Sykes and Parkes hold sway

Qualifying has been held for the World Superbike and Supersport rounds at Phillip Island, with Broc Parkes Australia's big hope for success on his Honda CBR600RR
Kawasaki's Tom Sykes will start from pole position in tomorrow's Superbike World Championship season-opener at Phillip Island, with Australian Broc Parkes (Honda) following suit in World Supersport.

The cool-headed Sykes completed regulation qualifying in top spot and, following cancellation of the traditional Superpole session which normally determines final grid positions, the Yorkshireman's hold on pole position became impregnable.

It is Sykes' third WSBK pole position on a Kawasaki, the last coming at the Misano (San Marino) round in 2011. But this pole position presents his most compelling case to continue the momentum into the races, as he's been in red-hot form at Phillip Island over the last week in both pre-season testing and from the start of round one proceedings on Friday.

"We have been fast in hot conditions and have stumbled across a couple of good things," said Sykes. "Today we did 14 laps on race tyres and it was very consistent, with the times coming easier than with previous settings.

"Honestly speaking, this is not one of my favourite circuits. In fact it is one of my least favourite ones -- so I am happy that we are towards the front at this track because I know that the performance should increase at the other circuits.

"I do not want to get too carried away because I like to keep my feet on the ground, so we'll keep working and see what happens on Sunday."

Superpole was cancelled following a fatal incident in the Australian Superstock 600 Championship opener at Phillip Island, which occurred at approximately 2.00pm this afternoon.

Superpole was scheduled to begin at 3.00pm, but was eventually cancelled at 4.00pm.

Sykes (1min31.323secs) will be joined on the front row of the WSBK grid by Aprilia's Max Biaggi (1:31.477) and Ducati pair Carlos Checa (1:31.621) and Jakub Smrz (1:31.783).

Checa won both Phillip Island races in 2011 en route to becoming the first Spaniard to win the WSBK title.

Pushing the leading quartet from row two will be Sylvain Guintoli (Ducati, 1:31.832)), Leon Camier (Suzuki, 1:31.904), emerging rookie Niccolo Canepa (Ducati, 1:31.953) and Jonathan Rea (Honda, 1:31.959).

And others looking to lock horns at the front will include highly fancied trio Eugene Laverty (Aprilia, 1:32.069)), Leon Haslam (BMW, 1:32.082) and Marco Melandri (BMW, 1:32.123).

The current lap record is held by Australia's Troy Corser with a 1:31.826.

Bryan Staring (Kawasaki) will be the first Australian on row five, with countrymen Josh Brookes (Suzuki), Mark Aitchison (BMW) and David Johnson (BMW) all behind him after battling an assortment of set-up issues over the last two days. Twenty-five riders qualified.

Since 1990, Australian riders have won 23 of the 41 WSBK races at Phillip Island, and the international contingent 18.

The first WSBK race will be held at 12.00pm, and the second at 3.30pm.

Meanwhile, Parkes now has the perfect opportunity to win his first World Supersport (WSS) race at Phillip Island after fending off challenges from all quarters this afternoon.

Parkes has been on the boil since the WSS field hit the track for the first time on Friday morning, and he continued to maintain his authority throughout qualifying, eventually setting the benchmark time of 1min34.445secs.

That slotted Parkes just in front of front of fellow Honda riders Sam Lowes (1:34.461) and Jules Cluzel (1:34.558), with two-time world champion Kenan Sofuoglu (1:34.577) keeping the flag flying for Kawasaki.

And the second row has some real strength too, with perennial Phillip Island fast man Fabien Foret (Kawasaki, 1:344.791) and South African gun Sheridan Morais (Kawasaki, 1:34.998) waiting in the wings.

Australia's second rider, Yamaha's Jed Metcher, showed dramatic improvement this afternoon, shedding a massive 1.268 seconds off his time from opening qualifying to finish up 17th (row five) on the grid.

Parkes has now amassed 15 WSS pole positions during his stellar career, but this one's his first at Phillip Island.

"The bike seems to be doing everything I ask from it, and the only real decision to be made now is finding a tyre that will last the distance.

"During the qualifying session, I saved a couple of tyres for the end, but I was a little bit concerned that I could only go about a tenth faster because of the heat.

"But that time was still good enough for pole, so I couldn't be happier. All in all, for such a limited pre-season on the bike, this weekend has been incredible and I can't wait to get out there tomorrow."

Tyre longevity may not be such an issue for the WSS field now though, with organisers announcing that tomorrow's race, based on continued extreme ambient and track temperatures, will be reduced from 21 to 15 laps.

In 2011, Parkes was second in the WSS race at Phillip Island after a rousing battle with Italian Luca Scassa. He eventually fell just 0.009 seconds short of claiming victory, with Lowes close behind in third.

All 28 riders qualified for the WSS race, which will be held at 1.30pm on Sunday.

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