situation before he arrives.

He said: “They're absolutely fantastic.The training that the guys have had is absolutely brilliant how the guys can manage and handle stuff.

“Sometimes you get there and you're thinking, Christ, they didn't even need me.”

Between the eight travelling marshalls, Derran commented on the camaraderie that comes with it.

The eight riders will regularly meet up outside of race weeks and will be getting together very soon for their annual Christmas dinner where past and present travelling marshals and their families all get together.

Derran also helps at the Manx Grand Prix newcomers weekends where he chats with young riders to pass on his knowledge of the course.

He said: “The weekends are absolutely fantastic nowadays for it and just to give over my knowledge, but you're not just showing them the course in itself, you're telling them all sides of it.

“How to manage it with family, with your team members, and so on and so forth.

“It's more than just coming here to race.

“There's so much, there's so much to take in.

“It's two weeks of your life, it's something that you need to focus on 100%.

“You've got to leave all the gremlins and everything else behind.”

“You can't come here on your own out of the back of a van.

“You need the right setup and listen to experienced people, it doesn't just have to be us guys.

He says he always reminds newcomers of the sheer speed of the Mountain Course, saying it differs from short circuit racing due to the amount of time you spend at top speed.

Derran said: “It's just all little things like telling them to remember to breathe and to blink and stuff like that, 'cause you'll take a deep breath coming into a big corner like Ballagarey, for instance.

“You'll take a deep breath coming into it, and then you're concentrating that much that they'll forget to release and they're not getting the oxygen in their brain and stuff like that.

“Just to be 100% focused and do as much homework as they can.

“You don't just come here and expect to go out there and I'm going to do this much speed, I'm going to win this race, I'm going to be doing this, I'm going to be doing that.

“You've got to come, learn the place and just take it tentatively.

“Which is one of the things I always say, respect it, it's an absolutely fantastic place, but also it can bite you if you don't give it the respect.”

Acting as a travelling marshal for both the TT and Manx Grand Prix, Derran praised both events.

He said: “I think the Manx Grand Prix really is a fantastic event, it's really, really friendly.

“Everyone helps each other, I think it just feels a bit more close-knit, everyone's helping each other so much.

“I mean, Joe Bloggs only has a couple of sets of tires someone will go, don't worry, I'll get you another set.

“Everyone's helping each other, or his engine's blown, all of a sudden there's another engine that's just turned up, 'cause it'll be on Facebook and someone's taken their engine out of their road bike.

“It's fantastic how people help each other over here.

“We've always got the rough side of it all which hits hard when it's locals as well but everyone all sticks together and they all help each other through it.”

Since Derran began his journey around the Mountain Course, the attitudes to racing around the Island has changed substantially with huge strides being made in rider and course safety over the past 25 years.

He said: “My first ever lap as a newcomer you weren't with an instructor.

“I went out on a coach at the back of the coach for a lap once and I can't even really remember much of it 'cause we were that packed.

“No one could see anything anyway, that's all you had to do was this one lap in the coach and that was it.

“You were blind to it.”

Derran recalled his first lap of the course being in thick fog over the mountain and recalled one race where he encountered a huge downpour coming out of the 13th.

He added: “It was a bit more relaxed in a sense, but the safety side of things had to have come.”

Travelling marshals remain something unique to road racing and the fans and appreciation that come with this is something Derran has to remind himself of each year.

He said: “If I'm going off in the morning and I'll go through Ramsey just to get fuel, you'll be stopped at traffic and next minute there's people taking selfies with you and talking to you when you get to the petrol station.

“It's really nice.

“A lot of people have so much respect for what we do, a lot of people don't understand what we do.

“They think that we just sit there looking pretty, but then I think more and more people recently have had more of an understanding of our role.

“We're not just there looking all suited and booted in the latest stuff from Arai and RST on a brand new motorcycle.

“They understand that we've got a job which entails quite bad stuff, but then we get the enjoyment as well.

“I think Woody explained it as the worst job in the world with the best benefits or something like that, I'm not sure, something along those lines.”

WORDS: GEORGE RATCLIFFE | PHOTOS: DERRAN SLOUS, LUKAS KANDLBAUER, LEE BARTRAM, NICK WHEELER

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