



MEET THE DAREDEVILS

We catch up with Britain's MotoGP contingent as the 2016 season roars into life

Words **Amit Katwala**

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MOTOGP SERVED UP A THRILLING SPECTACLE LAST YEAR, with Jorge Lorenzo clinching the title in the final race from veteran Valentino Rossi. It was a fruitful year for the three British riders, too. We spoke to LCR Honda's Cal Crutchlow (bearded), Yamaha Tech3's Bradley Smith (bald), and Octo Pramac's Scott Redding (tatts) before this weekend's opening race in Qatar.

What have you done with your time off?
Scott Redding: "Having tattoos, eating lots of food over Christmas and now getting back ready for the new season. I went out to Spain [training] last week, back in the gym - getting the diet back on point."

What about you, Brad - any tattoos?
Bradley Smith: "No. Just doing normal things. Last season was hard work. It takes a lot of dedication and focus, but you start to get the itch to get back on a bike."

Who were you rooting for when Valentino Rossi was carving through the field in the final race of last season?
SR: "All that went on [Rossi was penalised for tangling with Marc Marquez in Sepang, Malaysia, and started from the back of the grid] is nothing to do with me. I went to do my job, which is to do the best race I could, which was still shit!"
BS: "From my point of view, it was good for a Yamaha rider to win. I believe Jorge was the best rider that season in terms of his speed, and I always like to see the fastest rider win the championship."
Cal Crutchlow: "I'm not there for someone else to win. Obviously I enjoyed the show, but it made no difference to my life in the slightest. If Valentino had started from a normal grid position, I don't think the championship would have gone to Jorge. But that's the way it is and it's history now."

What are you most looking forward to?
SR: "I have a new team, a new bike, everyone has new electronics. It's going to be an exciting first half of the year, quite mixed up. Everyone has to adapt. There will be a few guys who can win on the day - not like at the moment where you have Valentino, Marquez, Lorenzo [dominating]."
BS: "I don't have a new bike or a new team, but I do believe the season is going to throw up some different winners. You're not gonna know who's going to win."

Will the three of you be racing closer together this season?
CC: "Not necessarily. We all have different abilities, and it depends what package you are on. It's going to make everyone closer, the whole field, but those four guys at the front [Lorenzo, Rossi, Marquez and Dani Pedrosa] are still gonna be the guys to beat. There are reasons for that: they're in the factory teams, they have the best

equipment, they're treated best, they're paid the best, they have an easier life."
What are your favourite tracks?
CC: "I like Brno [in the Czech Republic]."
SR: "I'm more like Silverstone and Indianapolis, which ain't there no more unfortunately. Philip Island [Australia] - I like a bit of the fast and flowing circuits."
BS: "My favourite track is Mugello [Italy]. I like the fact that it uses the natural hillside. Also Brno I enjoy. I'm a motocrosser, so anything built on hills is my cup of tea."

We thought you'd all say Silverstone...
SR: "I don't think Cal likes Silverstone."
CC: "Yeah it's... no bueno, Silverstone."
SR: "Silverstone just don't like Cal."
CC: "It's not the most entertaining track in the world. It's pan-flat, it's an old airfield. There's no real up and down on it. But there are certain sections of it that I love. Every section has been shit to me over the years. But it's not too bad. I always look forward to going there, but Sunday night I can't wait to get out of that hole."
SR: "Out of the hospital, normally."

MotoGP riders seem like a different breed - racing with broken ankles and things like that. Do you feel like you are pushing the limits?
CC: "I don't think you really think too much about that. Adrenaline is a big thing, because we can crash in a way that would put someone in hospital for six months, and we're back on the bike in 10 minutes. It's just the way it is. Brad will be no different to me, and Scott will be no different to Brad, it's just the way it is. You get back up and you try and ride again."
BS: "Also our sport allows us to ride injured, whereas football, rugby or tennis is very body-demanding - you're relying on your body to make sure you can play. Sometimes that makes us look a little bit stronger than we are. But yeah, riding with broken bones still hurts anybody."

Why watch MotoGP this season?
CC: "Because we're on it."
SR: "It's going to be a competitive season, it's gonna be quite an interesting season - more so than in the past few years."
BS: "The access they're able to give. They are not only showing MotoGP, but Moto2 and Moto3 as well. If you ever watch a Moto3 race, with 12 or 15 teenagers going hell for leather, it's very entertaining."

Finally, who's going to win the MotoGP title this season?
BS: "Dani Pedrosa."
CC: "I don't have an answer, because I'm not gonna bet against myself."
SR: "I'm the same." ●

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The MotoGP season gets under way on March 20 in Qatar. Watch all the race action throughout the season exclusively live on BT Sport, the home of MotoGP in the UK. Visit bt.com/sport