

## Japanese Riders Shine at 2004 World Championship Races Solid Performances at WCT, WGP, SWC, Other Events

The past 12 months were an excellent annum for Japanese motorcycle riders, many of whom turned in solid performances in various different world championship competitions. In this report, we examine such exploits in the leading races during 2004.

### WCT

At the World Championship for Trial (WCT), Takahisa Fujinami, 24, triumphed in 8 of the 16 races run in that series last year, emerging as the first-ever Japanese champion for the category. "Trial" refers to the demand to negotiate courses with rocks, cliffs and other obstacles while remaining astride one's motorcycle throughout, and never allowing the feet to touch ground. Fujinami made his WCT debut in 1996 at the age of 16, and in 1999 finished runner-up in the annual ranking. However, Dougie Lampkin, a fine rider whose father was the first WCT champion, displayed overwhelming strength in grabbing the top spot from 1997 on. Fujinami had to settle for second place for five years running. Thanks to his long-awaited rise to the top, however, on this past December 10 Fujinami was honored for distinguished service by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports Science and Technology.



Takahisa Fujinami  
competes in last July's  
WCT in Italy.

Another Japanese rider excelling at the WCT is Kenichi Kuroyama, 26, who finished third overall for two consecutive years during 1998-99. However, Kuroyama saw his ranking decline after suffering bone fractures in 2000, while in 2004 he managed a seventh place finish.

### 2004 Results

| Rank | Rider                | Nationality | Team                 | Point* |
|------|----------------------|-------------|----------------------|--------|
| 1    | Takahisa FUJINAMI*** | Japan       | Repsol Montesa HRC** | 282    |
| 2    | Dougie LAMPKIN       | G.B.        | Repsol Montesa HRC   | 266    |
| 3    | Adam RAGA            | Spain       | Tarres Trial Team    | 254    |
| 4    | Albert CABESTANY     | Spain       | Beta Tarragona       | 195    |
| 5    | Marc FREIXA          | Spain       | Repsol Montesa HRC   | 174    |
| 7    | Kenichi KUROYAMA**** | Japan       | Beta Kenny           | 140    |

(Constructor's championship: Montesa Honda)

\* Points are calculated by subtracting from a perfect score of 300. For example, losing one's balance and allowing a foot to touch the ground costs the rider one point, while running off the course or falling is a penalty of five points. Each race has with "scoring sections" in 15 different spots, with the course circled twice to travel over 30 sections in all. The rider with the lowest point loss total after completing the brisk and hearty runs is declared the victor.

\*\* HRC: Honda Racing Corporation.

\*\*\* Official website ( English version available ): <http://fujigas.net/>

\*\*\*\* Official website ( Japanese only ): <http://www.kuroyama.jp/>

### WGP

In the Road Racing World Championship Grand Prix (WGP), riders shoot for the best

circuit times aboard machines with both bodies and engines developed exclusively for competition. The categories were traditionally divided by engine displacement into the three classes of 125cc (GP125), 250cc (GP250) and 500cc (GP500). This was changed in 2002 when models with 4-stroke engines and displacement up to 990cc were authorized to compete in the GP500 class, with the GP500 designation changed to MotoGP.

### **MotoGP**

In the seventh race in this series last year (run July 4 in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil), Makoto Tamada, 27, scored his first victory in the 24 MotoGP races he has competed in to date. On the victory stand, Tamada hoisted his trophy high in the air, and dedicated the win to Daijiro Kato. Many racing fans will remember that Kato died in a tragic accident in the first leg of the 2003 MotoGP in April of that year (Suzuka Circuit in Japan) at the youthful age of 26. Declared a wistful Tamada: "Today is Kato's birthday, and I cannot think of a more fitting tribute." Kato, a close friend of Tamada, captured the 2001 GP250 annual championship with a record 11 race wins. The following year he moved over to MotoGP, where he walked off with Rookie of the Year honors and set his sights on rising to the global pinnacle. Tamada also roared to victory in the 12<sup>th</sup> leg of the series (run at Motegi in Japan). Finishing third there was Shinya Nakano, 27, who in 2002 was the annual runner-up racer in GP250, then moving to MotoGP in 2003. As such, two Japanese riders ascended the podium on that afternoon.



Makoto Tamada (center) and Shinya Nakano (right) take the victory stand after the 12<sup>th</sup> race of 2004.

### **2004 Results**

| Rank | Rider               | Nationality | Team                             | Point* |
|------|---------------------|-------------|----------------------------------|--------|
| 1    | Valentino ROSSI     | Italy       | Gauloises Fortuna Yamaha         | 304    |
| 2    | Sete GIBERNAU       | Spain       | Telefonica Movistar Honda MotoGP | 257    |
| 3    | Massimiliano BIAGGI | Italy       | Camel Honda                      | 217    |
| 4    | Alexandre BARROS    | Brazil      | Repsol Honda Team                | 165    |
| 5    | Colin EDWARDS       | USA         | Telefonica Movistar Honda MotoGP | 157    |
| 6    | Makoto TAMADA**     | Japan       | Camel Honda                      | 150    |
| 7    | Carlos CHECA        | Spain       | Gauloises Fortuna Yamaha         | 117    |
| 8    | Nicky HAYDEN        | USA         | Repsol Honda Team                | 117    |
| 9    | Loris CAPIROSSI     | Italy       | Ducati Marlboro Team             | 117    |
| 10   | Shinya NAKANO***    | Japan       | Kawasaki Racing Team             | 83     |

(Constructor's championship: Honda)

\* Scoring is 25 points for first place, 20 points for second, 16 points for third, 13 points for fourth and 11 points for fifth. One point is subtracted for each place thereafter, concluding with a single point awarded for 15<sup>th</sup> place. There are 16 races in all, with the results totaled to figure the annual points.

\*\* Official website ( English version available ) : <http://www.tamayan.jp/japan.html>

\*\*\* Official website ( English version available ) : <http://www.shinya56.com/>

### GP250

Following the move to MotoGP by the late Daijiro Kato (mentioned above), victor in the 2001 GP250 series, no Japanese rider has been standout in this category. There were signs of a shift in this situation in 2004, however, when 23-year-old **Hiroshi Aoyama**\*, competing in GP250 for the first time, placed third in the 12<sup>th</sup> leg (Motegi in Japan) and rose to No. 6 in the annual ranking. It is hoped that Aoyama will continue to build on these winning ways from here on. The constructor's championship, meanwhile, went to Honda.



Hiroshi Aoyama on the victory stand after the 12<sup>th</sup> race of 2004

\* Official website ( English version available ) :  
<http://www.hiro-aoyama.com/>

### SWC

The Superbike World Championship (SWC) series is a road racing speed competition, with riders driving machines based on "1000cc and over" models available on the market. Because the motorcycles are not specialized race models as such, this category is said to be a stiffer test of rider abilities and skills than WGP. Noriyuki Haga, 29, who returned from MotoGP to this category, bounced back from a crash in the 10<sup>th</sup> leg last year (that forced him to retire) to triumph in the final (11<sup>th</sup>) race of the year in France (the second final there). He finished the year with six victories overall, placing him third in the annual ranking.

\* Official website ( English version available ) :  
<http://www.kimura-inc.com/yamaha/noriyuki/index.html>



Noriyuki Haga leads the pack in the 11<sup>th</sup> SWC race of the year.

### 2004 Results

| Rank | Rider                | Nationality  | Team                        | Point*     |
|------|----------------------|--------------|-----------------------------|------------|
| 1    | James TOSELAND       | GB           | Ducati Fila                 | 336        |
| 2    | Régis LACONI         | France       | Ducati Fila                 | 327        |
| 3    | <b>Noriyuki HAGA</b> | <b>Japan</b> | <b>Renegade Ducati Koji</b> | <b>299</b> |
| 4    | Chris VERMEULEN      | Australia    | Ten Kate Honda              | 282        |
| 5    | Pierfrancesco CHILI  | Italy        | PSG-1 Corse                 | 243        |

(Constructor's championship: Ducati)

\*\* Placing points are scored in the same way as MotoGP. A difference, however, is the "two-race system" of running two finals for each event. Each race is staged as an independent event, with the total points accumulated over 22 races (spanning 11 legs) comprising the aggregate annual score.

### **Master of Endurance**

As the name suggests, "Master of Endurance" is a motorcycle endurance race in which riders see how many times they can lap a circuit during a 24-hour period. Three of these runs are run each year – Le Mans, France in April, Spa-Francorchamps, Belgium in July, and Bordeaux, France in September. Japanese riders performed well in these contests of endurance last year as well, with **Keiichi Kitagawa**, 37, of the Suzuki Endurance Racing Team\* logging 793 laps (4,180km) in Le Mans to rack up the first-ever first-place finish by a Japanese rider in this category. Kitagawa continued his stellar ways at the Bordeaux event as well, again topping the field with 713 laps completed.

\* Official website ( English only ) : <http://www.suzuki-racing.com/>

In Japan, the triumphs by Japanese competitors at last year's Summer Olympic Games in Athens, Greece, far exceeding advance expectations, have dramatically elevated hopes and expectations in the country's younger athletes. The same holds true for motor sports, with the fans looking forward to bigger and better things from Japanese drivers, and the younger racers in particular.