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VALENTINO

ROSSI



Mat Oxley

PORTRAIT OF A SPEED GOD

Fourth Edition

Jos Wilson

VALENTINO

Rossi

PORTRAIT OF A SPEED GOD

Fourth Edition

1970
1971

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To Debs, Joe and Alex

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VALENTINO

ROSSI

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PORTRAIT OF A SPEED GOD

Mat Oxley



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Contents

**BEING VALENTINO**

8

**HAIR ROSSI**

26

**VICTORY VALENTINO**

28

**ROSSI POSSE**

34

**ROSSI LIDS**

40

**ROSSI RELIGION**

44

**GROWING UP FAST**

50

**125s**

66

**250s**

78

**500s**

88



100

MotoGP HONDA

110

MotoGP YAMAHA

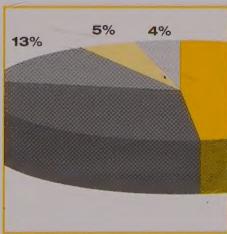
168

MotoGP DUCATI

176

PAPA ROSSI

180

METAL ROSSI**ROSSI RIVALS****ROSSI DOWN****ROSSI VERSUS HISTORY****AUTO ROSSI****ROSSI BY NUMBERS**

200

206

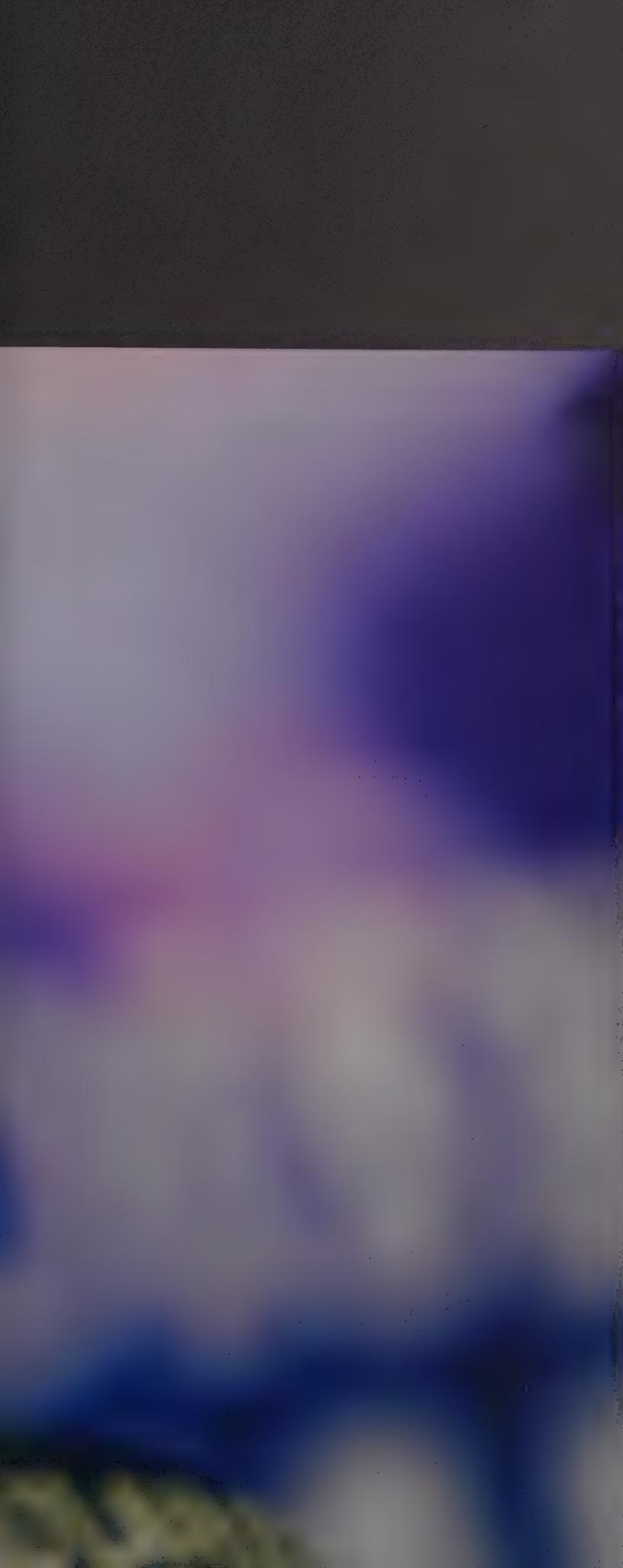
216

218

222

Intro





Valentino Rossi is arguably the best and certainly the most famous motorcycle racer who has ever walked this planet. He has won a pile of world titles and wooed millions of fans with his magical ability to wring the maximum out of an engine and a pair of wheels.

He's the petrolhead who became a pop star, hopelessly addicted to speed and irresistible to fans of all shapes and sizes: bikers and non-bikers, guys and girls, young and old. He earns his living from a violent and risky business, laying his life on the line, week in, week out, usually looking like he's really just having a bit of a laugh.

Motorsport in the 21st century is very much a science, a slave to the overbearing laws of physics, a digital duel of zeroes and ones. And yet Valentino races with an old-school cavalier swagger, his extraordinary natural ability allowing him to do things with a 210mph motorcycle that would take any normal human being deep into the disaster zone. Watching him at the height of his powers is special – he's totally at one with his motorcycle, melding muscle and metal into a seamless whole, a unique union of man and machine.

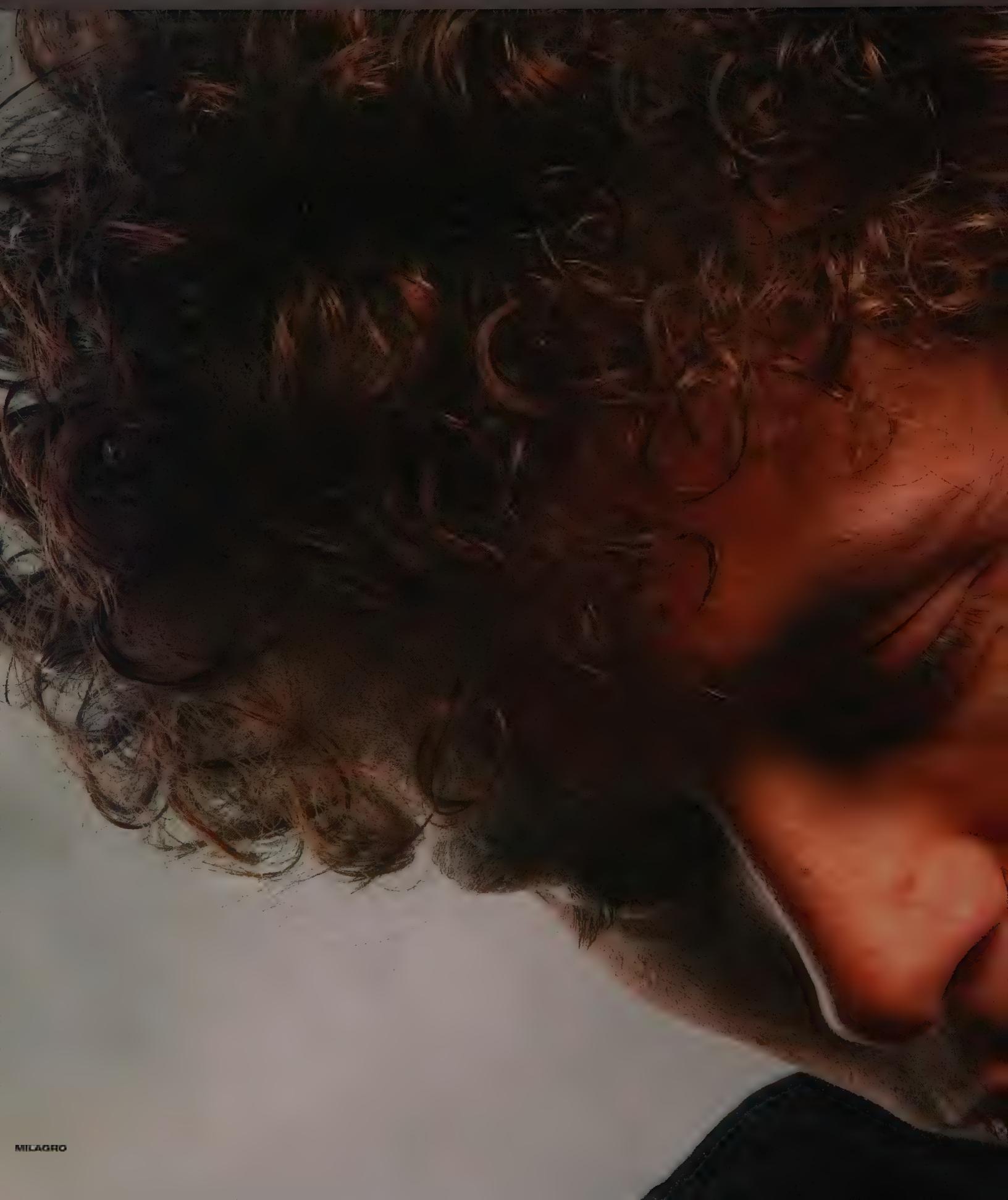
We're lucky to be witnessing a remarkable moment in bike racing history. As Carlo Pernat – the man who gave Vale his big break – puts it like this: 'A rider like Valentino is born every 20 years. For me he's similar to guys like Pele, McEnroe, Muhammad Ali or Maradona, people who tower over their sports.' Pernat isn't wrong, Valentino's shadow casts right across motorcycle racing, so that he's almost bigger than the sport itself.

Off the bike he's equally outstanding, with a lust for life that burns so brightly and a rock 'n' roll attitude that distinguishes him from so many of today's ass-kissing sports stars. Valentino is one of those rare people who every day extracts the maximum out of life, but he always gives as good as he gets...

Mat Oxley

London

July 2011





BEING VALENTINO

It's not just about being fast...

Valentino Rossi is a fan of the late Steve McQueen. There are obvious parallels between the lives of the World Champion bike racer and the uber-cool Hollywood actor. Valentino likes to live fast and loose, just like McQueen did. He's addicted to speed, just like McQueen was. He parties hard, just like McQueen did. His career is driven by an appetite for fun and revenge, just like McQueen's was. And he has that same conviction of greatness, that same unflinching self-confidence of someone who knows he's really good, just like McQueen had.

McQueen was an accomplished dirt bike racer, good enough to race for the USA's world enduro team. Quite simply, he lived for speed, just like Valentino does. 'All the racers I know race because it's something that's inside of them,' McQueen said. 'They're not courting death. They're courting being alive.' McQueen had a term for guys he



◀ It's a tough life, this GP racing. Valentino on holiday in Tunisia in '98. The big grin belies a troubled soul – he was midway through his first 250 season, crashing too much and getting eaten alive by the Italian media.

► really respected – ‘he’s full of juice,’ he’d say – and he would certainly have appreciated the fact that Valentino is so full of juice he bubbles over, with enough of the stuff to touch the lives of millions. He radiates a lust for life that most human beings can’t help falling for, just like McQueen did back in the ’60s and ’70s.

Of course, there are contrasts between these two gods of speed and cool. McQueen spent most of his life acting or playing the fool and the rest of his time racing motorcycles. Rossi spends most of his life racing bikes and the rest of the time acting up or playing the fool. But had they been able to spend time together they would’ve perfectly understood each other. They would’ve spent their days thrashing around on dirt bikes, getting into deep discussions about tyre compounds and suspension settings, and their nights getting drunk and talking nonsense. Because that’s what being Valentino is all about: race hard, play hard.

He’s certainly no longer the impish boy racer who had a smile for everyone, even his most belligerent 125 and 250 rivals. These days he’s a grown man in a tough world, and perhaps the McQueen fetish is all about growing up. Look at Valentino now, he’s no longer the playful kid with the trance cadet hairdo. And on the track he’s no longer a boy wonder, he’s a heavyweight fighter. His vicious on-track clashes with arch-rivals Sete Gibernau (Jerez 2005), Casey Stoner (Laguna 2008) and Jorge Lorenzo (Motegi 2010) prove that.

But people who balk at this more macho Valentino should remember that he competes in one of the cruellest, most vicious sports – a world of corporate overkill in the paddock and sudden death on the racetrack. It’s not the kind of world you pass through without making enemies, and if you can use your enemies for motivation, then why not?

Like McQueen, Valentino is one of those people who always gets the maximum out of life. And like Vale, McQueen was good at making enemies. McQueen was also well-known for taking risky roles at the height of his commercial powers, just like Valentino. Vale loves laying it on the line, taking risks, because he’s courting being alive. Someone once said of McQueen: ‘He didn’t die wondering.’ Neither will Valentino...



◀ The king indeed. Italian Rolling Stone dressed Valentino like Elvis and put him on its cover in December 2003. Editor Michele Lupi is a mate of Vale’s and spends much time trying to educate the youngster in the ways of the rock ‘n’ roll lifestyle.

'Racing is life,
the rest is just
waiting'

Steve McQueen,
Le Mans 1971

Wanting racing to race. Right my 2014. On
your screen have been here. I am excited on
driving the YAMAHA





Valentino hasn't had a steady girlfriend for a while. And he hardly ever brings girls to races. They appear occasionally but never for very long – he seems to be enjoying the young, free, single lifestyle. 'When you make this life is very difficult to have a girl,' he says. 'If you bring her to a GP maybe she's bored, so I stay alone at races, is better. Then when you stay one week at a racetrack, you come back home and you have some power to use, you need to have fun, go out with friends, go to the disco, but your girlfriend has just stayed one week doing all this, so when I come home, she say "can we see a movie?". So is difficult.'

Not that that has stopped him from enjoying the attentions of the gentler sex. 'We really enjoy having so many girls around!' says Vale's best mate Uccio. 'Maybe some top riders or superstars worry "is this girl coming to see me because I'm famous or does she really like me?", but Valentino doesn't think like that, he always says "I don't care why she's coming to see me, I'm just happy that she's coming".'

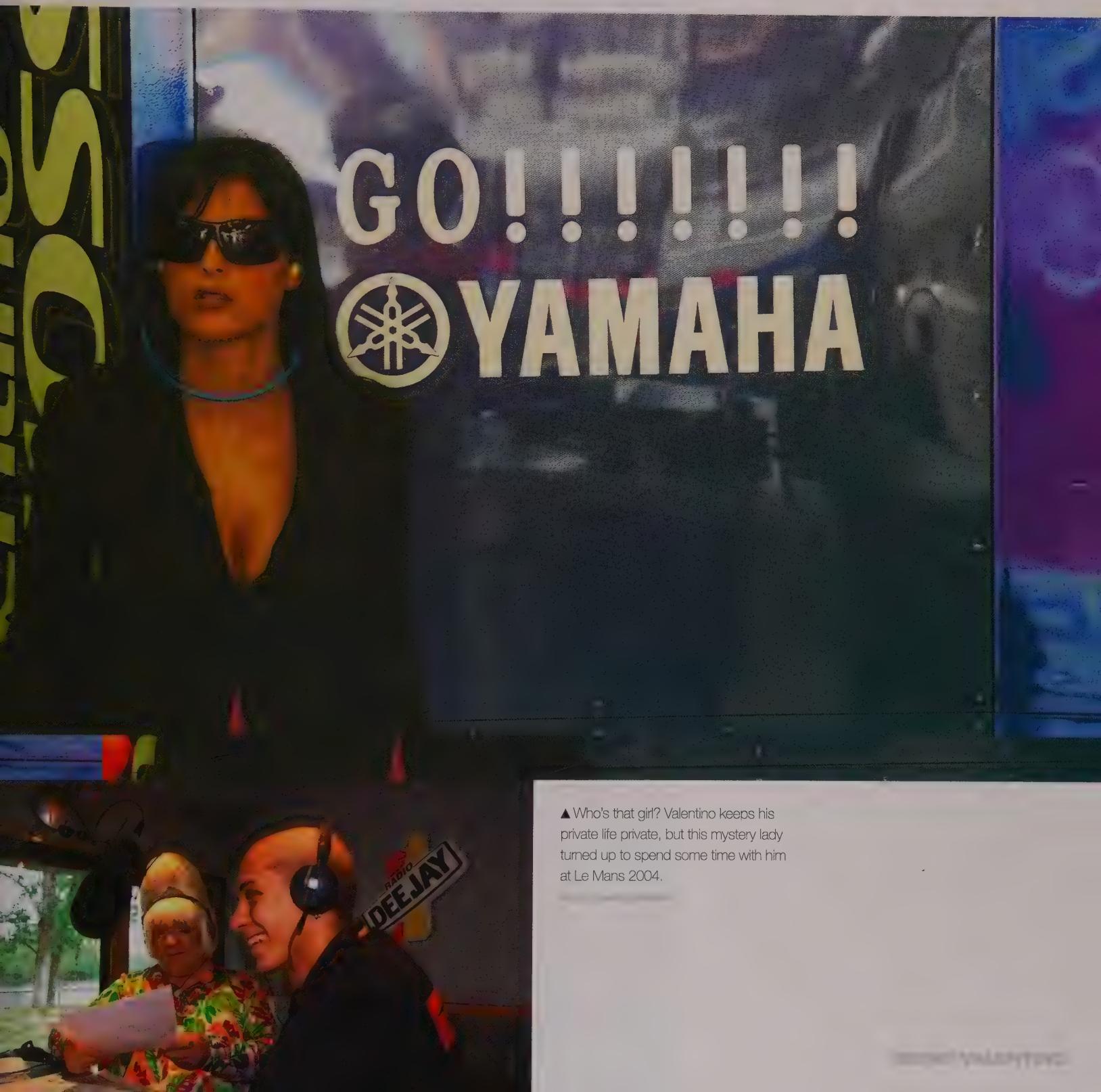
Former Aprilia GP boss Carlo Pernat has always been amazed at Vale's ways with the ladies. 'I've never seen so many girls around a rider, maybe Sheene or



▲ The Valenteenyboppers go nuts at Mugello '98. He was only just beginning to get used to all the fuss.

► You wouldn't find many macho bike racers happy to hang out with a tranny. Vale sharing a laugh with notorious Italian DJ Platinette at Imola 1999.

Lucchinelli (hard-partying premier-class stars of the '70s and '80s) but never so many,' he says. 'Valentino doesn't like to stay with a girl more than two or three months. He lived like a kid then and he lives like a kid now, with the same friends, the same way of life. After the racing is finished it's impossible to find him, no-one knows where he goes, maybe he's in London, maybe he's in a disco with some friends he's known since he was a boy. He never changes, he doesn't want to be famous, he doesn't want a movie-star girlfriend, he doesn't want to be in the papers with famous people.'



▲ Who's that girl? Valentino keeps his private life private, but this mystery lady turned up to spend some time with him at Le Mans 2004.



▲ Breakfast of a champion, breaking his fast with half-brother Luca at mum's house in Tavullia. This is where he goes to escape the stresses of his high-speed life.

► Vale never takes himself too seriously, which is why his personal logo is a super-slow tortoise. He has a sticker of the tortoise on the yokes of his M1 and a tattoo on his belly.



◀ This is what Valentino would've ended up doing if he hadn't become a racer – goofing around the streets of Tavullia like any other petrolhead scooter kid.



▲ He's a real doctor, you know. Receiving a doctorate in communications and publicity from the ancient university of Urbino, the city of his birth, in May 2005.

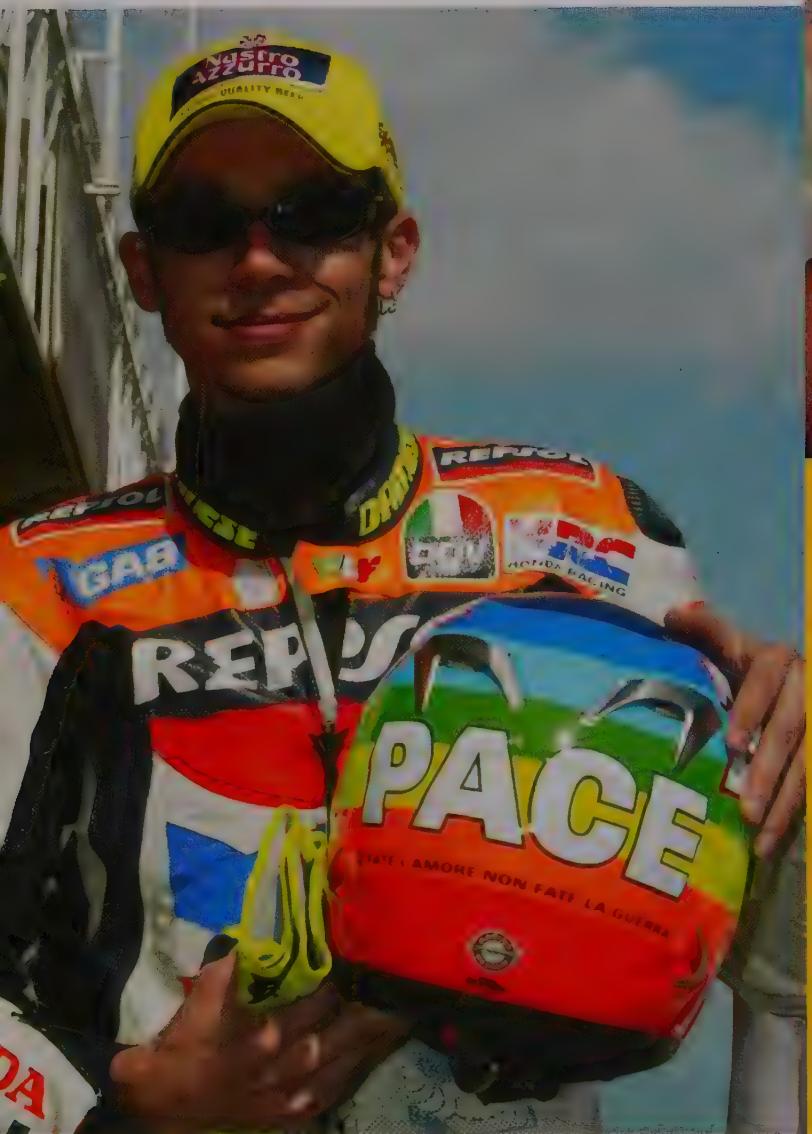


Touch and ye shall be touched. The Yamaha crew pay homage after Valentino's runaway win at Estoril, 2004. This was the victory that started the final push to the greatest world title success. Note white-haired manager Gibo and bestmate Cibola, with yellow hair.

MILAGRO







▲ You could never say 21st century Valentino isn't cool. But he definitely didn't used to be. Funny, yes, daft, definitely, charming, sure, but cool? Nah.

► A good yawn introduces extra oxygen to the system, which is why some racers yawn like crazy while waiting on the grid, even though they're most definitely not bored. But this is Valentino being bored...

◀ In the spring of 2003, with the US/UK invasion of Iraq ready to roll, most MotoGP riders kept quiet about the coming carnage, perhaps wary they might upset a corporate sponsor or two. Not Valentino. He was loud and proud on the issue: 'Peace – make love, not war' was the message.



► If he were a teenager now, he'd wear a hoodie and be the proud owner of an ASBO.

VITALE

► A word in your shell-like. Graziano gives his boy some sensible advice.

VITALE





◀ The Tavullia tobacconist – like most of Tavullia – is a shrine to Valentino and his achievements.



◀ 'Hello, is that the Tavullia council graffiti unit? Some kids have made a real mess of this wall in the town square.'

'Very decisive man, great hands, full of personality'

Palmist Joan Elizabeth

Palmist Joan Elizabeth read Vale's hands, knowing only that they belonged to a bike racer, nothing more. 'His past lifeline curves round the base of the thumb. Nothing to do with longevity; it's how a person lives their life. This chap is very independent. Childhood may not have been an easy time. It's not a criticism of parenting; his very strong, independent spirit made him someone who wasn't easy to parent. It seems his life has gone in blocks, with some difficulties.

'He's unsure – not from his lack of commitment but other people's. With that sorted I see him zooming into the future in a controlled way; this chap has control over his life.'

Something of a temper I'd suggest, but he's probably only lost it once or twice because he likes to be in control.

'I know he's a racer but I have to say I'm surprised. It's almost as if he got into what he's doing by default. I'd assumed that, because of the strong determination in his hands, he'd be very clear about what he's doing. In fact there seems to be a sort of vagueness. He probably found that he was very gifted and thought "I'll have a go". One day he'll wake up and say "I've had enough of this", and do something completely different. It'll certainly be creative. He's a very intelligent chap who could choose any career.'

'Whatever he does needs movement, people, changes. Repetition is like death to him. A very emotional man too; his heart line shows more than his share of emotional events, some of which he's vowed never to repeat. He's built a strong defensive mechanism around him.'

'He has a very sympathetic nature, but he likes to get on with it. Money-wise there's strong financial security. He's a very intuitive man who sums up people quickly. He doesn't suffer fools gladly. I wouldn't like to get on the wrong side of him. He may have a lot of acquaintances but very few real friends. If he makes a friend, that's it, you've got him for life.'



These are the hands of the master – the parts of Valentino's body that interact between his amazing racing brain and his motorcycle. They're not the gnarled hands of some veteran GP campaigners and they're not the hands of a builder, all sausage fingers and podgy palms. If anything, they're the hands of an artist, which fits Rossi's highly graceful style of riding.

Most interesting of all, Vale is left-handed. Left-handed people are said to use their brains differently from the majority; for example, they're supposed to benefit from greater integration of both brain hemispheres in processing information. They're also supposed to be more creative, which might explain Rossi's ability to



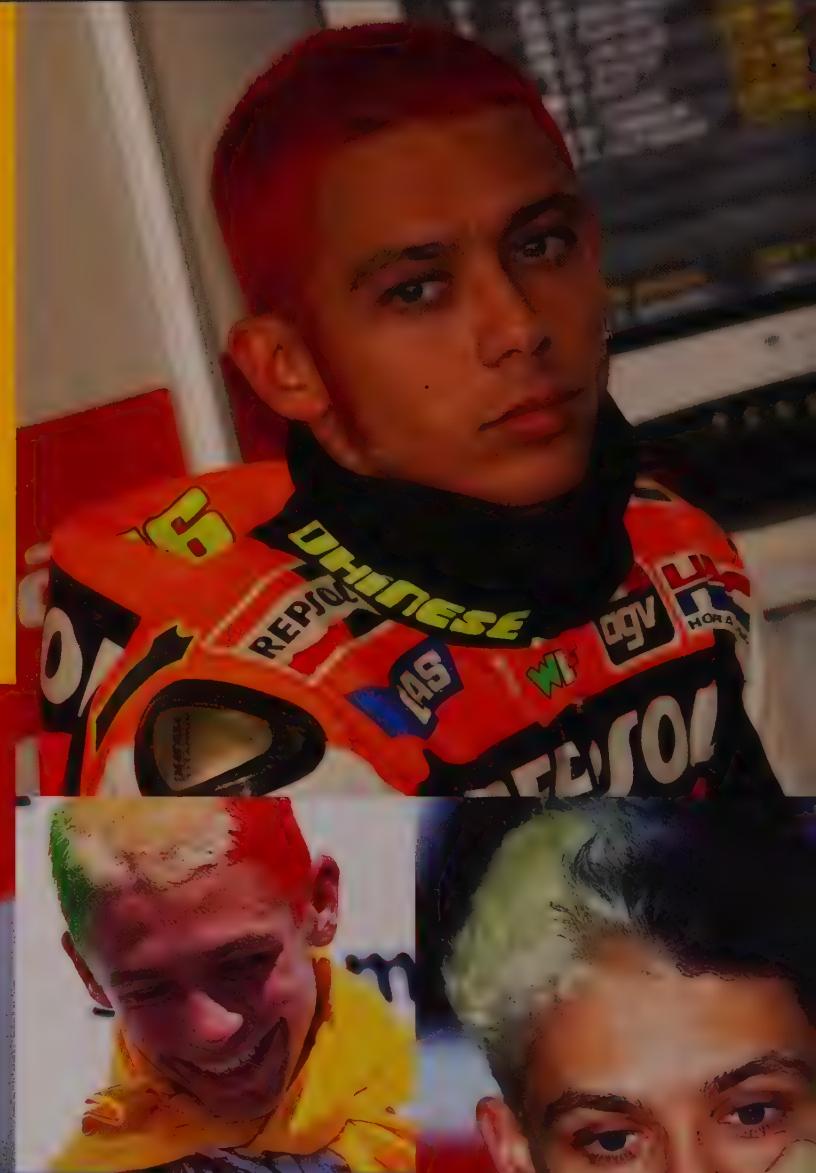
conjure up unusual racing lines that few rivals seem able to attempt. He's in good company here – football legend Pelé is left-handed, and so were F1 racer Ayrton Senna, Jimi Hendrix, Napoleon and Michelangelo.

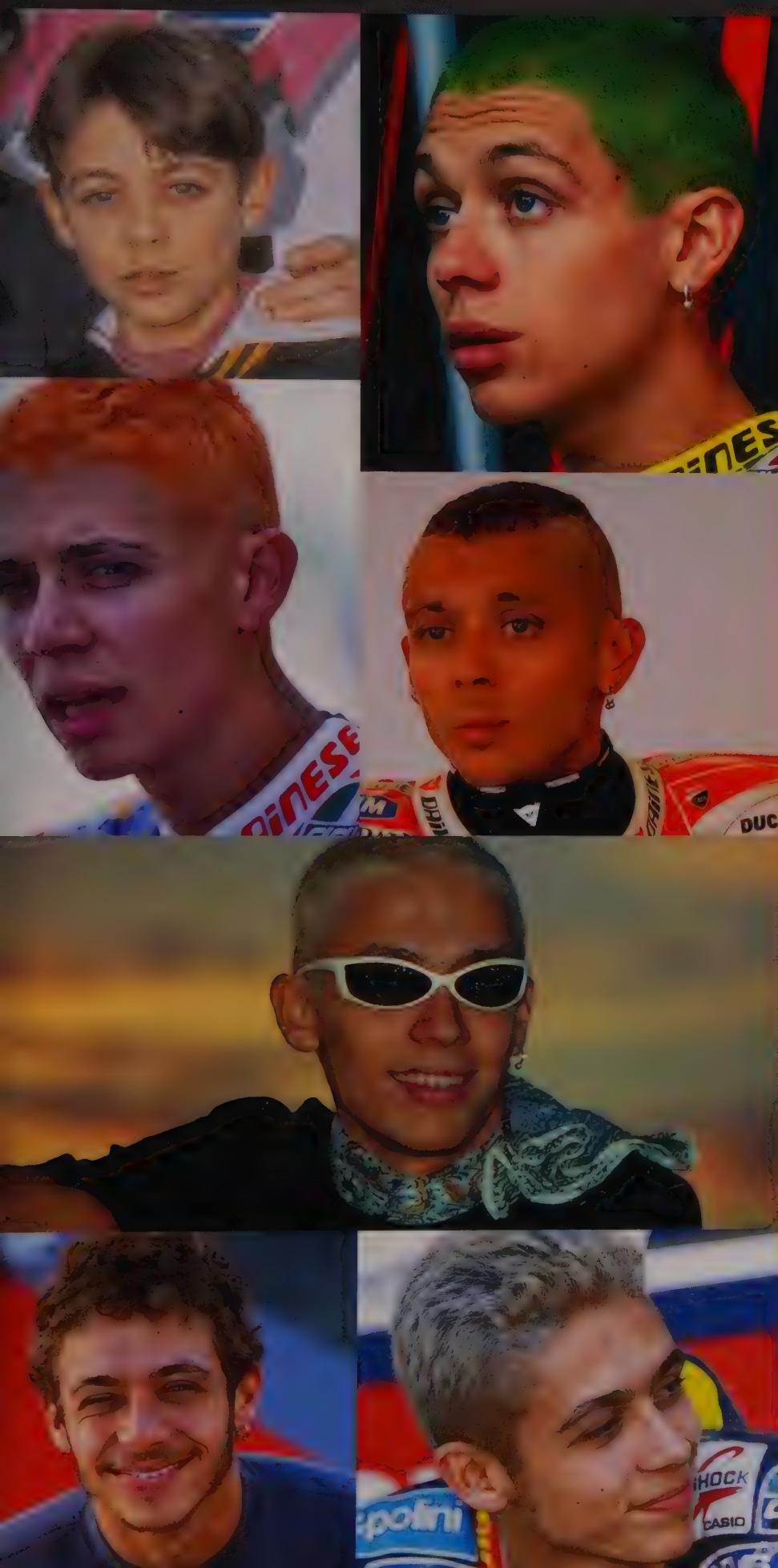
So far (touch wood) Valentino has been pretty lucky injury-wise, so his hands aren't as wrecked as some. He's one of those riders with an apparent ability to bounce, tumble and roll without incurring major physical damage, with the obvious exception of a broken femur at Mugello 2010. Some riders have this knack and no-one is really sure why – is it an innate talent to crash well, or do these riders have stronger bones and more flexible joints?

But his hands have suffered somewhat in his two decades of minimoto and Grand Prix racing. The little finger on his left hand is a bit of a mess. He broke the digit when he crashed out of a 125 European championship race at Assen in 1995 and the lower two bones have since fused together, leaving a nasty, crooked pinkie. 'I crash very much in '95 and '96, maybe 20 times.'

And Valentino's hands do suffer from the day-to-day rigours of high-speed motorcycle racing. The tops of his palms are hard and calloused, like the soles of a barefoot walker's feet, from gripping the handlebars like his life depends on it (which it does, of course).

'I saw a girl in Ibiza last week with dyed red hair, it looked cool, so I went for the same'





HAIR ROSSI

Valentino's history of cool and not-so-cool coiffures

Valentino is a master of the makeover, a one-man boom for the hairdressing industry. His tonsorial adventures have veered this way and that, from red to green, from blue to orange, from black and white to red, white and green. But what do they tell us about the man? Does each hairdo suggest the ever-changing moods of a mercurial spirit? Nah, they all tell us the same thing – that the man likes a laugh and that he doesn't want to be taken too seriously.

Photos:

ANDREA D'AGOSTINO/AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE





VICTORY VALENTINO

Victory always means one thing for Vale – party time

The Mad Hatter and the crazy little 125 rider get the party started at Brno '97. Vale has just won his first world title and what better way to celebrate than by strapping a giant *numero uno* to his back. Note Uccio with shades on head.

Valentino's wacky victory celebrations won him tens of thousands of fans long before his riding genius became fully apparent to the world. Right from the start in '97, Vale, Uccio and their mates put serious effort into their post-race pranks.

Uccio: 'I was one of ten people who would meet on Tuesdays before races to organise the gag. Then I would arrive at the track on Wednesdays to find a nice place to do the gag. We bought the plastic sheeting for the 'Superfumi' cape and made it ourselves for Assen '97. At Mugello that year Valentino rode his victory lap with a blow-up doll. We had that idea at Mugello, so we rang someone from the fan club to buy a blow-up doll from a sex shop!'

Vale: 'The gags are just a game, just some fun with the people in my fan club. The ideas usually came to us in a bar in Tavullia at two in the morning.'

Graziano: 'Valentino's victory gags aren't so much for the fans, they're more for his friends and the fan club, they're important to improve his relationship with the people who are behind him, the people who love him. The gags show that he's very different from other riders. My favourite was Jerez in '99, when he stopped on the victory lap and went into a marshal's toilet.'

▼ Valentino had the Jerez crowd in hysterics... and disappeared into this Portaloo. He repeated the gag a decade later when he won the 2009 Jerez MotoGP race.

PHOTOGRAPH BY GUY LAWRENCE

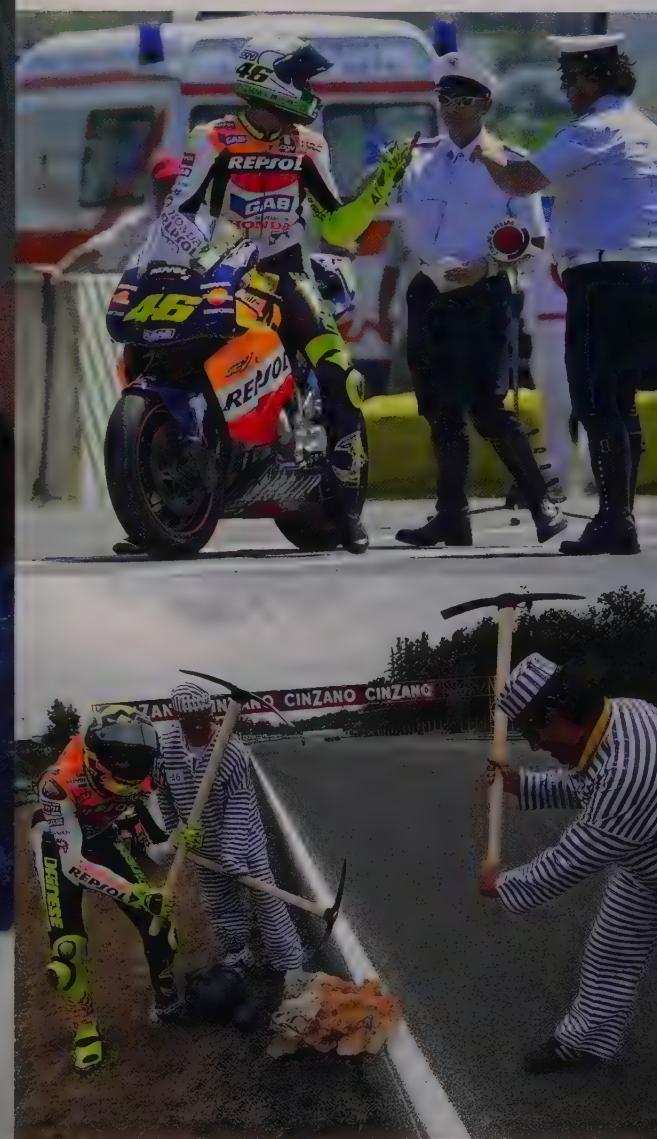


► 'Sorry mate, it may be a little too late for a urine sample.' Goggle-eyed on champagne, Vale gives the Aussie GP official the bad news. Phillip Island will probably never forget the party that followed his 2004 title-winning ride.

PHOTOGRAPH BY GUY LAWRENCE



▼ 'Who do you think you are, son, Valentino Rossi?' Vale's fan club, dressed as Italian speed cops, nick their hero after he'd won the 2002 Italian GP. And he'd only been doing 210mph down the start-finish.



▲ Valentino reckoned the media gave him such a hard time after a run of mediocre results during 2003 that they'd put him on the chain gang. Czech GP victory gave him his jailbreak.

▼ Vale donned this cape after winning the '97 Dutch 125 GP. The Superfumi tag came from his first racing nickname, Rossifumi, which came from Japanese GP star Norifumi Abe. Got that?



► Smoking is bad for your health but the people love it anyway. Vale gets another rolling bum-out started at the Sachsenring.





▲ When Vale won his 100th GP victory at Assen 2008 he unfurled a huge banner recording each of his previous 99 wins. Next stop: Giacomo Agostini's all-time record of 122 wins!

◀ It's 2002 and Brazil has just won the world cup in Japan. Meanwhile in Rio, Vale has just won the MotoGP world title. Cue some wild football-style celebrations.



▲ "What's my number?" Just in case anyone wasn't already sure, Vale and his coterie remind the masses after winning the 1998 Imola 250 GP.





The man with a plan. Vale and his crew at Sepang, winter tests, November 2004 (left to right): Brent Stephens, Alex Briggs, Matteo Flamigni, JB, Vale, Bernard Ansiau, team boss Davide Brivio, Gary Coleman.

GOLD AND GOOSE

ROSSI POSSE

The people who help make Valentino great

'As a guy to work for, you'd struggle to find someone better. If anything goes wrong with the bike he doesn't hold grudges with anyone, he knows that's just racing. He always puts more emphasis on the race side of things – watch how many laps he does on race set-up and race tyres during practice.'

Brent Stephens, mechanic

'Big-head syndrome hasn't come into his life, not as far as I can see, anyway, I think his mates keep him straight there. He's great because he never gives up and he's very apologetic if he doesn't win. Downsides? He's got too many fans, so it's bloody hard to get in and out of the garage!'

Gary Coleman, pit assistant

'He never says a bad word and he never complains. He's a lot of fun, a nice person to work with – which is sometimes surprising because some riders aren't so nice.'

Bernard Ansiau, mechanic

▼ Thick as thieves since they were five:
Valentino and Uccio.

'We have been friends since we were five. We used to race each other on minimotos, but I stopped after that and started going to races with him. I always knew he was very fast but I never imagined the future, we were too young to notice that he might be a really good rider. In '96 and '97 I was amazed at what was happening. We had never imagined how big our adventure would become, but I was very happy that Valentino realised his dream. To this day our relationship has never changed, but he has changed in the way he relates to the media, the fans, the people who aren't around him all the time.'

Uccio Salucci, best mate and right-hand man



'I'm very happy for him. My own feeling is more joy than pride, I'm not a proud person. Every time he achieves another success it's a pleasurable surprise but I will always remember him winning the 125 title in '97. We shared this summer and we were always fighting. It was terrible because he cannot go to bed before one o'clock, it's impossible for him, then I had to wake him up in the morning... the most difficult job in the world! I had to wake him once, twice, three times. In the end I had to get his engineer to do it.'

Graziano Rossi, father



► She brought him up well – Vale celebrates his 2004 title with mum and half-brother Luca.

'The thing I really like about him is the personal stuff. If I had to tell you what's his best quality, it wouldn't be his riding talent.'

Stefania Rossi, mother

▼ Ahhhh... Valentino and his dad have always been close.



▼ Vale and Axle spend their winters performing in front of empty grandstands – MotoGP's not-so-glamorous side.

GOLD AND GOOSE

'Ask most race mechanics what they think of their riders and a lot of them will say they're pricks, but Valentino's a great person. Within the first week of knowing him, he knew about me, about my family, he knew all of that. And he just loves all kinds of racing: bikes, rallying, F1, anything to do with engines. Watch some rallying on TV with him and he squeals with delight watching a car get sideways through a corner, he just loves it all.'

Alex 'Axle' Briggs, mechanic



► 'Then she said...' Vale amuses JB, Uccio and Matteo during a lull in winter testing, Phillip Island, January 2005.

GOLD AND GOOSE



'He has the mental capacity to take on board more than the other guys'

Jeremy Burgess



'He has better application and better understanding than any other rider I've worked with. And he has the mental capacity to take on board a lot more than perhaps other guys out there, so he's got the confidence in himself and in us to get the bike right leading into a race, when most riders are reluctant to make changes to the set-up.'

Jeremy Burgess, crew chief

'It's interesting to see how he rides in different conditions. When the bike isn't 100 per cent he modifies his riding style to get the best out of it. The data shows us how he uses the brake and throttle differently, how he uses different lines to make the best of any situation. He's always very logical in the pits, so he's easy to work with.'

Matteo Flamigni, data technician

▲ Getting to the heart of the matter – Valentino, JB and Matteo discuss set-up options at the 2004 German GP.



1997 – 125 WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP

▼ Things always used to seem more simple – this lid is straightforward by Vale's standards: sun and moon with the red, white and green of the Italian flag. All Vale's helmet designs are done by graphic designer Aldo Drudi, an old mate of Graziano's.

PEACE & LOVE – 1999 ITALIAN GP

▼► Valentino adopted a Peace & Love theme for his ride in the 1999 250 Italian GP. Turquoise inlaid into his usual sun and moon theme, along with a CND peace logo and his alter ego Valentinnik firing flowers from a laser gun.





2003 ITALIAN GP

◀▲ A Hawaiian shirt on his head – the blue and white Hawaiian design is possibly Vale's most famous helmet.

ROSSI LIDS

Valentino has always been big into graphic design. No better way to illustrate that than with a decade's worth of his AGV helmets



©AGV S.p.A. 2001

◀ Rear of 2001 lid includes a snapshot of Vale's graphic past (from left): the original number 46, Rossifumi, the sun, Valentinik, the moon and his 250-title-winning logo.





2001 - 500 WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP

▼ Valentino turned his back on the sun and the moon and headed off down psychedelia avenue with this 2001 helmet, designer Aldo Drudi adding some Aboriginal touches as he used on the helmets of Aussie former 500 champ Mick Doohan.



2002 ITALIAN GP

▼ This helmet paid homage to his dad's late '70s helmet design – a red, white and green lightning flash. The mini logos indicate crucial factors in the Italian psyche – sun, sea, music, motorcycles, the family, espresso coffee and so on.



2003 VALENCIA GP

▼ He returned to the flower power theme at Valencia 2003. The design was based on the winning entry of a competition arranged by sponsors Repsol.



WINTER TESTING – NOVEMBER 2004

◀▼ Mimicking a well-known brand of washing powder, this lid was a big 'up-yours' to Honda and Gibermau, who (Valentino believes) used dirty tricks to relegate him to the back of the grid at Qatar. The rear panel features washing instructions for a perfect World Championship: 125s are slightly dirty, 250s are averagely dirty, 500s are very dirty, MotoGP is extremely dirty, ultra dirty and, finally, impossibly dirty.



2009 MiniGP WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP

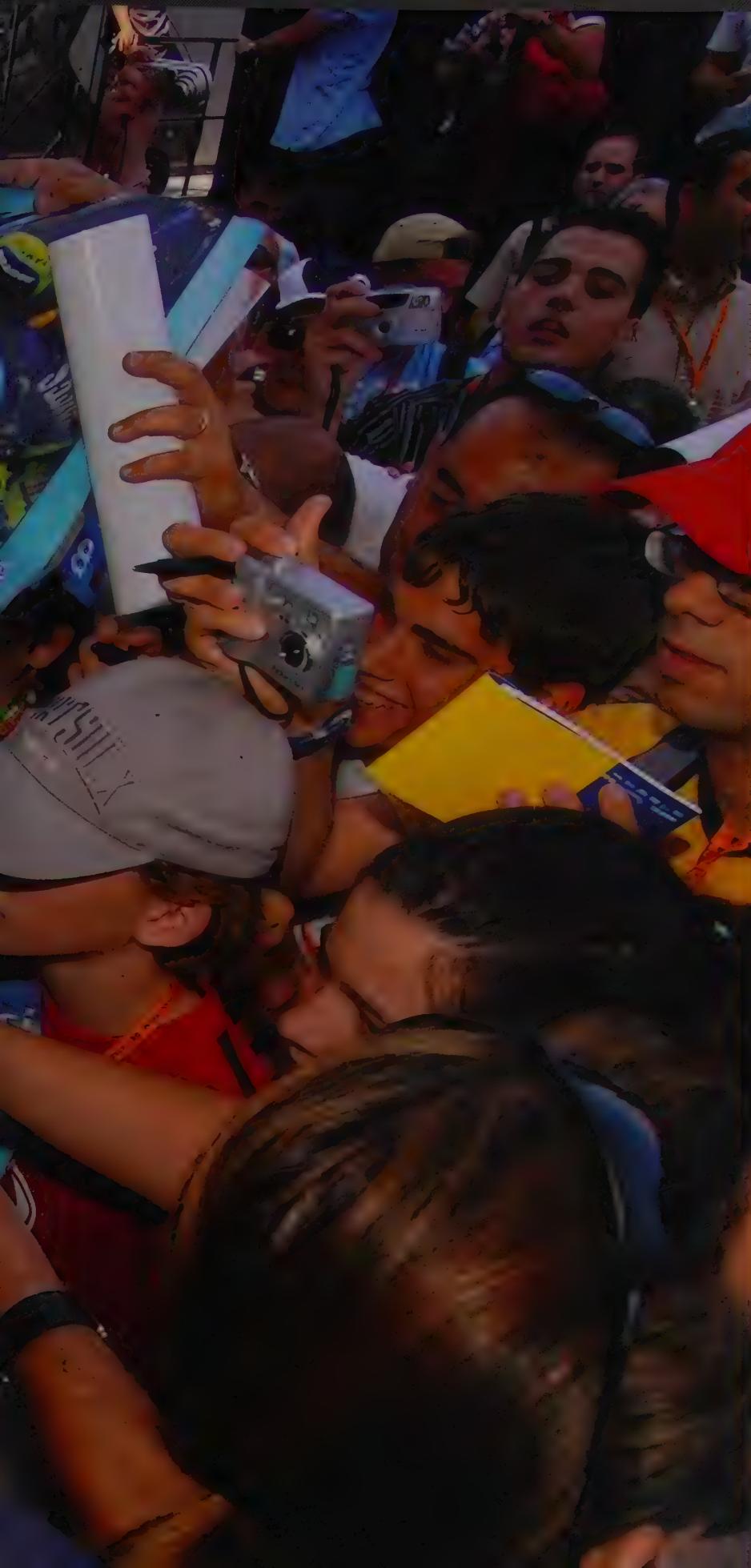
▼ And Drudi's designs keep on getting more and more intricate. Vale's 2009 AGV has got it all: African, Aboriginal and Chinese art, even a small piece of the solar system.

2011 ITALIAN GP

► Vale's all-seeing eye – that's his actual pupil – for his first home GP with Ducati. It means 'I can see you and I'm coming to get you'.







ROSSI RELIGION

It's a very special kind of Sunday worship

Sunday morning, Catalunya 2004 – just another normal moment in the life of Valentino Rossi. Out the back door of the pits and he's mobbed by fans. By the time most riders are back in their motorhomes and in the shower, Vale is still working the felt tip. Former manager Gibo Badioli (grey hair, left) and minder Max (with yellow towel around his neck) are ready to pounce on anyone getting too keen.

PHOTOGRAPH BY

MOTORCYCLE MAGAZINE

► Some girls are prepared to do anything to get their man.

HERK KEULENANS



▲ The supporters' club make some noise up on the hill at Mugello.

► This man is a very, very big fan of Valentino Rossi. Some day his back will be worth a lot of money.



THE MUSE



► Frankly rather worrying – an Aussie fan wears his heart in his hairdo.



▼ The famed Ducatisti were behind Valentino in a big way at Mugello 2011, even though he only finished sixth.

GOLD AND GOOSE

► Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery – Italian fans get into the party spirit in downtown Mugello, June 2004.

FRATERNALI







▲What a difference a couple of decades make: Graziano and Valentino at the 1980 Italian GP (where dad finished third behind King Kenny Roberts and Franco Uncini) and together again at the 2003 Italian GP.

GROWING UP FAST

Just an ordinary kid from an ordinary family. Well, not exactly...

◀Look into those eyes, look right into those eyes. Riding shotgun with dad Graziano at a Pesaro town festival in the summer of 1985, Valentino already knows exactly where he's going... The bike is the Morbidelli 500 that papa Rossi rode in the 1981 500 World Championship.

It's the summer of '85, Madonna's 'Like A Virgin' is pumping out across the town squares of Italy, annoying the Roman Catholic church, and motorcycle GP racing is an all-American affair, with 'Fast' Freddie Spencer and 'Steady' Eddie Lawson duking it out for the 500 World Championship, biking's biggest prize. Down in the Adriatic seaside town of Pesaro they're putting on a bit of a fiesta – riding racing motorcycles and cars around the centre of town, just for the sheer hell of it, because that's what they do in Italy.

Graziano Rossi has already been retired from bike racing for three years, following a massive crash at Imola, but is asked to take his old Morbidelli 500 GP bike out for a spin. Rossi lives only a few miles inland in Tavullia, and the Morbidelli factory is just down the road, so this means something to the locals. Only one little problem, Rossi's six-year-old son wants to come along for the ride.

Of course, Graziano is an accommodating sort of a guy, so he lifts Valentino onto the 500's fat aluminium fuel tank and trundles off down the road, taking it nice and easy because the kid's not even wearing a helmet, just shirt, shorts and sandals.

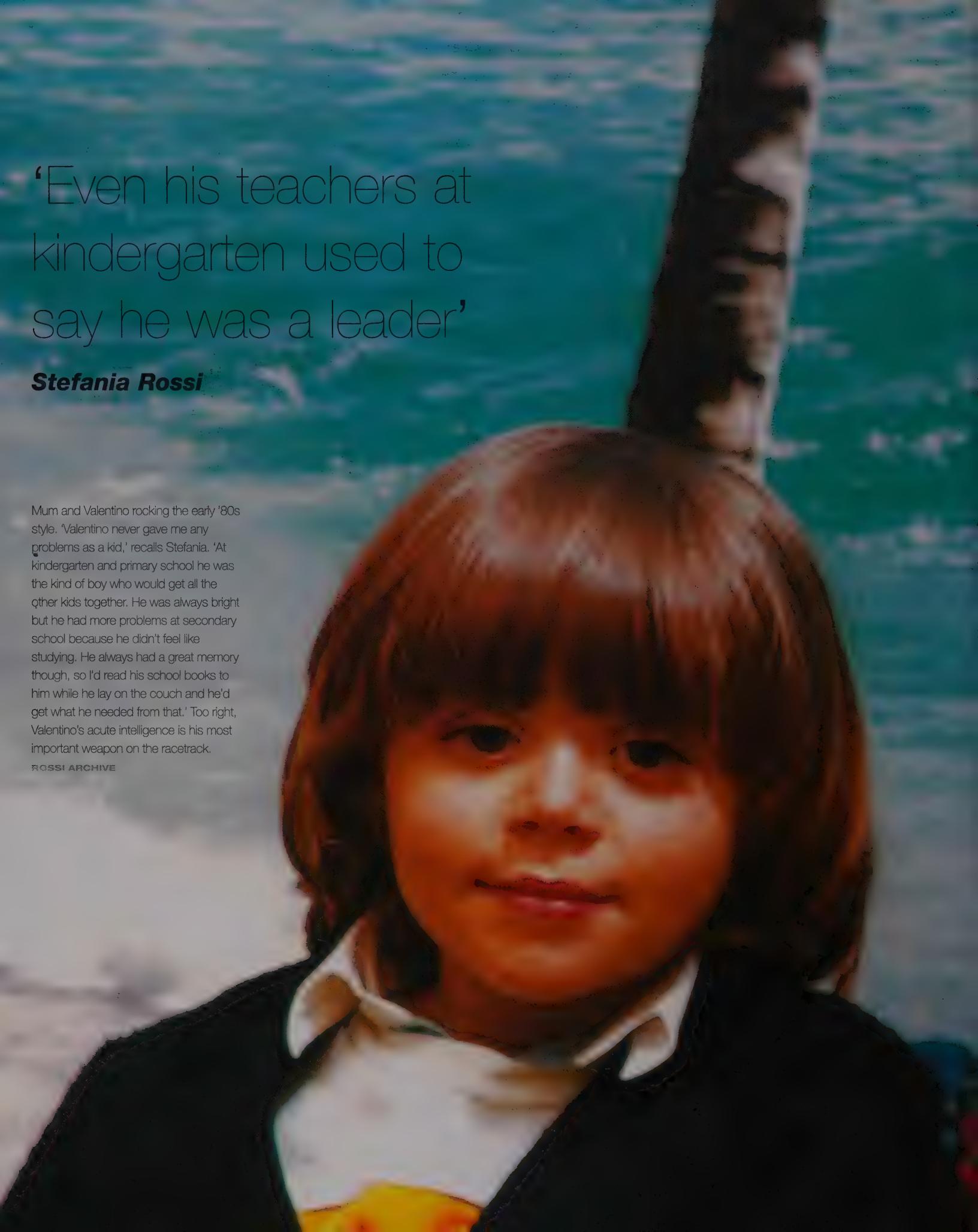
The fickle four-cylinder two-stroke, which Rossi raced without success in the 1981 500 World Championship, wasn't built for cruising around town, so the engine's spitting and cursing and the slick tyres are dead cold. But Valentino isn't worried in the slightest, in fact the serenity in his eyes is astonishing. He's looking ahead, working out the racing line, like he already knows exactly where he's going in life.

Except it would be wrong to say that Valentino knew exactly where he was going. Sure, he grew up surrounded by the tools of his dad's trade – engines, GP bikes, rally cars, race trucks, caravans, leathers, helmets and so on – but the only thing of which he was sure was that he wanted to go somewhere fast in life. He could just as easily have become a car racer: indeed that's what Graziano wanted, because he'd been bitten too often in nasty motorcycle crashes and didn't want his son to get so badly beaten up.

His mum, Stefania, wanted Vale to be an engineer, or a guitarist, or maybe even a footballer, anything but a racer. She had already spent too many anxious hours in hospital waiting rooms, wondering if Graziano would pull through from his all too frequent accidents.

But when Valentino was five, Graziano built him a go-kart, a wildly over-powered go-kart. 'That first kart was an awful thing,' dad remembers. 'The frame was meant for a ten-year-old, with a 60cc engine, but I put in a 100cc engine, so it was very fast and also very light, because Valentino was so little, so the thing was sliding everywhere.' And this was Valentino's initiation into speed – no wonder he's so good at controlling outrageously powerful motorcycles.

The kid was good at driving, good enough to win a regional kart title in 1990 and have his eyes set on the 1992 Italian and European championships. Then along came minimoto, the pocket-bike craze that swept through Italy in the early '90s. Valentino badly wanted his own minimoto bike: 'I push, push, push and finally Graziano buy me a minimoto. It was all-black, like Ron Haslam's Elf GP bike. It was a toy, I wanted it.' Of course, Graziano didn't have a clue what he was getting himself into... ■



'Even his teachers at kindergarten used to say he was a leader'

Stefania Rossi

Mum and Valentino rocking the early '80s style. 'Valentino never gave me any problems as a kid,' recalls Stefania. 'At kindergarten and primary school he was the kind of boy who would get all the other kids together. He was always bright but he had more problems at secondary school because he didn't feel like studying. He always had a great memory though, so I'd read his school books to him while he lay on the couch and he'd get what he needed from that.' Too right, Valentino's acute intelligence is his most important weapon on the racetrack.

ROSSI ARCHIVE





► The day that changed his life – Valentino is two and a bit years old and dad has just bought him his very first bike. The outrigger wheels didn't stay for long.

► Dad's old racing lid, man-sized goggles – but there's no doubt about it. Right now he thinks he's the coolest kid in the whole damn universe. And he's not entirely wrong.



▲ Second gear... bwaaaaam... third... bwaaaooorrr... fourth... bwoooooomrrr... fifth... Valentino thrashing the living daylights out of a Bimota HB3; if only he could reach the gearshift. Bimota was another exotic Italian motorcycle marque based within a few miles of the Rossi's home town of Tavullia, just like Morbidelli, the factory that helped papa Rossi to his two^oGP wins in 1979. The HB3 was powered by a Honda CB1100 motor; only 101 were made.

◀ Graziano didn't waste any time in getting Vale logo'd up. But dad's career was already on the downward slope. A big car rallying crash before the 1980 season ruined what should've been the chance of a lifetime – a factory Suzuki 500 ride.





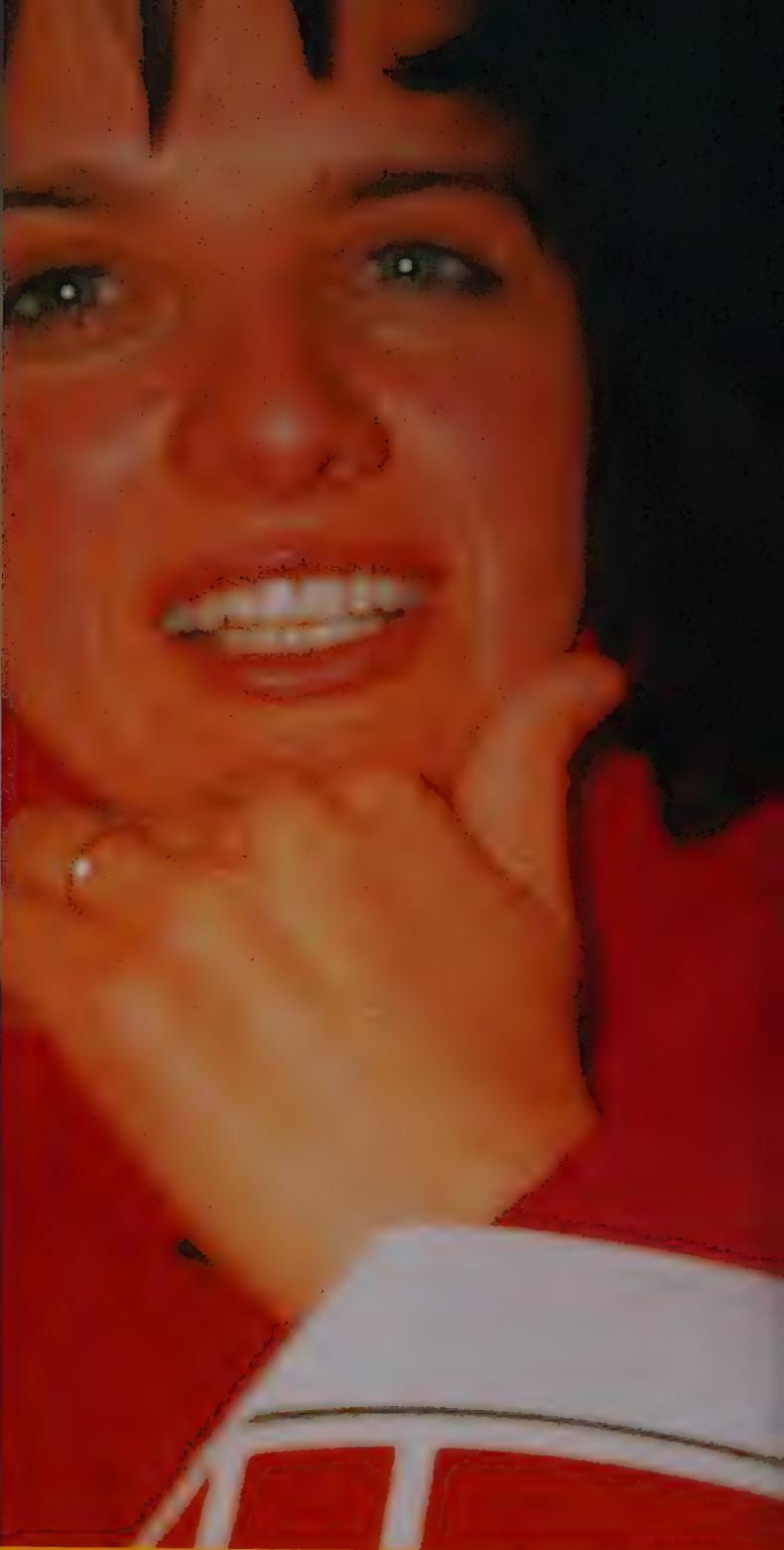


'That first kart was an awful thing... sliding everywhere!'

Graziano Rossi

Right foot stamping on the throttle, full opposite lock and a face that's all concentration and aggression - this is how Valentino learned his first lessons about throttle versus traction. From the age of five, Graziano would take little Vale down the local gravel pit, where he was almost always faster than the grown-ups in their beat-up rally cars.

ROSSI ARCHIVE



▲► 'Oh, oh, child, way you shake that thing, gonna make you bum, gonna make you sting...' Valentino may not have heard of Led Zeppelin when he was eight years old but his mum and dad sure had (take another look at Graziano's hair if you're unsure). Anyway, he quite fancied himself as a guitarist. 'Bikes were always his main interest, the only other thing he was into was guitar lessons,' mum remembers. 'He took them for six years and really liked it, even though he had a very traditional teacher.'





► They've got schoolboy racing all worked out in Italy; the kids let rip on the racetrack, the dads hit the bar. Hey Graziano, if Vale win again, you buy me another gin-tonic.' Ninja Turtle and Kevin Schwantz replica helmet (Vale was a big fan of the 1993 500 World Champ) were essential items in Vale's minimoto kit. But tattered motocross shirt suggests that the Turtle wasn't always a reliable guardian angel.

ROSSI ARCHIVE

'I still remember my first minimoto win, it was funny'

At first Valentino rode his minimoto just for fun, thrashing up and down the drive outside his dad's house in Tavullia or racing mates at the dozens of Lilliputian racetracks that spread like a rash around the seaside resorts of Miramare, Cattolica and Rimini. He won his first real minimoto race in the summer of '91 and quickly realised this was heaps more fun than kart racing. And anyway, karts were getting too expensive for the Rossis.

By '92 he was local minimoto champ and brave enough to make an under-age and illegal debut on a man-sized motorcycle on a proper racetrack. 'My friend signed on, then I wore his leathers, it was like a dream.' In March '93 Valentino made his race debut at a freezing cold Maggione, aboard a Cagiva 125 streetbike: 'It was the first practice and first proper bike race of my life. I try morning practice, first corner I crash. So I come back to the pit, stay quiet, restart, make three or four laps and another crash, so we think maybe we make big mistake.'

Pretty soon he got the hang of it, however. That summer he took third in the Italian 125 streetbike series and won the crown the following year. In '95 he took the Italian 125 GP title and ventured abroad for the first time, taking third in the European 125 championship, enough to guarantee himself a ride in the '96 125 World Championship. ■





► Of course, he didn't always get it right. Getting too cocky for the camera, Vale gives his first minimoto a tad too much throttle.



▲ You little show-off... performing a perfect one-handed wheelie in dad's driveway. It was already obvious that he had uncanny balance.

▼ Oh what a surprise, he's a great skier too. Valentino still takes to the piste in the Italian Alps every winter but these days he's a snowboarder, not a skier!

ROSSI ARCHIVE



◀ This is the scooter-engined Ape trike he drove to high school. 'He wouldn't get the bus like everyone else,' says Stefania. 'He would wake up at the last minute, grab the Ape and fly down the hill into Pesaro.' Within weeks, all his mates had them.

FRATERNALI



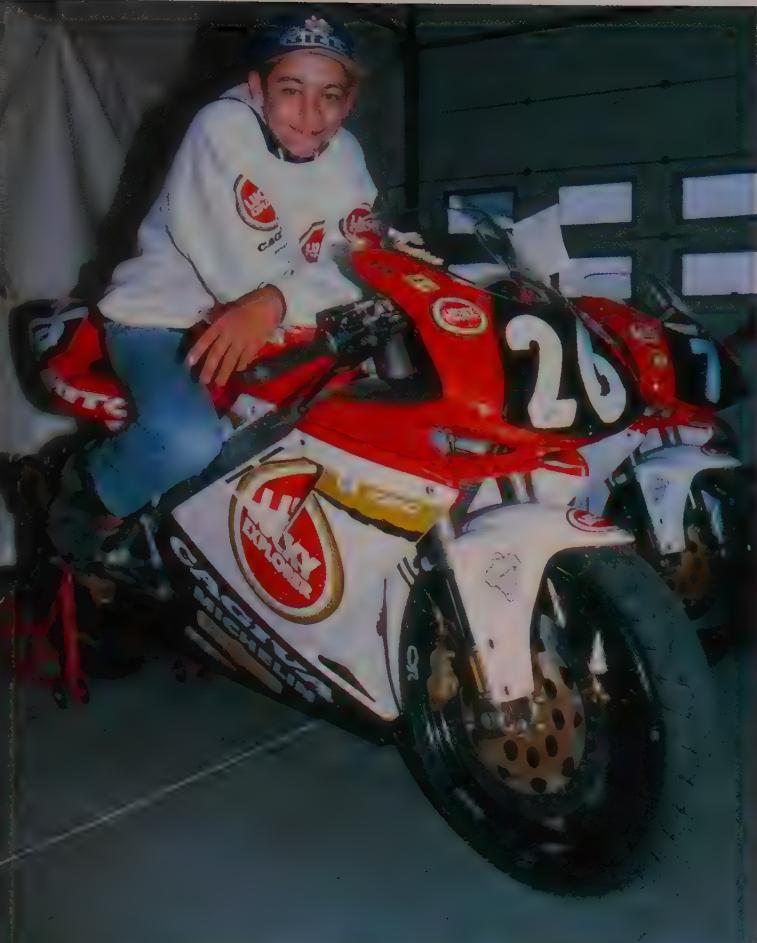


▲ Just 14 years old and aboard his first man-sized bike. This is the Cagiva Mito 125 he crashed twice within a few laps during his first proper track outing at Maggione in the spring of '93.

► On the podium at Misano with Andrea Ballerini (left) and winner Roberto Locatelli, who went on to capture the 2000 125 world title.

▼ Proud dad, or what? Vale's just finished third in the Misano round of the '93 125 Sport Production series and Graziano can't conceal his joy.





▲ His first try-out for a top team, in late '93, Team Pileri ran Nobby Ueda and Fausto Gresini in the '93 125 world series. Ueda later became Vale's toughest 125 rival, while Gresini went on to run his own MotoGP squad.

► Now he's really rocking. Vale poses aboard his fully painted-up Cagiva Mito at the start of the '94 Italian Sport Production championship. He won it, of course.

▼ On a real GP bike at last, Valentino raced this Sandroni-framed Aprilia to third in the '95 European championship, good enough to guarantee him a start in the following year's 125 world championship.







And so the legend begins. Having grandly outfoxed former world champ Jorge Martinez, Vale swoops towards the chequered flag to win his first GP on the afternoon of August 18 1996. Note lack of interest from pit lane.

© Philip Morris Inc. 1996

125s

IN THE BEGINNING

Valentino Rossi was just another crash-happy teenager when he came to GPs in 1996

Oh yes, back then he had a real knack for falling off motorcycles, as well as a huge appetite for fun and an outrageous mop of girlie hair, as friend and former 125 rival Nobby Ueda remembers: 'Valentino came to stay at my house in Nagoya before the '96 Japanese GP. I introduced him to my friends as the next World Champion and they thought he was a girl! His hair was very long...'

Vale's hair stayed long throughout '96, just like he stayed a crash-happy teenager. During that season's 15 GPs he threw his little Aprilia down the road something like 18 times and he only won a single race, his debut victory at Brno during August. So Rossi was no overnight sensation – by the end of '96 no-one had any idea of the greatness that lay ahead. However, by the end of '97 he was 125 World Champion and a bona fide superstar.

During that second 125 season he won 11 GPs from 15 starts, all the while developing the talent that would allow him to go on to dominate every GP category – from 125s to 250s and from 500s to MotoGP. But what really grabbed everyone's attention that summer was Rossi's hilarious post-race theatrics. One weekend he would take a blow-up doll for a ride on his victory lap, the next he'd arrive on the podium dressed like superman. 'When I came to GPs all the riders were very, very serious, so when I started winning, me and my friends decided we should try to make some big fun,' Vale recalls. These comic displays made him much, much more than just another fast man on a motorcycle. They turned all kinds of people on to Valentino Rossi, ultimately transforming him into the biggest bike racing star the world has ever seen.

Of course, it was no real surprise that Vale crashed a lot when he started GP racing. Most fast racers crash a lot when they start out, because they're hurrying to find the limit and, in finding it, they invariably overstep it. 'I make some good races in '96 but also some big crazy mistakes,' Vale remembers. Most importantly, he was learning all the time and that Brno win reinforced his self-confidence, so when Aprilia equipped him with factory-prepared bikes for '97 he knew he was in with a chance of the world title. With a better bike, he crashed much less and won much more: 'I changed because when you understand your power you become more confident and with a faster engine you can be more relaxed.'

And if his growing self-confidence changed his racing, his burgeoning popularity changed his life. Ueda again: 'At

the end of '97 I went to the Milan bike show and was surprised there were so many girls after Valentino. He had seven or eight security around him – big macho men – otherwise he wouldn't have been able to move. He arrived saying "Incredible, what can I do? I want to get away," so I helped him escape out the back.'

▼ Getting messy with the bubbly after beating Masaki Tokudome at the '97 British GP. He won so many races that summer that he wrapped up the championship with three races to go.





▲ Hanging in his bedroom, summer of '97. Check the graffiti on the Biaggi poster. The scribble suggests that the reigning 250 champ 'doesn't even deserve a Benelli triple', that 'Biaggi is nothing' and that 'Biaggi = Naples' (another Italian insult).

◀ Just another long-haired kid showing off down the local shopping mall. Or something like that.

▼ Valentino shows off his first 'hospitality unit' in the Imola paddock, July 1997. Compare this to dad's hospitality 'bus' at Imola '81 (see page 161).





'I make some good races but also some big crazy mistakes'



◀ Life is never less than hectic in 125 racing – this is Vale trying to make good his escape at Brno '97, chased by Scalvini, Ueda, Manako, Martinez, Sakata and the rest. Twenty minutes later he was world champ.

▲ Following a big bang to his head (when dad crashed a car after Vale's title-winning party in Tavullia) Valentino entered his infamous surrealist period. Don't even ask...

▼ Looking after number one: celebrating his very first world title atop the Brno podium, 31 August 1997.

VITTORIO SARTORI



► 'Ciao, mama! I am the champion!' Vale phones home from the Brno pits. From now the Italian media would be bugging him non-stop. It took him a while to realise they weren't all his mates.





‘Becoming world champion is for sure the greatest moment and maybe the first was best’

▲ The first taste is the sweetest. Getting stuck into the fizz after wrapping up the 125 world title. He still rates this moment as sweet as winning the 500 and MotoGP crowns.



◀ Within minutes of winning the title, he was back in his tiny camper van with his mates, drinkin', smokin' and generally behaving like a grown-up.

▼ Falling prey to a minor attack of pre-race nerves. Of course, there was no need to worry.



Valentino had to work hard for that first title. Although he'd already won nine of the season's first 11 races, he wasn't able seal the championship with a win at Brno, where he'd won his first GP success 12 months earlier. Still aching from a crash during Saturday's final qualifying session and unhappy with the set-up of his Aprilia, he spent the entire 19 laps in the midst of an insane dogfight with nine rivals. He eventually finished the race in third spot, just 0.328 seconds behind winner Nobby Ueda, and just enough to give him the title. Of course, the fun was only just beginning. On his slowdown lap Vale stopped to pick up a massive

number one – carved out of solid granite (or possibly Styrofoam) – that his fan club strapped to his back. 'Vord Cienpion' proclaimed the prop, and it wasn't wrong. Minutes later he stood on the podium with his dad while the sombre tones of the Japanese national anthem rang out. After that, chaos! With half a bottle of champagne inside him, Vale headed home to his camper van in the paddock and proceeded to get very merry with his mates. A few weeks later his home town laid on a massive celebration, Tavullia's main square packed with a thousand fans who partied into the night. It was the first of many Tavullia parties... ■



▲ Listen up! Addressing the crowd at the start of his Tavullia title-celebration party, a few weeks after he had secured the crown at Brno.



▲ Vale's first fans – no smoke without fire.

► Too much beer.

▼ Uccio and Vale slightly the worse for wear in the dying stages of the Tavullia knees-up.







Vale's gangly limbs fitted a 250 better than a 125. And it didn't take him long to master the fast but fickle Aprilia RSW250.

250s

THE WORLD ON HIS SHOULDERS

He may have been bound for greatness, but life got tough when Valentino moved from 125s to 250s

The toughest time of his life – that's how Valentino describes his two seasons in the 250 World Championship. Not that the racing was the hardest (he won 14 of his 30 races in the class) but this was when he began to learn the heavy price of fame, when his beaming teenage naivety was rudely snuffed out by the big, bad world. Not only that, two of his best mates died in a car crash.

When he first climbed on to a 250 at the end of '97, Valentino was still a wide-eyed 18-year-old, loving all the attention from the media and his fans, loving everything about life, about racing. He hadn't quite realised that he had unwittingly signed a Faustian pact – make the people and the press love you and you're

► From boy to man. He was a sweet-faced 19-year-old kid when he fronted up for pre-season testing in '98. The next few months would have a huge effect on his character, hardening him for the challenges ahead.

in for a rollercoaster of a love affair. Even when everything was sweet, sometimes there was just too much love: 'Now everyone in Italy recognises me,' he said. 'It's "Rossi! Rossi! Rossi!" all the time, I don't like!' No wonder that by the time he'd won the 250 title in October '99 he was already making plans to escape his homeland for the anonymity of London.

So '98 and '99 were all about coming of age, about leaving his carefree teenage years behind. And about learning to ride bigger bikes, of course: 250s were an important staging post on his journey to MotoGP greatness, not that there was any certainty that he'd even make it that far. All Valentino had done so far was win a single 125 world title: there had been no conclusive evidence that this kid might be the most gifted bike racer to have walked this planet.

From the get-go he was fast on 250s, but also flawed. He crashed out of four of the first ten races of '98, then bounced back to win the final four, only missing the title by three points. In theory, the '99 championship should've been a walkover but a few bike problems in the early races plus a miserable ride in the soaking-wet Japanese GP ('I don't like to ride under the water') gave him a mountain to climb. After that Vale got his head down to win eight of the last 12 races, finally alerting the world to the fact that he might be a bit special after all.

'Very much was expected of me when I came to 250s in 1998, so it was the most difficult period of my career, I really felt the pressure,' explains Vale, who had full-factory Aprilias for both his seasons in the class. 'I was

fast but I made mistakes because I wasn't calm, because I had some personal problems with some friends who I realised weren't friends. It took some time to understand that.'

The best thing about his two years in 250s was getting up late: 'In 125s I had to get up for morning practice at seven, for 500s at eight, but in 250s I could stay in bed till nine!' No wonder he overslept for 500 morning practice at Catalunya in 2000.



▲ Not quite ready to put away childish things, Valentino kills some time in the Mugello pits during winter testing prior to his first 250 season. Pretty soon he'd be able to afford much, much more than just a pink toy Cadillac.

► Throwing himself to the mercy of 100,000 Dutch mullets as he celebrates his very first 250 win at the '98 Assen TT. This win followed a rash of morale-sapping crashes but even then Vale wasn't out of the wilderness. It wasn't until later in '98 that he assumed mastery of the class.



Nastro
Azzurro

aprilia

BREIL

domino
DUNLOP
DAINESE

ROSSI FUMI



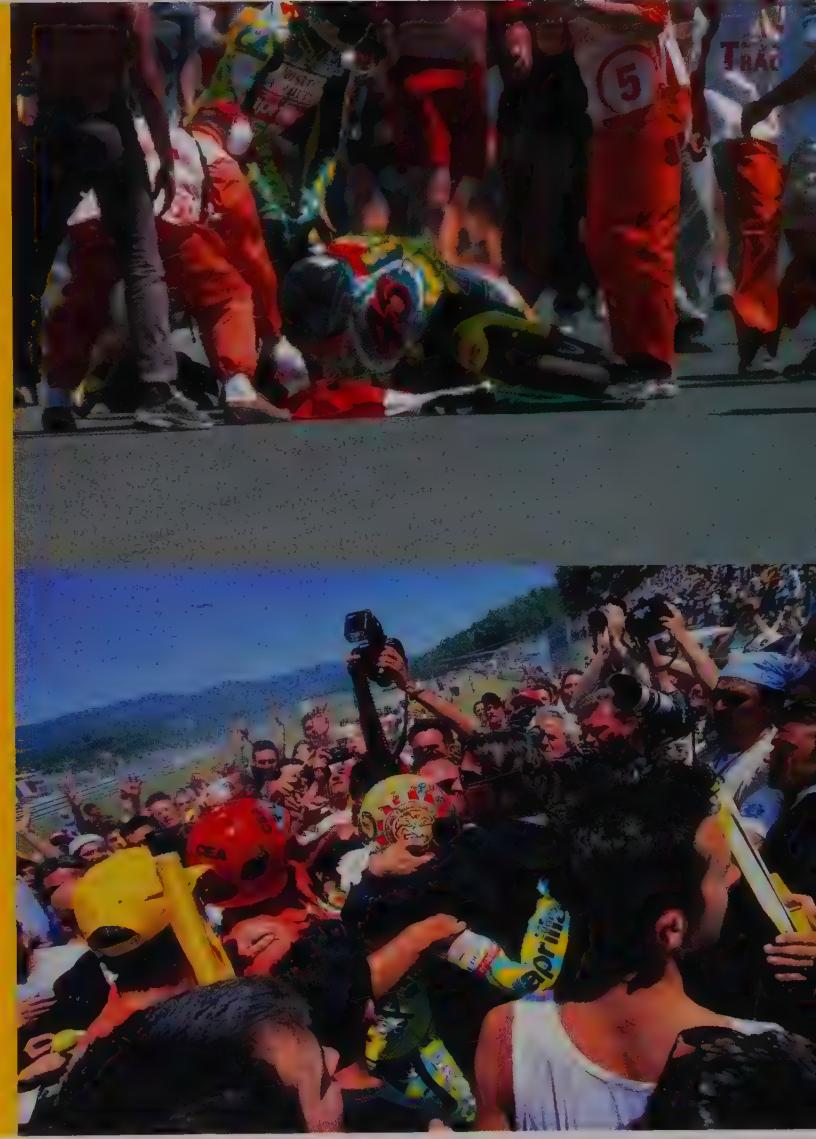
► The '70s theme was something he'd return to later, at Valencia 2003.

GOLD AND GREEN

Mugello '99 was Valentino's Day: one big Rossi Love-In. It ended with Vale prostrate on the tarmac, with a couple of hundred over-excited fans on top of him. He hadn't planned it like this, though you could say he'd asked for it, racing an Aprilia sprayed up in eye-watering yellow and turquoise swirls, emblazoned with the '70s-inspired legend ValentiPeace&Love. The race itself had been relatively easy – a comfortable three-second win over German veteran Ralf Waldmann – but the victory lap turned out to be an altogether tougher proposition. Things went okay until he reached Casanova Savelli, the

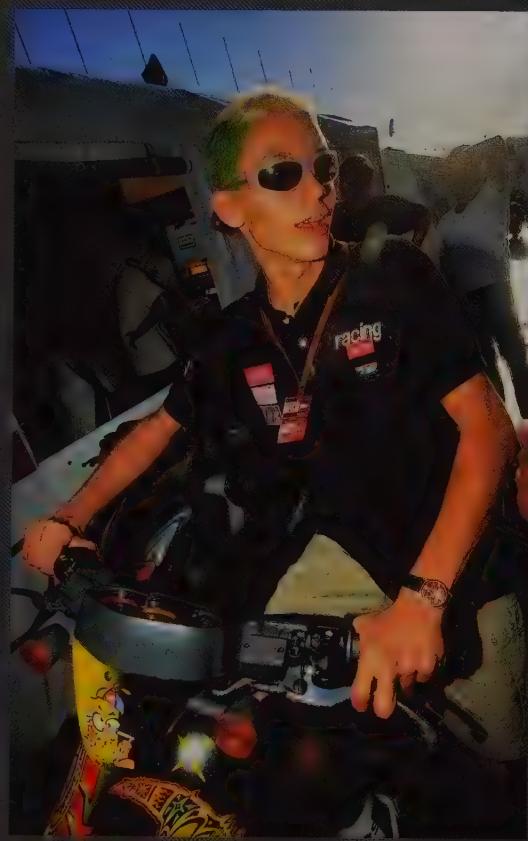
heart-stopping downhill right/left where his fan club camps out in its thousands (because this is where Rossi watched his first GP in 1991). A few yards further round the track he ran into Italian cameraman Gigi Soldano (the man responsible for many of the Milagro images in this book) and crashed to the ground. In an instant he was submerged in the throng, gasping for breath as 1000 Rossi worshippers did anything to get a piece of him – gloves, helmet, arms, legs. So was this the day he finally decided to escape the homeland hubbub and move to London? ■

‘The fans went crazy,
I think I would die’



▲ In a vain effort to avoid a cameraman, Valentino loses it despite the best efforts of a couple of panicking fans... topples to the tarmac, Italian tricolore still in hand... and gets swamped by a mass of writhing, sweaty bodies.

GOLD AND GOOSE/FRATERNALI



▲ By now there was no way he could head out for a gentle evening cruise around the paddock. Whatever colour he dyed his hair, people were on to him, although going red, white and green at Imola was hardly keeping it incognito.

GOLD AND GOOSE

► Getting artful with his lines, Valentino leads Shinya Nakano (Yamaha) and Tohru Ukawa (Honda), two of his biggest rivals for the 1999 250 world title. This Jerez win was his first of '99, after a couple of disasters at the season-opening Malaysian and Japanese GPs that left him a gaping 21 points down on the championship leaders.

GOLD AND GOOSE



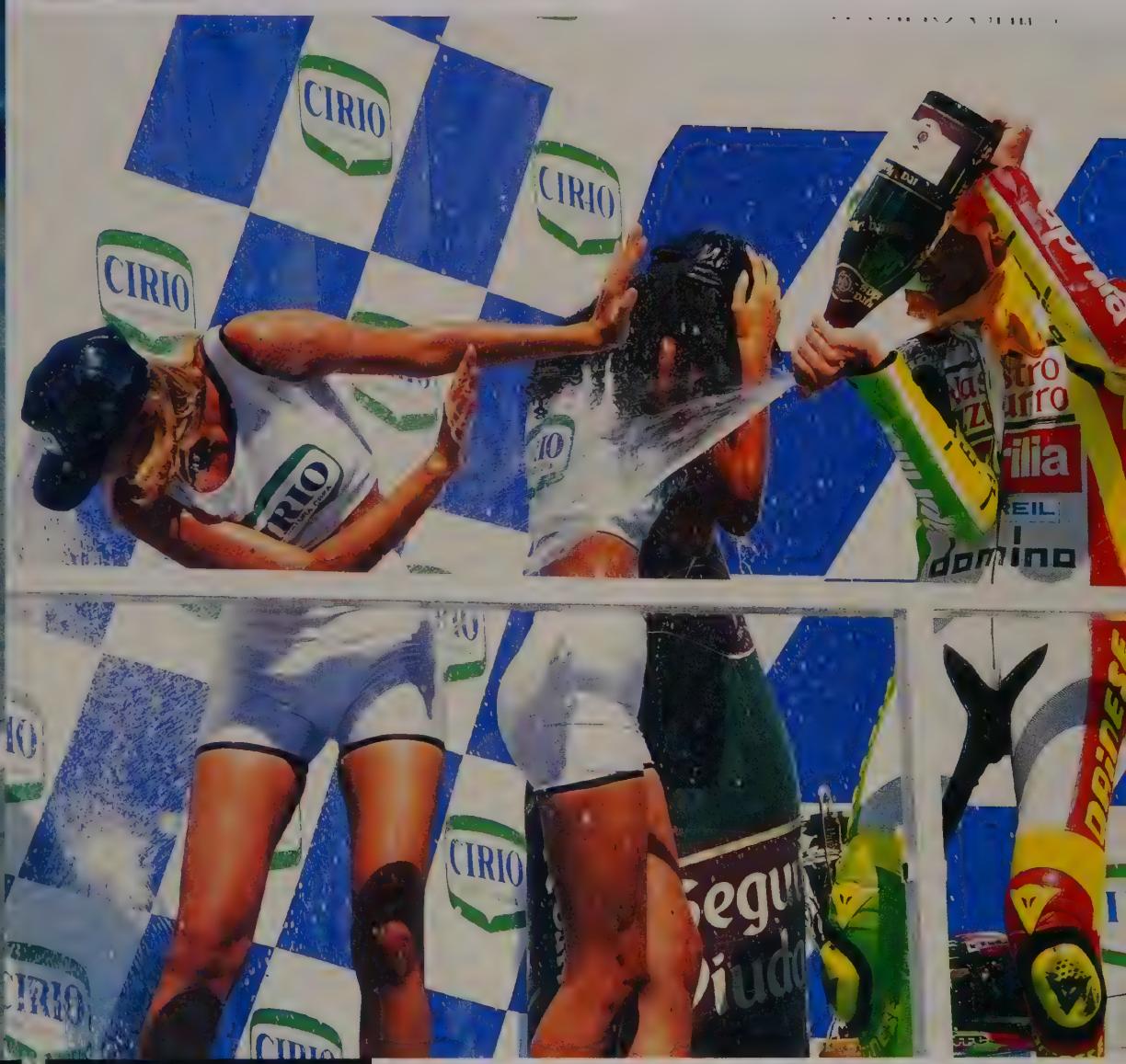




▲ His Aprilia proudly painted in the red, white and green of the Italian tricolore, Vale wastes Stefano Perugini (4), Olivier Jacque (19) and the rest at the Imola '98 GP. This success was the first of four straight victories that brought him to within just three points of winning the 250 world title at his first attempt. If only he hadn't crashed out of four races that summer.

PHOTO: GIANFRANCO RAVASI

▼ 'Fancy a drink, love?' He can't help being the generous type, but sometimes finds his generosity unappreciated by those around him. This is the Imola '98 podium.



◀ Rossi and team-mate Tetsuya Harada get introduced to the locals before the '98 Japanese GP. The large gents were students from a Tokyo sumo college but declined an invitation to become 'brolly dollies' for Sunday's races. Big blokes but shy, you see.





Mugello 2000: Vale stuffs it up the inside of Kenny Roberts Junior (2). Loris Capirossi (65), Norick Abe, Nobu Aoki (both behind Roberts), Carlos Checa (7) and Max Biaggi (4) give chase. Capirossi won after Valentino and Biaggi fell.

500s

PREMIER LEAGUE CHAMP

It took just two years for Valentino to conquer the 500s

In the real world, winning a 125 or 250 world title means not a lot, a bit like winning a second or third division football title. It's merely another step on the journey towards the main prize – the premier league.

When Valentino joined bike racing's premier division in 2000 there were just two years left in which he could win the 500 title, the class that had been the Big Deal ever since the birth of World Championship bike racing way back in 1949. The sport's governing body had decided that from 2002 the scary old two-stroke 500s would be replaced by a new breed of more sophisticated 990cc four-strokes, more relevant to the machines sold on the street. Vale had spent half his childhood dreaming about winning the 500 crown, now he had just two seasons in which

▼ The men who made him king. From left: Rossano Brazzi, who guided Vale to the 1999 250 title; Mauro Noccioli, who helped him to the 1997 125 crown; and Jeremy Burgess, who masterminded his successful assault on the 500 World Championship in 2001.

PHOTOGRAPH BY GUY LAWRENCE

► to master the scariest motorcycles known to man...

And there was no certainty that he'd ever make it as a great 500 rider. If someone had told you in April 2000 that Valentino wasn't half as good as he was cracked up to be, you would have struggled to disagree with them. The 21-year-old hadn't made the greatest of starts to his 500 career, and in fact his entry into the premier league had been an unmitigated disaster. His first three races produced two crashes and one 11th-place finish.

Valentino, some people opined, could handle a puny 125

or 250 but he couldn't ride a real man's motorcycle.

Of course, the signs of greatness were there for anyone bothered to look carefully enough. He had battled for a front-row start at his very first 500 GP and set the fastest lap of the race before his 190 horsepower Honda NSR500 rudely ejected him on to the tarmac. And, anyway, it didn't take too long to prove that he really could ride a man's bike: first podium in his third outing, first win after just eight races, in tricky, damp conditions at Donington Park.

By the end of the following season no-one was in any doubt. Valentino had won two 500 GPs during 2000 to end the year second overall and he grew to dominate in 2001, winning 11 out of 16 races. In just two seasons he had eclipsed the victory rate of Mick Doohan, the rock-hard Aussie who dominated premier-league racing in the '90s with 54 GP victories and five back-to-back titles.

Vale had also taken on and defeated his first serious rival, Max Biaggi. While most of his 125 and 250 opponents had also been mates, he enjoyed a relationship of mutual hatred with the Roman Emperor. Their rivalry threatened to spiral out of control after their notorious punch-up in June 2001, but Valentino stayed cool to soundly defeat his compatriot.

And while Vale's more recent MotoGP achievements seem to overshadow his 500 successes, he still believes that the 500 is the apogee of racing motorcycles, an altogether nastier beast than a cuddly four-stroke MotoGP bike. 'The 500's power was more wild, so the bike was more difficult to ride,' he says. 'But if you took risks, you could make the difference against the others.'



► The winning secret: a plate of pasta and a bottle of ice-cold Nastro. This is Welkom, South Africa, 2001, one of those flyaway races where the MotoGP paddock roughs it in Portakabins, rather than the five-star transporters and motorhomes they inhabit at European races.

► Valentino became an ex-pat in 2000, moving to London to escape the attentions of his omnipresent Italian fans. He rented a flat in St James Square, London, then bought a place in Mayfair. Getting about the posh part of town was easy – aboard a blagged Honda SP-2.



'Is necessary to have big balls to ride the 500'

► Vale and Biaggi get stuck into each other at the 2000 Portuguese GP, but this time they're only fighting over third place. Vale was still learning the art of 500 riding at this stage, even though he'd just won his first big-bike race at a damp Donington Park a few weeks earlier.

GOLD AND GOOSE







▲ Vale's bright idea of going Hawaiian for Mugello 2001 didn't just mean making his bike, leathers and team gear blue and white. This is Uccio's dad and the fan club making merry in the paddock.

► Hawaii Five-0-0. Vale took the beach party to the racetrack at Mugello, but while the Hawaii paint job looked great in sunny practice, it didn't look so good upside down in the mud on race day.

► Decisions, decisions... Vale deep in thought during 2001 Italian GP qualifying with JB and Showa suspension technician Juan Martinez (now Hayden's Ducati crew chief). The blur is Uccio.



▼ The best laid plans of mice and men... Even this three-way pre-race snooz didn't help Vale at Mugello. He crashed on the sighting lap, then again in the rain-lashed race.

MILAGRO





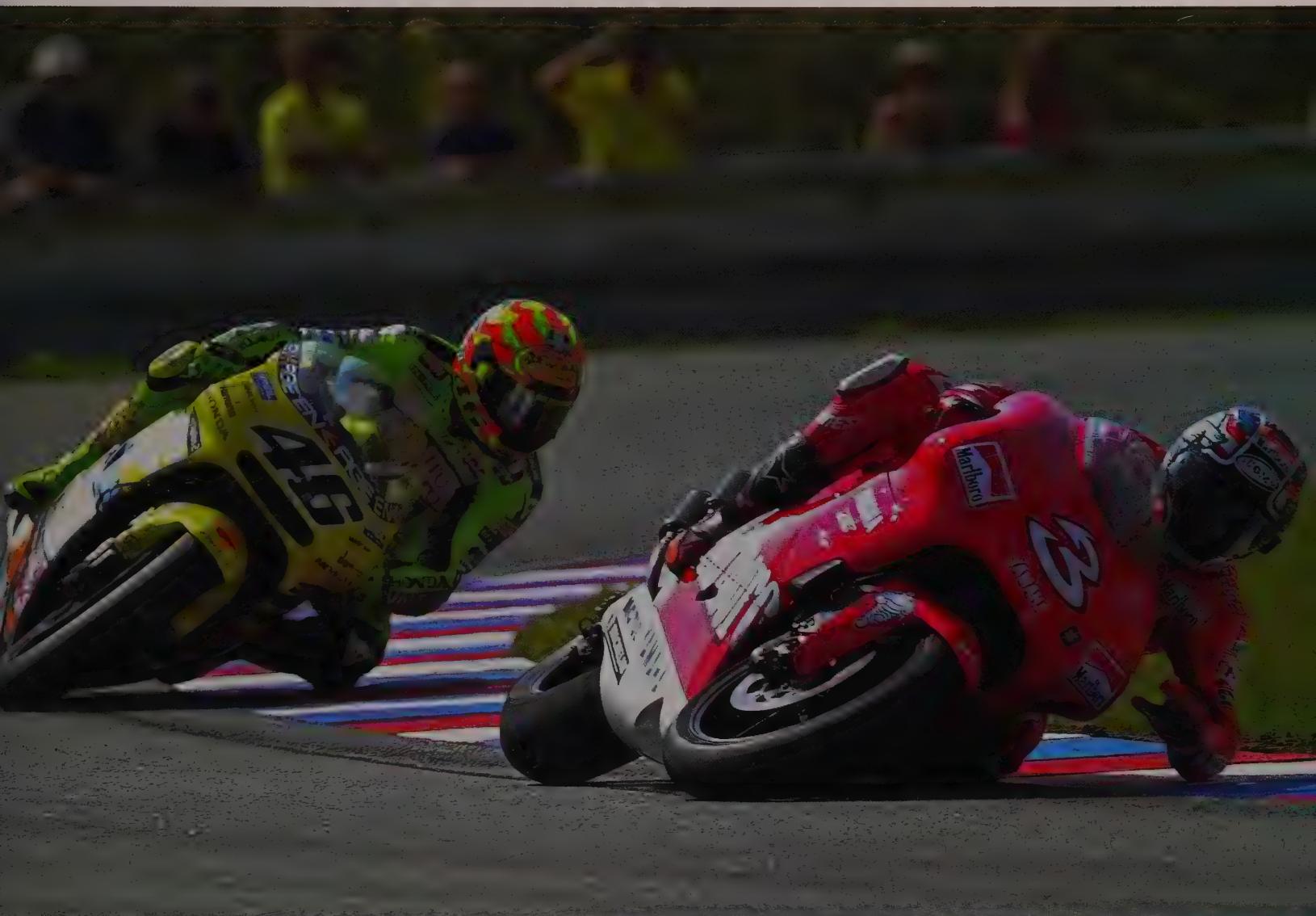


▲ Mine, all mine! Valentino hugs the trophy after blitzing Biaggi in the 2001 British GP. A big crash during practice had left him way down the grid but he still managed to win. Even now he rates this victory his most thrilling.

► All the better for seeing you with... Vale gives himself a patient Rossi eye massage on the grid for the 2000 Portuguese GP. It's all about increasing blood flow, apparently.



‘I think Brno is
the masterpiece
of my career’



▲ Brno 2001: The moment that effectively decided the outcome of the final 500 World Championship. Vale shadowed Biaggi until the Roman overcooked it and crashed. From this moment on, he had the upper hand over his bitter rival.

PHOTOGRAPH BY GABRIELE MUSCHI

► The secret price of winning the 500 title. Former 500 GP clown Randy Mamola cream pies Vale during the post-race press conference at Phillip Island, where he'd secured the title with a breathtaking win, a fraction ahead of Biaggi and Capirossi.



▲ Things are starting to get messy at Honda's 2001 end-of-season party in Rio. Vale has made it his mission for the night to get 250 world champ Daijiro Kato well and truly hammered; 18 months later Kato was dead, suffering fatal injuries in a high-speed accident during the 2003 Japanese MotoGP race.





◀ Valentino on stage at the 2001 FIM awards, where he collected his 500 title award from FIM president Mr Burns (sorry, Francesco Zerbi). Championship runners-up Biaggi and Capirossi wear suits while Vale keeps it rebellious in jeans, trainers and no tie.

MILAGRO

▲ Randy Mamola, how do you say this... making like a lady during the Rio party. MotoGP's great and good are suitably amused. From left, Honda PR Carlo Florenzano (Hawaiian shirt), Toni Elias (bottom left, light blue shirt, then a 125 man, now a former Moto2 world champ), Vale, 2000 250 champ Olivier Jacque (two-tone blue sweatshirt), 2002 250 champ Marco Melandri (bottom right, black top) and Doma big cheese Carmelo Espeleta (far right, jacket).

MILAGRO





Valentino makes some art at Valencia 2003, his last race for Honda. He won 20 of his 32 races on the factory's 210mph RCV V5.

MotoGP Honda — **LIVING THE EASY LIFE**

Valentino burned even brighter in MotoGP but winning with Honda got too easy

GP racing got turned upside down in 2002. The knife-edge 500cc two-strokes that had ruled the premier class for three decades were consigned to the dustbin of racing history, replaced by rip-snorting 990cc four-strokes. Everything changed – the bikes were much faster, much pricier and the two-strokes' spine-chilling yowl was drowned out by the four-strokes' ear-splitting boom. But the song remained the song – Valentino Rossi was still king of the racetrack.

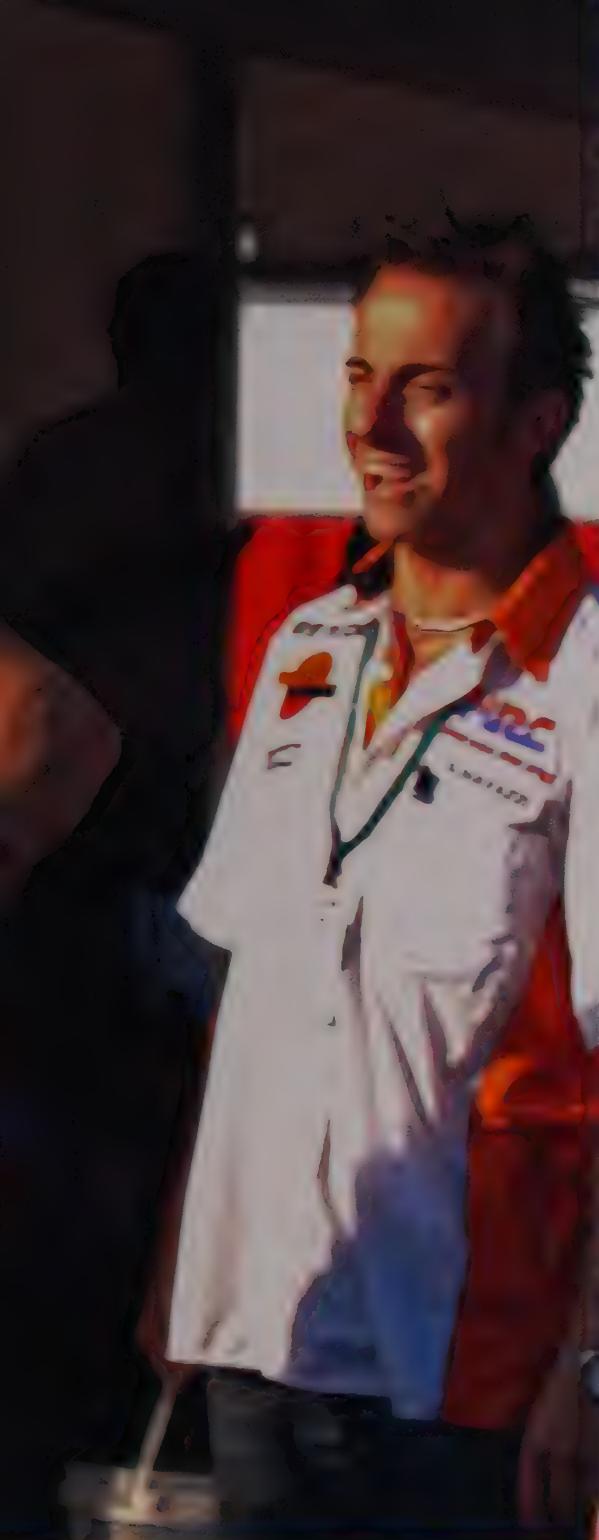
Five months after he'd won the last-ever 500 GP at Rio in November 2001, Vale won the first-ever MotoGP event at Suzuka in April 2002. By the end of his two seasons on the RC211V V5 he'd won another 20 GP victories to take him into motorcycling's hall of fame. Only racing



► Valentino and Honda's brand-new RCV distract Spanish builders, working on the new Jerez pits complex, during their first European outing in November 2001. Vale's input played a large part in the V5's amazing performance.

PHOTOGRAPH BY GUY LAWRENCE





◀ Valentino and his Repsol Honda henchmen ambush passers-by with buckets of water in the Brno paddock, August 2003. It's all part of an Italian summer water ritual, apparently.



◀ Racing for Honda took Valentino too deep into his comfort zone – after easily destroying his rivals in the first MotoGP series in 2002, he got bored.

legends Mick Doohan, Mike Hailwood and Giacomo Agostini were still ahead of him.

But Vale's two seasons on the stunningly effective RCV were very different. He ruled 2002 with awesome precision – winning 11 of the 16 races, including a mid-season run of seven back-to-back victories, and never finishing lower than second. He won the title with four races still to go, despite recording a DNF at the Czech GP, where he suffered tyre problems. It was an impressive record for a rider on a brand-new bike in a brand-new World Championship.

If anything, 2002 had been too easy, because during 2003 Valentino seemed to run out of juice. He won just two of the season's first nine races, beaten on three occasions by new rival Sete Gibernau, now on a Honda instead of Suzuki's dog-slow GSV-R. But after the Italian media had savaged him, suggesting he was a spent force, Vale got a grip on himself to win all but one of the last seven races. The first of those six victories came at Brno, where he beat Gibernau with a daring end-of-race attack: 'After making stupid mistakes at the last two races – just from thinking too much – I changed my tactics – ride 100 per cent and if anyone comes past, attack them immediately!'

He maintained that aggressive attitude for the remainder of the season, falling out with Honda after months of very public wrangling over a new contract. So he finally decided to walk away from MotoGP's most powerful factory to ride for the struggling Yamaha outfit. 'Maybe my choice seems a little bit crazy,' said Vale. 'But we will see next year.'

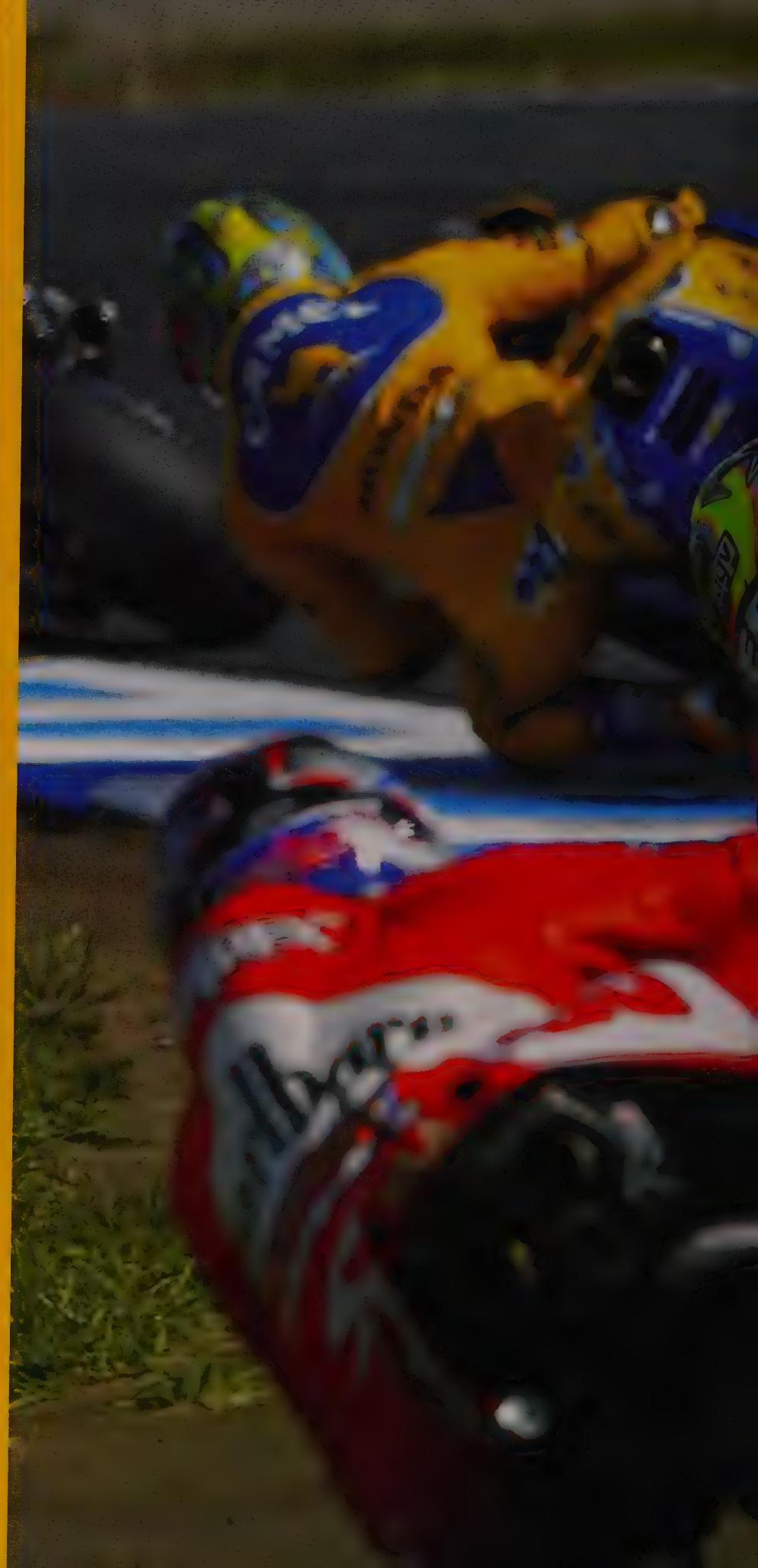
Of course, those who know Valentino weren't surprised by this apparently suicidal career move: he simply wanted another challenge because he loves a challenge. As Carlo Pernat, the former Aprilia team boss who gave him his first GP ride in 1996, says: 'Two qualities make Valentino special. First, his sense of balance on the motorcycle is unbelievable, I've never seen anything like it. Second, he has fun, he amuses himself by racing. That's all he does, he amuses himself.' Which must be just a little depressing for his rivals... ■

'When Valentino
shuts his visor
and starts a
race, everybody
becomes his
worst enemy'

Graziano Rossi

Slowly, slowly, catchy monkey. Valentino on his way to victory at Jerez 2003. He's already passed Loris Capirossi – only Nicky Hayden, Max Biaggi and Sete Gibernau to go.

BARSHON





Incarcerated by the Italian media for a run of so-so results during 2003, Vale became prisoner 1111-46 at the Czech GP, where his RCV carried these Interpol mugshots. They said I was in crisis because I'd been beaten at the last four races,' he laughed after winning the Brno race to break free from jail. 'Leading the championship and finishing on the podium obviously isn't enough for them, so now I must work on the chain gang!'

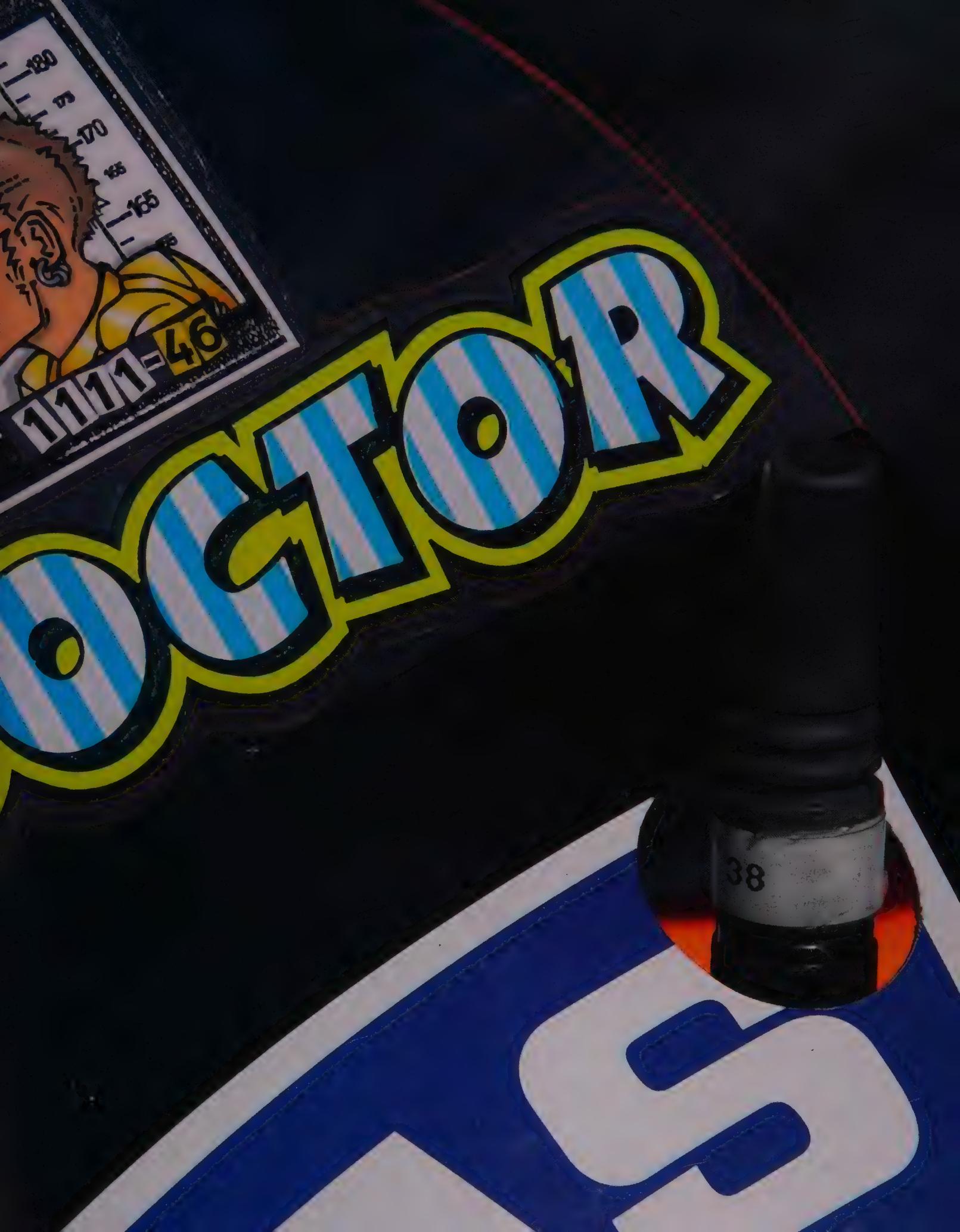
The Italian media never give anyone an easy ride – they build people up to knock them down – and Rossi has long complained about the posse of Italian journo who follow him everywhere, waiting to attack whenever he makes the smallest of mistakes. As Italian opera legend Pavarotti is fond of saying: 'When a journalist write about the positive, he write five lines, when he write about the negative he become a poet.'

BARSHON

INTERPOL

15/08/03





38

▼ Groovy, baby! Vale wigs out after his final win for Honda. At this stage the world's biggest bike brand had no idea how much it was going to miss him.



► Receiving his leaving card from Repsol Honda boss Carlo Fiorani. Many insiders reckoned he was insane for leaving Honda but does he look the slightest bit worried?





▲ Hard on the gas and all crossed up, Vale shows Honda rival Sete Gibernau how it's done at Valencia.





Standing on his M1's seat, Vale conducts the pit-lane worshippers after his stunning 2004 Malaysian GP victory. This was possibly the first 'angry' win of his career. He had scores to settle after he'd been relegated to the back row of the grid at the previous weekend's Qatar GP – and he settled them well.

PHOTOGRAPH BY GUY LAWRENCE

MotoGP Yamaha —

BECOMING GOD

When Valentino quit Honda he took the risk of his career. He would either end up a fool or a deity...

In fact Valentino wasn't becoming God at all, even if it rather seemed like it. Asked in an interview why he'd stopped celebrating his wins in madcap style, he answered 'I am becoming old', but his Italian accent obscured his words and the headlines rattled out across the world: 'Rossi: I am becoming God!'.

Of course, Vale's against-all-odds success on Yamaha's M1 did make him something more than mere genius. There are riders of a certain ability, like Max Biaggi, Sete Gibernau, Alex Criville and Kenny Roberts Junior, and there are riders of a certain nobility, like Giacomo Agostini, Mike Hailwood, King Kenny Roberts, Mick Doohan and Rossi. After his stunning 2004 World Championship success Valentino was in the pantheon, no doubt about it.

And yet it could all have gone so wrong. Yamaha wasn't in great shape when Rossi signed with Honda's old rival in autumn 2003. And Honda was bound to up the ante to ensure that the world's most powerful bike manufacturer wasn't embarrassed by this turbulent young upstart. At first, the RCV was way faster than the M1, but somehow Valentino managed to demolish the Honda hordes at the 2004 season-opening South African GP to start his Yamaha years the same way he'd finished his days at Honda. And that Welkom win made history – in more than half a century of bike GPs no-one had ever won back-to-back premier-class races on different makes of bike.

Valentino continued to defy the odds throughout 2004. Down on speed, he had to dig deeper than ever before, which is why he tumbled twice during the first few months of the season, as often as he'd crashed during his previous two years with Honda. Crew chief Jeremy Burgess had some straightforward advice at faster tracks like Mugello: 'Valentino, you're on the straight for a long time here, so keep your shoulders tucked in and your toes up'. JB's wise words worked because Vale won at Mugello and at other fast tracks.

For 2005 it was a very different story. Informed by Vale's and JB's input, Yamaha built a much-improved M1. Honda bosses suffered in silence as Valentino rubbed more salt into their self-inflicted wounds. But like he says, 'life isn't a movie', so maybe he wasn't too surprised when everything went pear-shaped in 2006 and 2007: engine blow-ups, tyre disasters, physical injuries, a multi-million euro tax bill, even girlfriend trouble. Which only made his 2008 and 2009 MotoGP crowns – his eighth and ninth world titles – feel all the better.

▼ Like a schoolboy motocrosser with his first trophy, Valentino beams with delight after his debut win on the Yamaha at the 2004 South African GP. He scored this historic victory after a race-long duel with Max Biaggi, whose Honda was way faster.



► Giving his vital first impressions of the M1 to JB, Yamaha MotoGP chief Masahiko Nakajima (background) and engineer Ken Suzuki (who died from a brain tumour in April 2005 – RIP). 'The bike is a tool, so we have to work to get the best out of the tool,' says Valentino. 'If we have a problem with the front end, we modify the front end – it's like mathematics!'



◀ The start of a brave new adventure – striding out into the Sepang pit lane for a photo call before his first ride on the M1, January 2004. At this moment nobody knew whether his shock decision to quit Honda would prove him to be a racing genius or a petulant fool.

DAVID LINDNER



▲ From here on in, it was no longer just an impossible dream. The pit-lane TV monitors tell the Gauloises Yamaha team that they've got pole position at the season-opening Welkom GP. Team boss Davide Brivio (with Vale's Michelin technician Pierre Alves on the left) offers his congratulations. 'This first pole for Yamaha is like ten for Honda,' said Valentino.

DAMIEN PARTRIDGE





▲ Come and have a go if you think you're hard enough... Valentino taunts his new worst enemy, Gibernau, during practice for the 2004 Malaysian GP. For several years the pair had been good mates, getting drunk together after races, that sort of thing, but the events of the 2004 Qatar GP changed all that.

MILAGRO

► With just a few days to go before the next race in Malaysia, Vale casts a worried glance at his bloodied little finger after crashing out of the Qatar GP. He'd been forced to start from the back row of the grid after his crew had been caught cleaning his grid slot on the sand-blown track. Valentino reckons title rival Gibernau was a prime mover in the protest that had him punished.

'Sete is behind all this, he's behaved like a child'



▲ Don't get mad, get even. Little finger patched up, Valentino psyches himself up for the Malaysian GP – where he was determined to make Gibernau and Honda look like fools. 'This time I wanted to destroy the morale of everybody,' he said after wasting them in the steamy tropical heat.

MILAGRO

BECOMING GOD

Ecstasy in a bottle. Valentino celebrates winning the 2004 MotoGP crown at Phillip Island. All he had to do to secure the title was finish second to Gibernau – but he beat the Spaniard in a ferocious duel, despite running off the track at 120mph. His title-winning T-shirt proclaims: 'What a show!'

GOLD AND GOOSE







▲ No need to ask who won and who lost. Valentino, cocky as hell after destroying Gibernau at the final turn of the final lap of the 2005 Spanish GP, stands atop the podium, while Gibernau looks ready for a good blub. More payback for Qatar 2004.

GOLD RUSH CONCRETE



► Final corner, Jerez 2005: Valentino sees a gap inside Gibernau and doesn't need a written invitation. Gibernau, determined to win his home GP, shuts the door but it's already too late. The pair collide, propelling the Spaniard into the gravel trap. Gibernau extricated himself to finish second.



▼ Valentino's bulldog Guido died a few years ago, to be replaced in the Rossi household by two almost identical bulldog puppies. While he was alive, Guido was always along for the ride, emblazoned on the seat of his master's M1. Note Vale's respect for racing history – Guido wore old-school Yamaha colours, made famous by King Kenny Roberts in the '70s.

GOLD AND GOOSE



► Like most MotoGP riders, Vale has a massage in Dr Costa's Clinica Mobile before every ride; keeps the body loose
in case of accidents.

MOTO GP 2003





◀ Definitely a man who's always had his own way of doing things. While Giberman (15) and Biaggi (3) peel off to complete the warm-up lap prior to the 2005 Spanish GP, Vale is busy making himself comfortable. Cool or what?



▲ He spent his teenage years terrorising the Tavullia cops on a scooter, so at least he still gets to utilise those skills as an adult. And here he is on a Yamaha scooter, getting to know Shanghai's new GP circuit before the first Chinese GP in May 2005.



▲ Vale's got his head down and his front wheel up as he leads the 2004 season-ending Valencia GP from Honda rivals Makoto Tamada and Nicky Hayden. He won the race even though his M1 was only 14th quickest through the speed trap.

► Valentino has a laugh with Marco Melandri, one of MotoGP's young stars and the man who won the final two races of 2005. These two first raced together in the early 1990s, on minimotos.

▼ Valentino and JB have built an amazing rapport in their 12 seasons together. In some ways they seem like father and son, although JB has only had to tell off the youngster on a few occasions, like the time Vale overslept and missed morning practice...



‘A happy team is a good team. We don’t take ourselves too seriously, we have a laugh’

Jeremy Burgess



► Vale gives vain chase to Nicky Hayden at Laguna Seca 2005. This was the first US GP in almost a decade, because the rollercoaster Californian track had been deemed too dangerous for GP racing. The Americans spent two million bucks upgrading the hillside venue but Valentino wasn't convinced. 'Some comers are dangerous,' he said. 'And others are very, very dangerous...' This is Turn One – a 160mph left-hander with minimal run-off – which falls into the second category.

PHOTO: GETTY IMAGES



▲ Valentino sits on King Kenny Roberts' legendary 1975 TZ750 dirt tracker during Yamaha's 50th birthday party at Laguna. Roberts won first time out on the evil beast, which was then banned! The machine was good for 120mph and, like all dirt-track bikes, has no front brake.

► Half of Hollywood turned up at Laguna, including Brad Pitt and Matt LeBlanc – who dropped into Vale's pit, only to find that MotoGP's finest was too busy to see them. So JB told them a joke instead...





►Vale walks out to start Laguna practice flanked by Yamaha's all-American pit girls. The famous yellow, white and black livery was born in the 1970s when fans christened Yamaha's buzzy two-stroke racers 'bumblebees'.





► Valentino celebrates the completion of ten years of GPs at the 2005 season-ending Valencia GP, which he finished third after starting from the fifth row. That's team-mate Colin Edwards emerging from the smokescreen. The red, white and black livery was another celebration of Yamaha's 50th anniversary, mimicking the colours worn by the factory during its first successful premier-class campaign in 1975.

▼ Track marshals dig Vale's wrecked M1 out of the dirt following his big 110mph get-off during Valencia qualifying: 'I eat one kilo of gravel when I crash!'.
Photo: D. Williams



▲ 'Mine is this big but I think yours is quite a bit bigger, maybe like this.' Vale and Edwards compare the relative size of their wallets.
Photo: D. Williams



Resplendent in Yamaha's second special 2005 livery, Vale races to third place at the year-ending Valencia GP.







► So this is what Vale gets up to in his spare time. Well, as they say in racing, you've got to have another interest. In between jetting around the world racing bikes Vale is building his own uber-cool fashion label called Imatra R.C., Inc., named after Finnish GP track Imatra. The brand was launched at the 2006 Milan fashion week in archly decadent style with, er, deep S&M overtones. No doubt, he's a baaaad boy!

MILANO



▲ Vale bought a house in Ibiza a few years back, a place to rest his weary head after cutting loose at legendary club DC10. He's a regular at DC10's Circoloco nights (the Circoloco mantra: 'It's a mess but we know what we are doing'), also frequented by notorious heads Danny Tenaglia, John Carter and Norman Cook.

VITALE

'Something seems to have gone wrong for us'

▼ Down and out at Assen. Vale's bone-crunching 115mph fall during Dutch TT practice left him with a broken right wrist and left ankle, his worst injuries in 11 years of GP racing. At least he finally got to prove that he has the toughness to match the talent. Pumped full of painkillers, he finished eighth at Assen and second at Donington the next Sunday.

PHOTO: ANDREW MCKEE



► This is going to hurt; GP medic Dr Costa (left) helps Valentino get ready for the Dutch TT. Costa strapped Vale's broken wrist in sticky blue tape to splay the bone during braking, rather than close it up, to put less pressure on the fracture. Nice.





◀ Valentino and his technicians (from left: Yamaha MotoGP boss Masahiko Nakajima, JB Michelin's Pierre Alves and Öhlins' Mike Norton) get their heads together to exorcise the chatter that plagued his M1 in the early stages of 2006.

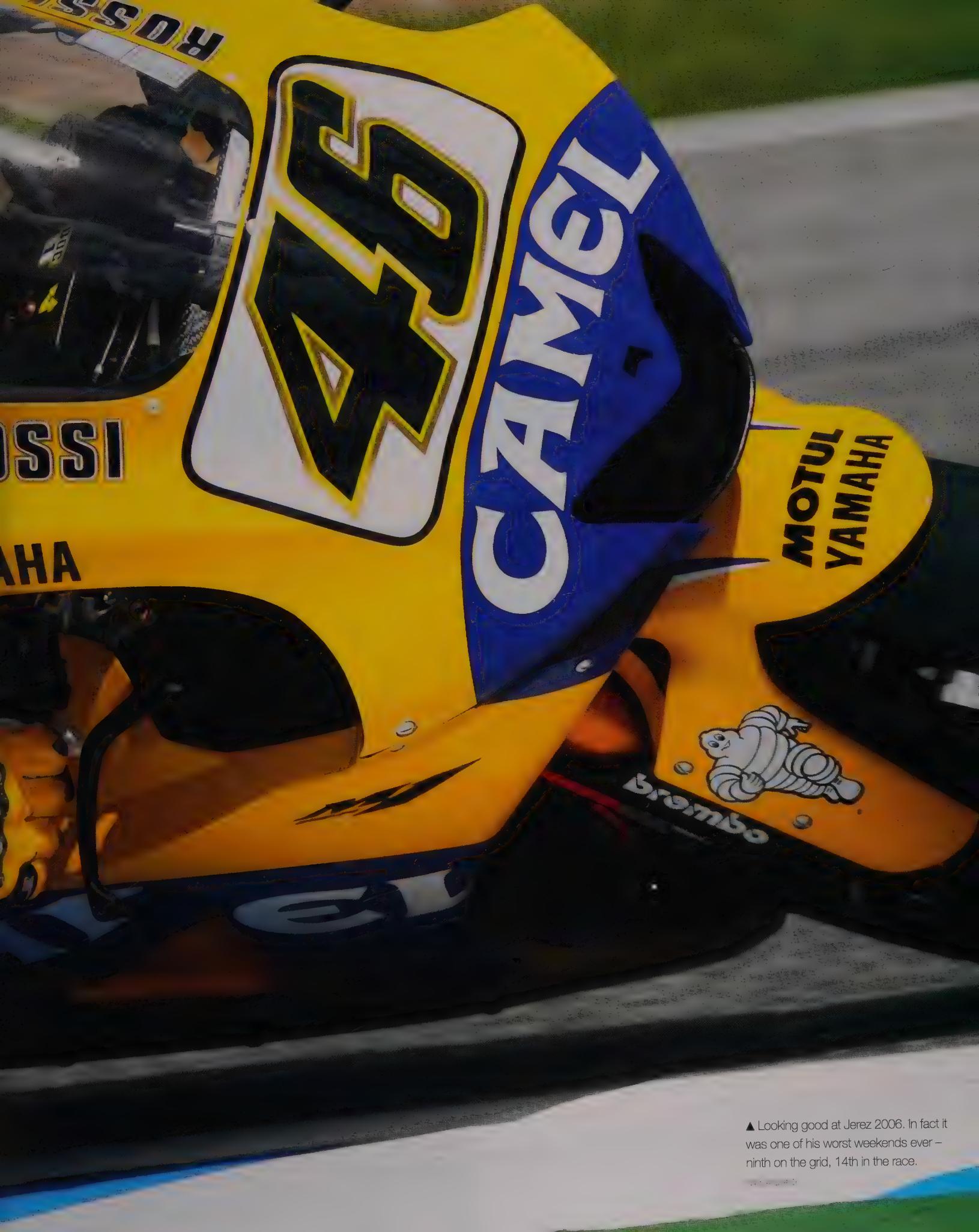


▲ The man who enjoyed a charmed existence during his first decade of GP racing endured a hellish start to 2006: crashes, injuries, engine breakages, tyre problems, chassis woes, you name it. But he never lost his sense of humour, his dog Guido sheltering from the icy winds of misfortune in a fury coat and moon boots. The -32 refers to the champ's points deficit to series leader Nicky Hayden at the French GP.

► What have I done to deserve this? Vale is distraught as his stricken M1 is pushed away during the French GP. The engine had broken while he was on his way to a much-needed victory.







▲ Looking good at Jerez 2006. In fact it was one of his worst weekends ever – ninth on the grid, 14th in the race.



► One-off Mugello helmet featured Vale's heroes, from Hollywood biking icon Steve McQueen to Enzo Ferrari and Doors' front man Jim Morrison. No doubt about it, Vale has a big fascination with the 1970s.

Photo: G. Sartori



▲ Mugello 2006 was an epic – scary-close racing and a huge and appreciative crowd at arguably MotoGP's greatest racetrack and certainly its most picturesque venue. The fans went nuts for Vale during the podium ceremony.





◀ Old rivals were reunited at Mugello, Ducati-mounted Gibernau giving Valentino a hard time until his right boot tore apart, the Spaniard ending the race with a bloodied little toe. Vale's hex, administered at the 2004 Qatar GP, is still working then...



◀ The Mugello freight train: Vale leads Gibernau, Melandri, Stoner, Pedrosa and Hayden. Capirossi isn't yet in the picture – he's coming through from a bad start.

▲ Capirossi, Valentino and Hayden are all friends on the Mugello podium, though just minutes earlier they'd been mercilessly mugging each other at 200mph. Rossi beat Capirossi by half a second, Hayden a further two tenths down.

'I was so excited I wet my pants'



▲ Vale gets stuck in at Donington 2006, Suzuki's Chris Vermeulen just ahead, Capirossi, Shinya Nakano and Edwards just behind. This was a true hero's ride, from 12th on the grid to second in the race, with a broken right wrist...

▼ Trying hard not to run down any fans, Vale threads his way through the track invasion at the 2006 British GP. 'Donington is always great,' he said later. 'Is like my second home GP, always a lot of people, always a lot of casino (Italian for 'craziness').'

PHOTO: ANDREW MCKEE



◀ On the Donington podium with winner Dani Pedrosa and Marco Melandri. Asked if he was excited about sharing a podium for the first time with the tiny but tremendously talented 20-year-old Pedrosa, Rossi grinned and said: 'Oh yes, I was so excited I wet my pants!'

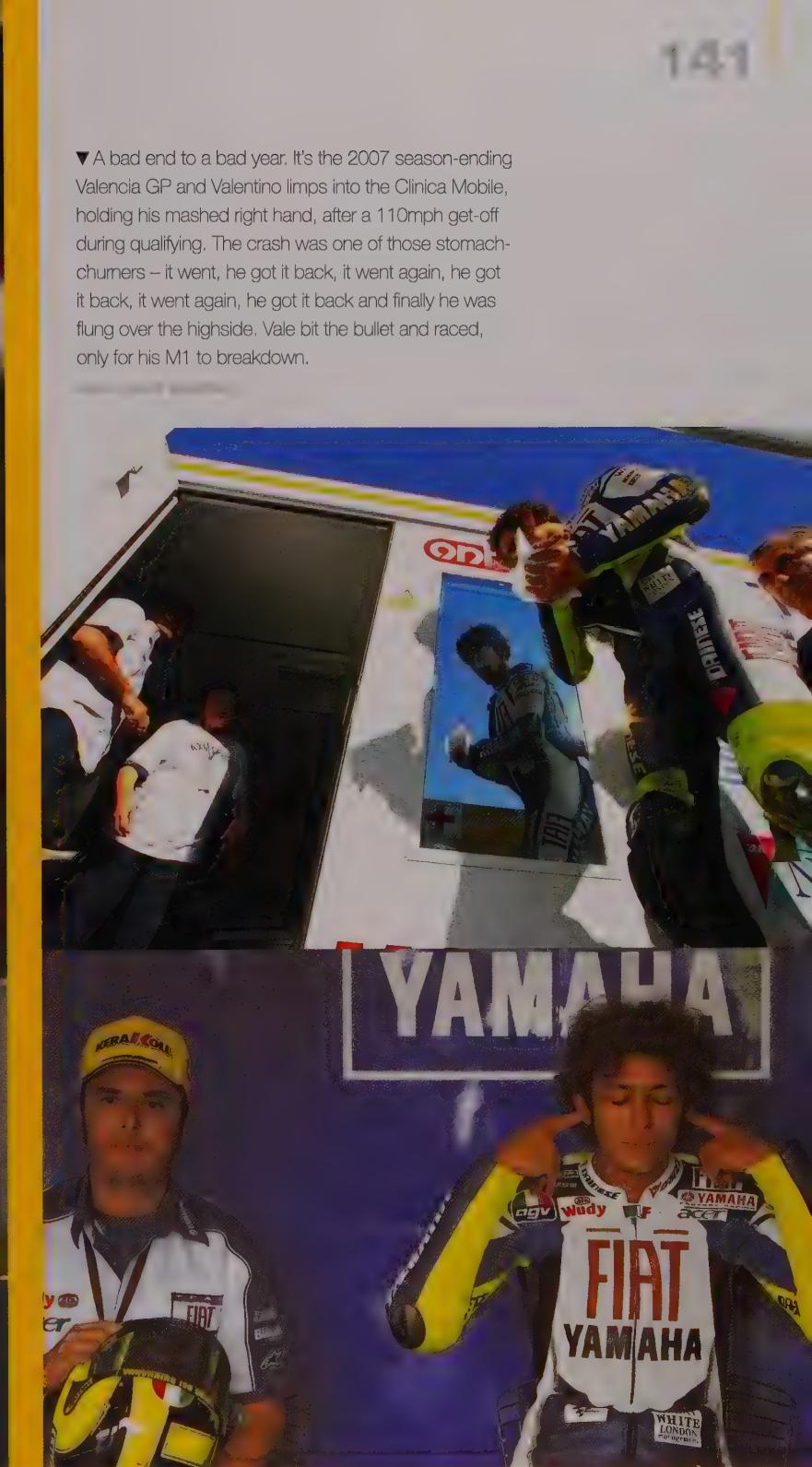
PHOTO: ANDREW MCKEE



‘Obviously we are missing
some horsepower’



▲ Overlooked by Catalunya's vast grandstands, Valentino struggles to stay with Dani Pedrosa's Honda and Casey Stoner's rocket-ship Ducati during the 2007 Catalan GP. Yamaha's M1 was never the fastest 990 but its first 800 was dog slow; sometimes 12mph down on Stoner's Ducati! Stoner won this race, Rossi second, Pedrosa third.



▼ A bad end to a bad year. It's the 2007 season-ending Valencia GP and Valentino limps into the Clinica Mobile, holding his mashed right hand, after a 110mph get-off during qualifying. The crash was one of those stomach-chummers – it went, he got it back, it went again, he got it back, it went again, he got it back and finally he was flung over the highside. Vale bit the bullet and raced, only for his M1 to breakdown.

▲ Maybe if I pretend I'm not actually here, the nightmare will end. If 2006 had been unlucky, 2007 was Valentino's *annus horribilis*. He was outgunned on engine and tyre performance and had to cough up a whopping 35 million euro of unpaid tax. Like always, Uccio was by his side – for richer or poorer, for better or worse.



▲ 2007 wasn't all doom and gloom. At Assen Valentino came through from the fourth row to hunt down championship leader Casey Stoner and win the second of his four 2007 victories. At the time it seemed like a championship turning point, but it wasn't. The gaudy livery promotes a new Fiat car.

ROLANDO GOMEZ

▼ Have you ever seen him look more satisfied with victory? Vale's 2007 Portuguese GP win was his first in five races, which is why it tasted so good; it would also be his last for almost eight months.

► And, of course, he won at Mugello, for the sixth year in a row, much to the delight of the Italian fans. The special heart logo helmet was an 'up yours' to those who had dared suggest that Valentino's bad run of results proved his heart was no longer in bike racing.



◀ In September 2007 Misano hosted its first GP in 14 years, a good excuse as any for Valentino's fan club to march the ten miles from Tavullia to the track. Didn't do him much good though, his engine went bang in the early stages of the race. Not that it really mattered because the title was already long gone to Casey Stoner.

▼ Talk about a turnaround! 2008 was Valentino's *annus mirabilis*, the year in which he could do no wrong. He won his sixth and most satisfying elite-class championship, regaining the title from Casey Stoner here at Motegi. No wonder ecstasy is writ large across his face, along with half a jeroboam of cava.

► The history man makes history at MotoGP's most historic racetrack. The Indianapolis Motor Speedway was exactly 100 years old when Valentino won his 69th elite-class GP there in September 2008. Fellow Italian legend Giacomo Agostini had held the wins record for more than three decades. Most experts presumed it would never, ever be broken.



► Diego Maradona was judged the greatest football player of the 20th century in a FIFA poll. He is also a huge Valentino fan. Here he is getting extremely excited as he celebrates Vale's 2008 Misano win like he's just won the World Cup. On the grid before the race he had kissed Vale's hand. Would that be the Hand of God?





◀ Local boy made good – wearing a special homeboy helmet, Valentino makes up for his 2007 Misano disaster by winning the 2008 race after pressuring Stoner into crashing out of the lead. It was the tipping point of the championship battle, after that there was little doubt who was going to be king.

'At the beginning I was quite scared'

▲ If you want to really understand the fire that burns inside Valentino's belly, you only need consider Indy 2008. The race went ahead during Hurricane Ike – torrential rain and vicious winds ripping marquees and advertising awnings off their moorings. The 2008 title was as good as signed and sealed, so it would have made sense to take things steady. No way, Vale stuck it on the line and won the race.

► The switch to Bridgestone tyres was the foundation of Valentino's 2008 comeback. But it wasn't easy and required endless consultations with Bridgestone tyre technicians, as well as major changes in riding technique and bike set-up. 'When you begin with Bridgestone is very difficult,' said Vale.





▼ These days half the MotoGP grid wave their legs around during heavy braking but it was Valentino who started it all. Apparently it's just another way of going faster, delivering improved braking leverage and steering balance. 'When I take the foot off the footpeg it feels like I can brake harder,' he says.

COLD AND GOOSE



◀ There's pure joy in that face as Valentino returns to his pit after winning his 69th premier-class victory at the 2008 Indianapolis GP and thus becoming the winningest rider in GP history. This is one racer who knows that history really matters.

COLD AND GOOSE

Vale destroys Stoner and Pedrosa at Mugello 2008, wearing his best-ever helmet paintjob. The screaming skull design was supposed to illustrate the terror of tackling the 210mph kink at the end of Mugello's start-finish straight. It was an instant classic.

GOLD AND GOOSE







'Serious sport has nothing to do with fair play... it is war minus the shooting'

George Orwell

▼ No room for error at Laguna's scary 170mph Turn One. If Valentino could stay ahead through here every lap, he knew he had Stoner's faster Ducati nailed through the twistier parts of the circuit.



◀ When everything else fails, there's always motocross! Valentino knew he only had one chance of beating Stoner at Laguna 2008 – attack at every turn, never let the faster Ducati get more than a few metres ahead or the race would be over. This Corkscrew out-braking move sent him wide and into the dirt. In the end it was Stoner who fell and Vale who won, probably his greatest victory ever.

▲ Many fans believe Laguna 2008 is Vale's greatest win. It is definitely the most important, and he knew it, kissing the tarmac during his slowdown lap. Maybe he already knew that this victory would change the course of the championship, derailing Stoner who had won the previous three races.

▲ Stoner wasn't happy with the intensity of Valentino's Laguna assault and told him so on the podium. Did the Aussie have a point? Perhaps, because Vale's riding surfed the outer limits of control and decency. And yet his tactics were not only those of a desperate man, they were also those of a master tactician.

COLD AND COOL

▼ Valentino gets his M1 so far over these days there's hardly any room to stick his knee out. This is 2009 preseason testing and he's got a full 60 degrees of lean on, thanks to the latest chassis, electronics and tyre technology. That's why he destroys kneesliders much quicker than he did on the 990s.

GOLD AND GOOSE



‘We use 30 per cent more kneesliders than on the 990s and the 500s’

▼ In time-honoured fashion, Vale and sidekick Uccio watch the start and early stages of the 125 race. Carefully monitoring how the start lights work is crucial preparation for each MotoGP race. And by watching the 125s race he can get a good idea of the track's grip characteristics on race afternoon.

DAVID LEWIS



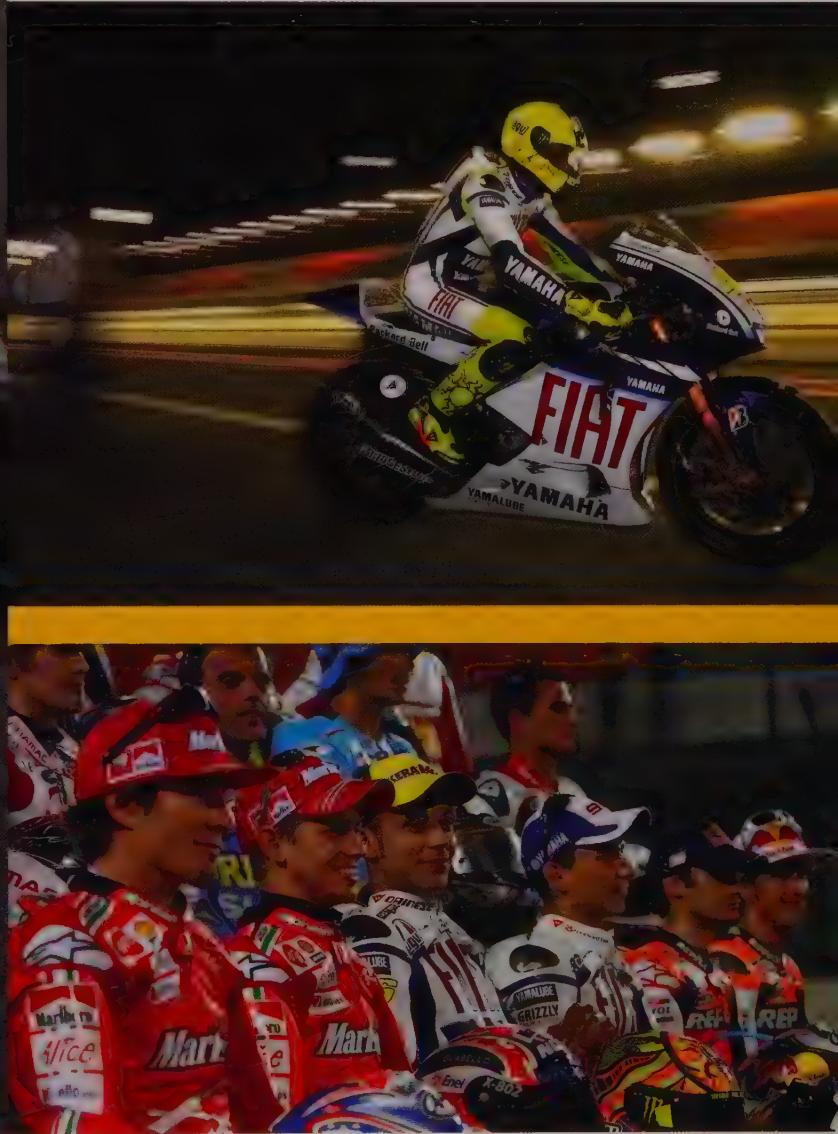
◀ How much fun would MotoGP be if someone could clone Valentino? In the absence of that technology, replicas of Vale's superb 2009 Mugello helmet proved hugely popular.





▲ Arguably the only benefit of the night-time Qatar GP is that most riders use clear visors, so you can see their eyes. Vale's eyes are looking way ahead, probably at Stoner who's on his way to a third consecutive Qatar victory. Following are Jorge Lorenzo, Andrea Dovizioso, Chris Vermeulen and a very off-line Randy de Puniet.

▼ Some people think the after-dark Qatar GP is a great idea. Other people think it's a gimmick that wastes millions of watts of energy. The gimmick seemed even more ridiculous after the 2009 race was postponed for 24 hours due to a desert downpour; the gods' way of punishing man for his hubris? 'I have never understood the point of racing at night. We should never do it again,' says Vale.



▲ The class of 2009 photo – always a good moment to judge the vibe between the riders. Vale seems happy sitting between his most dangerous rivals: team-mate Jorge Lorenzo and Casey Stoner. Nicky Hayden, Dani Pedrosa and Andrea Dovizioso are the other front-row boys.



▲ That's the way to do it. Valentino stuffs it up the inside of Dani Pedrosa to take the lead at Jerez. It was his first win of 2009 following defeats by Stoner and Lorenzo at the opening two races.

PHOTOGRAPH BY GUY LAWRENCE

▼ A soon to be very embarrassed JB gets a kiss on the Jerez podium. That morning JB had come up with a new set-up that solved chassis problems which had hampered Valentino throughout practice.



▲ There's a first time for everything – even a first time to be last. And this was Valentino's maiden last-place finish, following a crash during the wet-dry French GP. Vale had made the brave (or stupid?) decision to be the first rider to swap from rain tyres to slicks. He lasted four corners.



▲ Most GP stars hate the notoriously dangerous Isle of Man TT, but Vale loves all kinds of racing, which is why he made a pilgrimage to the sport's birthplace and rode a closed-roads lap. TT riders say normal tracks are very boring and they prefer the TT,' he said. 'It is clear they are crazy people and not normal. They are true gladiators!'



▲ He's behind you! Two corners to go at Catalunya 2009 and Valentino has got it all worked out...

'I've dreamed of that overtake for a week!'

▼ ...his plan is simple – mega corner-exit speed from the penultimate turn gets him within striking distance, then he dives inside at the final turn, catching Lorenzo unawares. Remarkably this was the first 800cc race to be decided on the final lap – a sad testament to the one-line-only 800s.

PHOTO: ANDREW MCGOWAN



▲ Exhausted after robbing Lorenzo of victory in front of his home crowd. 'I've dreamed of that overtake for a week!' he said. 'This race confirmed that I'm very strong in one-to-one battles, also that I'm good at overtaking.' Like we didn't know...



▲ If Catalunya was Valentino's way of reminding Lorenzo who was boss, Indianapolis reminded him that the young Spaniard was getting more difficult to beat with every race. Indy was one of four wins that put Lorenzo second overall behind his team-mate.

PHOTOGRAPH BY GUY LAWRENCE



▲ Valentino has just won his ninth world title. Sepang winner Stoner offers his congratulations. Theirs is a strange rivalry – a twisted mix of deep respect and serious animosity.

GOLD AND GOOSE

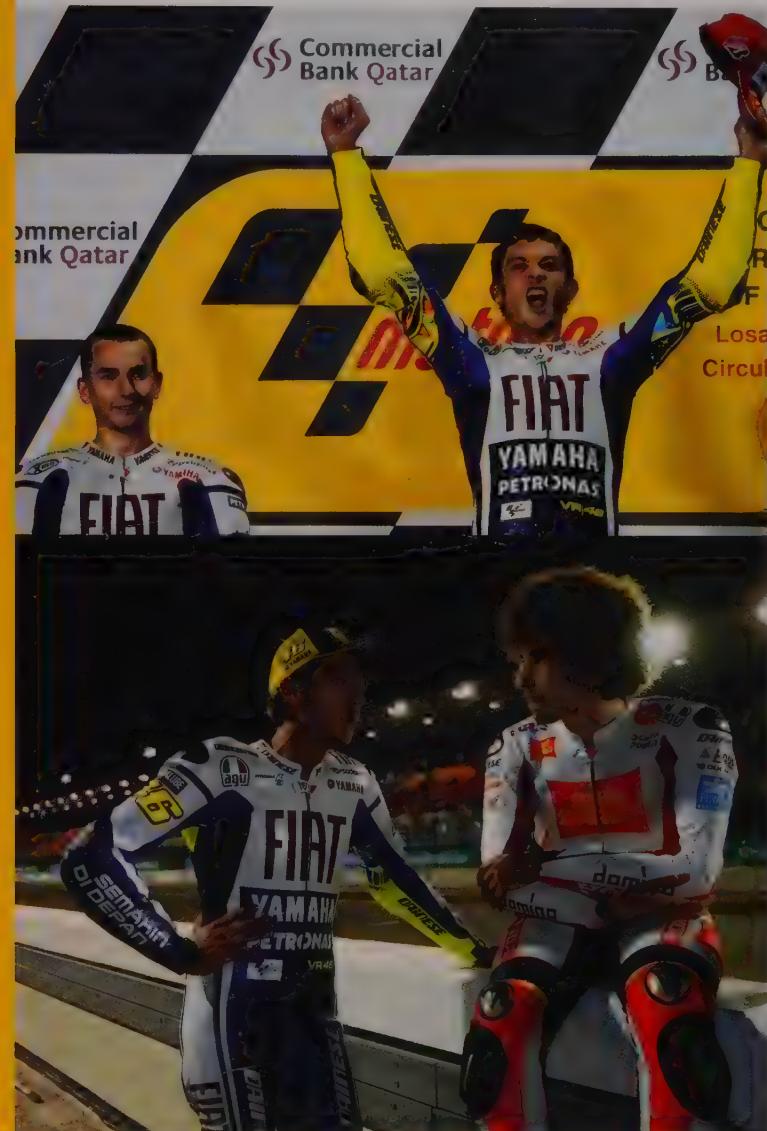


▲ A false dawn in the desert night? Valentino came out all guns blazing at the 2010 season-opening Qatar GP to narrowly beat Lorenzo. But those who considered this a first step to a tenth title had forgotten something – Lorenzo was riding with a broken hand.



▼ Lorenzo looks like he absolutely knows who's going to come out on top of this particular confrontation. He was right too. During 2010 the team-mates' relationship got darker and darker, until Valentino knew there was no way he could stay at Yamaha.

© P. S. / Gamma L'Espresso



▲ Valentino counts Marco Simoncelli as one of his best paddock friends. The pair were born and raised within a few miles of each other, and they share a gladiatorial approach to racing. At first, Vale gave the MotoGP newcomer plenty of advice. 'But now I am fast, he stops!' said Simoncelli in 2011.

© P. S. / Gamma L'Espresso



◀ This is the moment that cost Valentino a broken right leg. During a cool morning session at Mugello he slowed for a few seconds, waiting for a clear track, and that was enough for the left side of his rear tyre to cool. He crashed at the next left.

© D. GOLDBECK

▼ Valentino grasps his broken right leg as medics get ready to stretcher him away. Surgeons pinned the break in Florence, where he announced from his bed: 'I have a very good relationship with morphine'.

© D. GOLDBECK



▲ The race day mood at Mugello was noticeably less fevered than usual. Some fans had packed their bags and left the circuit as soon as they knew their hero was out of the race. But he wouldn't be away for long...

© D. GOLDBECK



▲ Six weeks after Mugello, Vale was back racing again at the Sachsenring. He might have been hobbling around on crutches but he wasn't hobbling around on the racetrack. He battled with Stoner for third, missing out on a podium by three tenths.

'I will try to beat him again... with more attention!'

▼ Just six weeks after breaking a leg, Valentino was back inside the top three at Laguna, climbing the podium with his crutches. This is early in the race, battling with impressive rookie Ben Spies who would take VR's place in the factory Yamaha team.

GOLD AND GOOSE



► Just weeks after Ducati announced they had signed Valentino for 2011 and 2012, Italian stallholders were flogging homemade Rossi/Ducati T-shirts at Misano. Police swooped to confiscate the shirts because they infringed Ducati's and Vale's number 46 copyright.

GOLD AND GOOSE



▲ Excuse me – coming through! No way was Valentino going to get beaten by Lorenzo in their battle for third place at Motegi. This collision earned Vale some harsh words from Yamaha bosses who were terrified that an accident might cost Lorenzo the world title. 'After the race Yamaha asked me to race with more attention. So, next time I will try to beat him again... with more attention!' In other words, no remorse.





Ducati and main sponsor Marlboro don't do things by half – they launched their 2011 MotoGP team on the top of a mountain outside fancy Italian ski resort Madonna di Campiglio. Valentino's and team-mate Hayden's GP11s were helicoptered to the summit.

MotoGP Ducati —

THE FINAL FRONTIER

Valentino and Ducati – it's the Italian dream team, but it's a big mountain to climb

Valentino's move to Ducati – officially announced at the 2010 Czech GP but known about many months earlier – had been a long time coming.

The moment Lorenzo arrived at Yamaha at the end of 2007, life started getting difficult for Valentino. He demanded a wall to divide the Yamaha pit into two, telling the world that this wasn't a team in the normal sense of the word. Valentino did go on to win the 2008 and 2009 world titles, but by the end of 2009 – when Lorenzo was challenging and beating Valentino on a regular basis – it was obvious that Yamaha would have to choose between the two of them.

Valentino also knew the writing was on the wall, announcing that 'there isn't room for both of us at





► Hanging off more than ever, pulling the handlebars more than ever, Vale bends the GP11 to his will at Jerez.

'Yamaha'. He started talking with Ducati early in 2010, but in fact the two parties had been interested in each other for much longer than that.

Ducati's genius engineer Filippo Preziosi had dreamed of working with Valentino ever since he created the original Desmosedici MotoGP bike that achieved Ducati's historic first premier-class win just ten weeks after its race debut in 2003. No wonder that Rossi, then falling out of love with Honda, was casting amorous glances in Ducati's direction.

'Valentino was really interested in racing with us and, of course, we were very interested in having him,' says Preziosi. But it took another seven years before the relationship would be consummated. During that time Ducati won its first MotoGP world title, with Casey Stoner in 2007, but at the same time the 800cc Desmosedici became known as a fickle, tricky motorcycle. Only Stoner, with his dirt-track background, could get the best out of the bike.

The Valentino/Ducati marriage was finally consummated at 12.23pm on 9 November 2010, when the nine-time world champion rode down the Valencia pitlane aboard the GP10 that had proved difficult for even Stoner to master. After two days on the bike Valentino was a lowly 15th fastest, 1.7 seconds behind Stoner, who was having his first ride on a Honda RCV after defecting from Ducati.

So there is no doubt that the big red Duke is a difficult beast to master. It will need all the brain power of Preziosi, Rossi and Burgess to get it right. But Valentino's

arrival can only be good for the Bolognese marque, as his new team-mate Nicky Hayden remarked. 'Valentino coming to Ducati will put a lot of pressure on the factory,' said Hayden, Vale's team-mate at Honda in 2003. 'I mean, if he's not winning, the fans are gonna burn the factory down!'

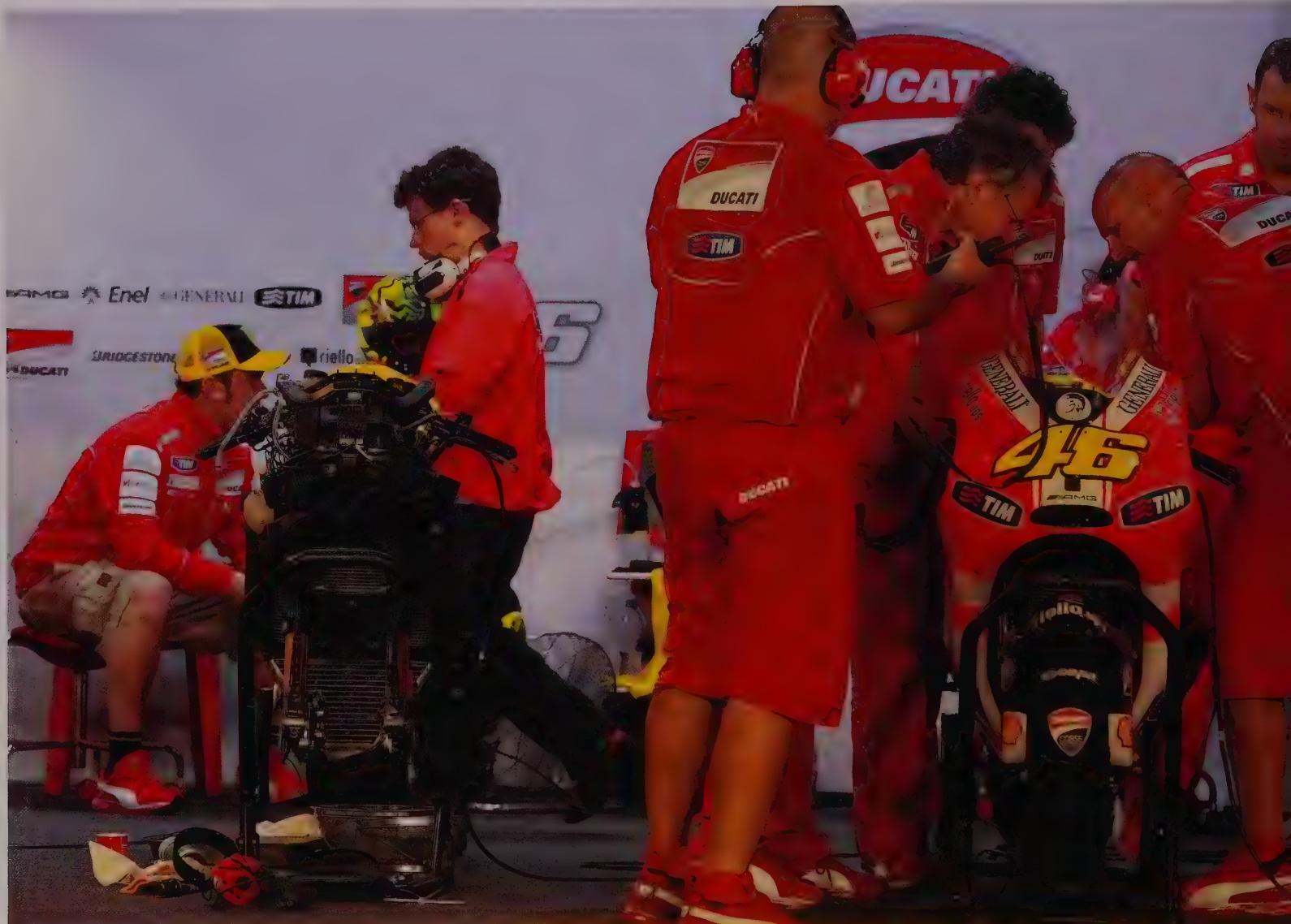
That first Valencia test proved two things: that Ducati were going to have to change the bike and that Valentino was going to need to modify his riding style, even though he could never ride like Stoner.

'Casey rode the Ducati in an oversteer situation going into the corner, so the bike would start to slide, which made it start to stand up, then he squared it up and he went,' explained Burgess. 'He was getting it turned with brake and throttle, but that's an awful risky way to do it.'

Valentino at least did his best to meet the Ducati halfway. 'The Ducati is different from the M1 – it must be ridden with a more dirty style,' he said. 'You have to slide the bike in the middle of the corner and then pick it up as soon as possible to accelerate. With the M1 your lines are more a round, like a 250. We cannot try and turn the Ducati into a Yamaha because the two bikes are on the opposite side of the world! We can improve the Ducati and adapt it to me, but it will always be different to the M1.'

Valentino expects to finish his career with Ducati and he has already said that once he's had enough of MotoGP he would like to have a shot at the World Superbike crown, on the factory's booming v-twins.

▼ The pressure is on as Vale prepares for his Ducati race debut in Qatar. JB, Bernard, Brent, Gary and new mechanic Mark Elder (back to camera) have never worked so hard in their lives to get a bike right.



‘The Ducati must be ridden with a more dirty style’

▼ Rossi with Ducati's genius engineer Filippo Preziosi at their first test together. 'Valentino is very impressive at giving feedback,' says Preziosi. 'Bike behaviour is so complex that we cannot understand it just by what we get from the sensors.' New teammate Hayden is on the left.



◀ Vale, scared? This Aldo Drudi mudguard sticker illustrates the 'dirty' riding style demanded by Ducati's ferocious Desmosedici.





◀ A rare moment of respite in his toughest year yet. Vale scored his first Ducati podium at Le Mans, but it was a lucky result and he finished a long way behind winner Stoner.

▼ Racing with Dovizioso and Edwards at Estoril. Despite regular beatings in 2011, Vale kept his sense of humour. After finishing sixth at the recently resurfaced Mugello, more than a second a lap off the winners, he joked: 'If we race with the new surface and the others race with the old surface then maybe we can win!'



◀ The weight of history on his shoulders. In his pit at Le Mans, Vale examines a poster of legendary Ducati rider Paul Smart riding a Desmo 250 single at Oulton Park in 1968.





Papa Rossi on his way to victory,
Dutch TT, Assen 1979.

HEULEMANS

PAPA ROSSI

To know Valentino, you need to know his dad...

Graziano's Assen victory was the second of his three 250 wins in 1979. 'Assen was my favourite because Assen is the true theatre of bikes,' he recalls. 'I start in third place, pass Kork Ballington's Kawasaki after half a lap, then some laps later I arrive behind Greg Hansford's Kawasaki. We are going down the straight side by side, we both decide to brake at the last metre, but I brake even later. Was fantastic! I make my first win at Rijeka, one week before. I qualified between the Kawasakis, who won everything in those days, so when I arrive on the grid between them they look at me like I am a UFO. That was the beautiful thing, it was a surprise, and surprises are always important in life. Maybe I lose the chance of the World Championship at Silverstone, two races later. I crash on the last lap when I come across a slow rider halfway through a fast right. I decide to pass him on the outside but this was a bad decision, very bad...' ■

▼ He could ride four-strokes too – Graziano at speed on a Bimota Honda, Imola, 1981.

PHOTOGRAPH BY GIANFRANCO RAVASI



▲ And just like Vale, dad loves anything with an engine and wheels. Here he entertains the crowd with some sideways antics in his clapped-out Opel rally car at the Pesaro town fiesta, summer 1985.

PHOTOGRAPH BY GIANFRANCO RAVASI

► The definition of Latin cool? Even with his leather dungarees, Graziano manages to cut a dash in the Misano pits with mate and 1981 500 world champ Marco Lucchinelli, summer of '84.

PHOTOGRAPH BY GIANFRANCO RAVASI





▼ This little Fiat was Graziano's 'hospitality unit' at the 1981 Imola GP. Rossi senior was definitely an eccentric motorcycle racer.

FRATERNALI



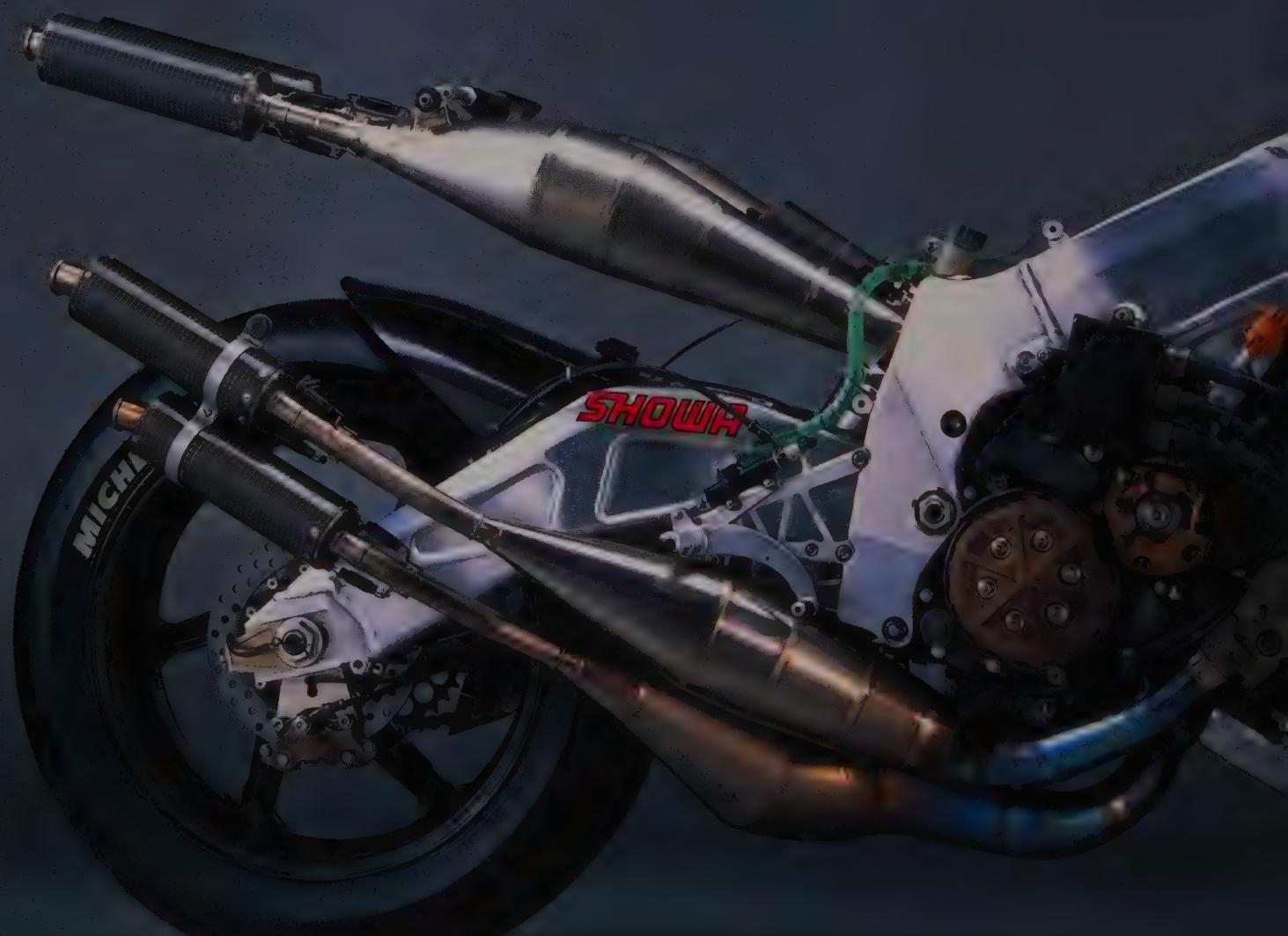
▲ Graziano was a bit wacky, just like his son, wacky enough to wear this hallucinatory fantasy helmet. The paint was done by artist friend Aldo Drudi, who also does Vale's graphics.

OXLEY

180

HONDA NSR500

2001





METAL ROSSI

The bikes that have transported Valentino to premier-class World Championship success

Valentino has ruled the premier class pretty much since he first turned up at the start of the 2000 season. He didn't quite win the title that year but he has won it every year since and has achieved that remarkable run of success on three very different motorcycles. First, the harum-scarum Honda NSR, the last of the man-eating two-stroke 500s; then Honda's wondrous RCV four-stroke, possibly the most intelligently created race bike in history, then the Yamaha YZR-M1, the machine that Vale turned from loser to winner in a few months, and finally the trickier Ducati GP11. Motorcycles don't come any more trick than these four: they're all fabulous works of art, a testament to the greatest engineers on this planet.

Massive carbon-fibre airbox delivers air to the NSR's greedy Keihin carbs, no hi-tech fuel injection on this 'stinkwheel'. Monster aluminium chassis just about keeps the motor under control.

STUDIO PHOTOS:
TERUTAKA HOASHI/RIDERS CLUB

HONDA NSR500 2001

This is the Honda NSR500 two-stroke that took Valentino to his first premier-class title in 2001. It's a history-making machine, because that year's 500 World Championship was the last before new technical regulations admitted the 990cc four-strokes that dominate the sport today. It's also an evil machine – fickle, fiery and ferocious compared to the more rider-friendly four-strokes. Nevertheless the 2001 NSR was the apogee of high-performance two-stroke engineering, a science now restricted to the 250 and 125 GP classes.

Honda built its first NSR500 in 1984, so almost two decades of development went into the bike that Valentino rode. Throughout its time on the tracks the NSR was always a tower of power, rocketing American legend Freddie Spencer around the Daytona banking at 190mph on its 1984 race debut. By 2001 the NSR V4 was pumping out almost 200 horsepower but with superb throttle linearity. It was this remarkable usability that made it the bike that every GP racer wanted, so when Valentino began considering his move to 500s during 1999, he knew that only an NSR500 would do.

Of course, compared with a big, soft four-stroke, the NSR was never easy to ride, which is why Vale loved it so much. Given the choice, he would rather be racing 500s now, but smoky ol' two-strokes (nicknamed 'stinkwheels' by some) were consigned to history because they'd become marginalised by environmental concerns.

During its 17 years of GP racing the NSR won no fewer than 21 World Championships (ten riders' and 11 constructors'). ■



SPECIFICATIONS

Honda NSR500 2001

ENGINE

Type: liquid-cooled V4 two-stroke, reed valve induction, with adjustable ignition, exhaust control, etc

Bore & stroke: 54 x 54.5mm

Displacement: 499cc

Fuel system: four 36mm magnesium Keihin carbs

Claimed output: 195 horsepower at 12,500rpm

Gearbox: six-speed, cassette type

CHASSIS

Frame type: dual beam aluminium

Tyres: Michelin

Wheels: 17in front, 16.5in rear

Front brake: 4-pot Brembo, twin 320mm carbon discs (dry), twin cast iron discs (wet)

Rear-brake: 2-pot Brembo, single 196mm disc

Front suspension: 47mm upside-down Showa, multi-adjustable

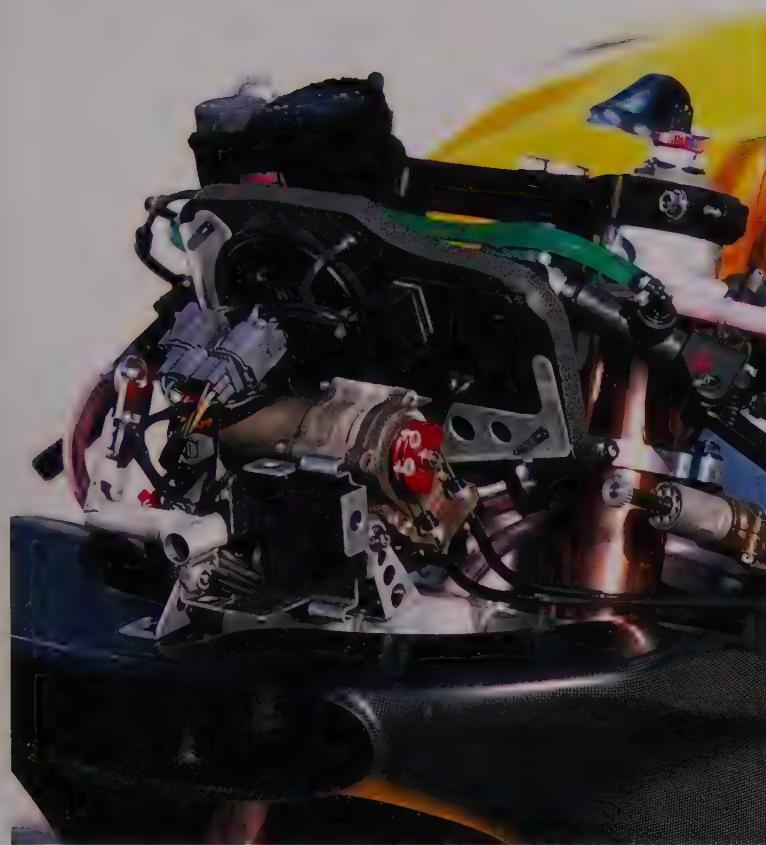
Rear suspension: Pro-link with Showa shock, multi-adjustable

Wheelbase: 1400mm

Length: 2010mm

Race weight: 131kg

Top speed: around 195mph



HONDA RC211V

2003





HONDA RC211V 2003

Honda's RC211V is probably about as close as you'll get to a perfect racing motorcycle. The V5 four-stroke ruled MotoGP's first two seasons, winning all but three of 32 races in 2002 and 2003, then Honda went and made their only mistake, somehow allowing Valentino to walk away and sign for Yamaha. The fact that they've had two lean years since Valentino defected reinforces that well-worn racetrack axiom: in motorcycle racing the man matters more than the machine.

Generally regarded as the most rider-friendly of the current generation of 250 horsepower MotoGP bikes, the RCV is the embodiment of Honda's five decades of motorcycle racing know-how. Squat, lean and muscular, the V5 was created to be a totally balanced motorcycle, so its engine, chassis and aerodynamics enhance each other for maximum all-round performance. It was the first race bike to properly realise the concept of 'mass centralisation', gathering as much weight as possible around the bike's centre of gravity for improved handling characteristics.

Honda designed its V5 motor for the same reason, with a relatively narrow 75.5 degree vee, because it would be compact. The engine's power characteristics are as cool, calm and collected as they can be, and if things do go wrong, there's a traction-control system that should prevent the rider losing control. So the RCV is a very manageable motorcycle, at least in relative terms, because no machine that can nudge 215mph is going to be a doddle to ride. ■

Whichever way you look at it, Honda's RC211V looks squat, muscular and compact. Not an inch or an ounce wasted, this is the very pinnacle of the art and science of race-bike design.

SPONSORED BY
SCHUBERT MOTORCYCLES CLUB





SPECIFICATIONS

Honda RC211V 2003

GENERAL

Type: liquid-cooled 20-valve 75.5 degree V5 four-stroke

Displacement: 990cc

Fuel system: PGM fuel injection

Claimed output: around 240 horsepower

Gearbox: six-speed, cassette type

CHASSIS

Frame type: dual beam aluminium

Tyres: Michelin

Wheels: 17in front, 16.5in rear

Front brake: 4-pot Brembo, twin carbon discs (dry), twin cast iron discs (wet)

Rear-brake: 2-pot Brembo, single disc

Front suspension: Upside-down Showa, multi-adjustable

Rear suspension: Pro-link with Showa shock, multi-adjustable

Wheelbase: 1440mm

Length: 2050mm

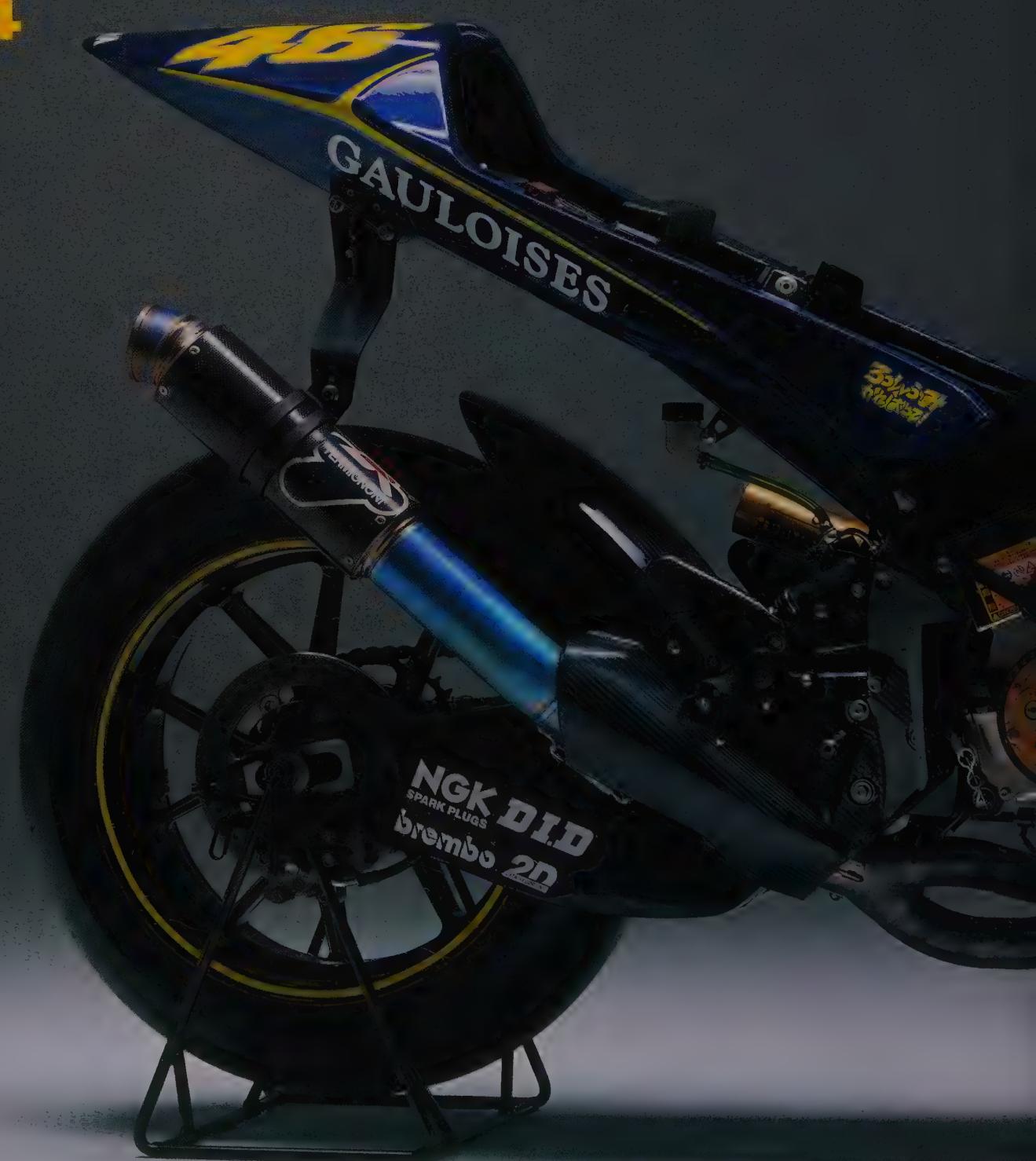
Race weight: over 145kg

Top speed: up to 215mph



YAMAHA YZR-M1

2004





The M1 looks sharp, like a razorblade, and that's the way it handles too. Electronic trickery includes traction-control system and a full LCD dash with 15,000rpm tacho and inbuilt lap timer.

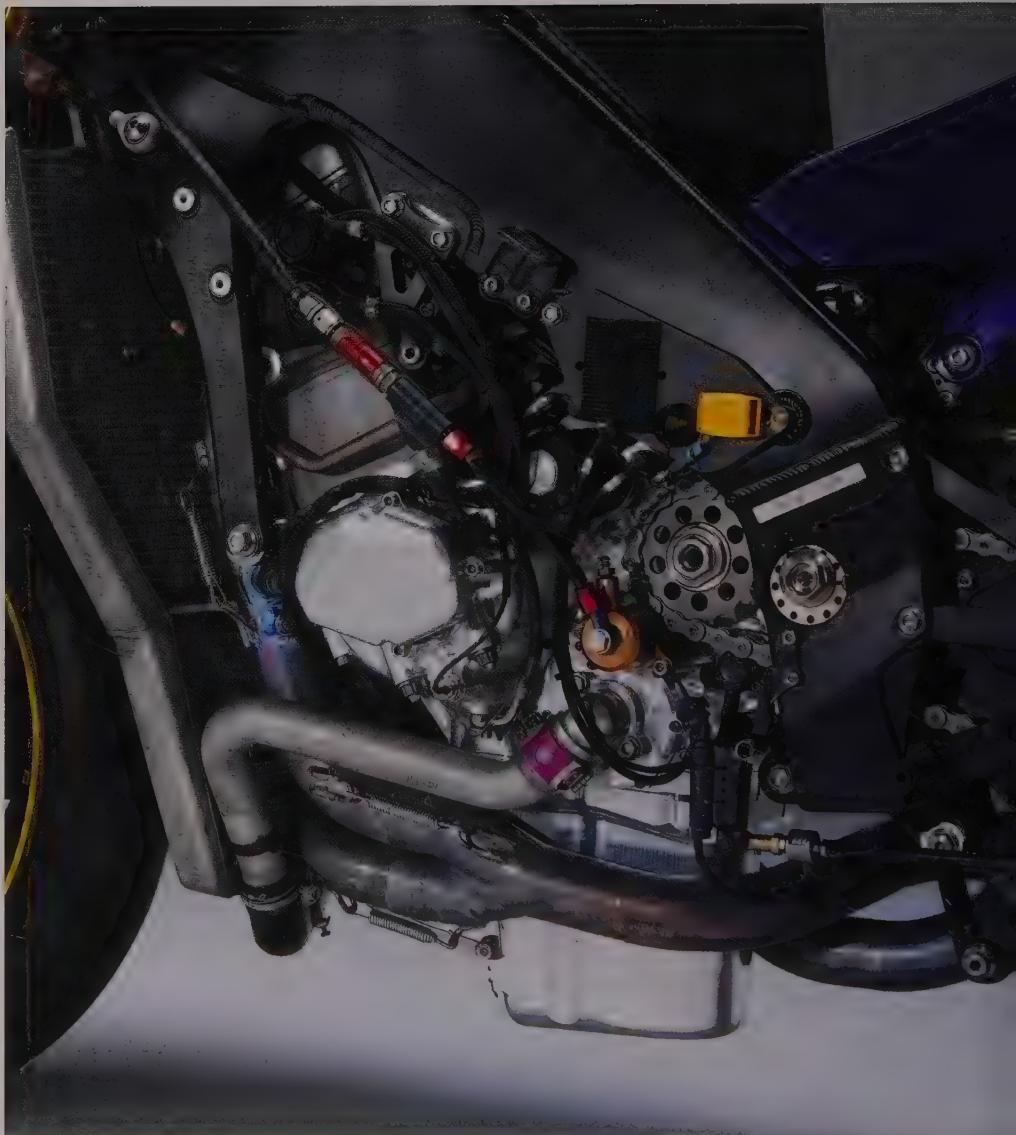
STUDIO PHOTOS:
TETSUAKA NOASHI/RIDERS CLUB

YAMAHA YZR-M1 2004

This is the bike that cemented Valentino's legend. When Vale quit Honda at the end of 2003, Yamaha's YZR-M1 was going through grim times, with just two wins from two seasons of MotoGP racing. By taking the 2004 title aboard the M1, Vale proved that he can win even when he doesn't have the best motorcycle beneath him. Prior to that – in 125s, 250s, 500s and MotoGP – he'd always had fully competitive machinery.

But Valentino did more than merely win the title for Yamaha. His special development abilities also helped the factory to drastically improve its M1. Vale's sensitivity to a bike's behaviour, his intelligence in understanding what's going on and his ability to communicate those thoughts and feelings to his engineers are as vital to his success as his instincts as a racer. The 2004 M1 was obviously not as good a motorcycle as Honda's RCV, but with a year of input from Valentino and his crew chief Jeremy Burgess, the 2005 M1 looked as good as the RCV, especially during the late stages of races, when bike behaviour is so crucial.

The Yamaha may seem less high-tech than the Honda, with its inline four motor (like the marque's R1 streetbike), but in fact it features some very clever technology. The M1's traction-control electronics inhibit wheelspin via engine and chassis sensors that monitor factors like lean angle and slip angle (via gyros and triple-axis sensors) to control wheelspin according to tyre wear and track conditions. ☀





SPECIFICATIONS

Yamaha YZR-M1 2004

ENGINES

Type: liquid-cooled 16-valve inline four-cylinder four-stroke

Displacement: 990cc

Fuel system: fuel injection

Claimed output: over 240 horsepower

Gearbox: six-speed, cassette type

CHASSIS

Frame type: dual beam aluminium

Tyres: Michelin

Wheels: 16.5in front, 16.5in rear

Front brake: 4-pot Brembo, twin carbon discs (dry), twin cast iron discs (wet)

Rear-brake: 2-pot Brembo, single disc

Front suspension: Upside-down Öhlins, multi-adjustable

Rear suspension: Öhlins with rising-rate linkage, multi-adjustable

Race weight: over 145kg

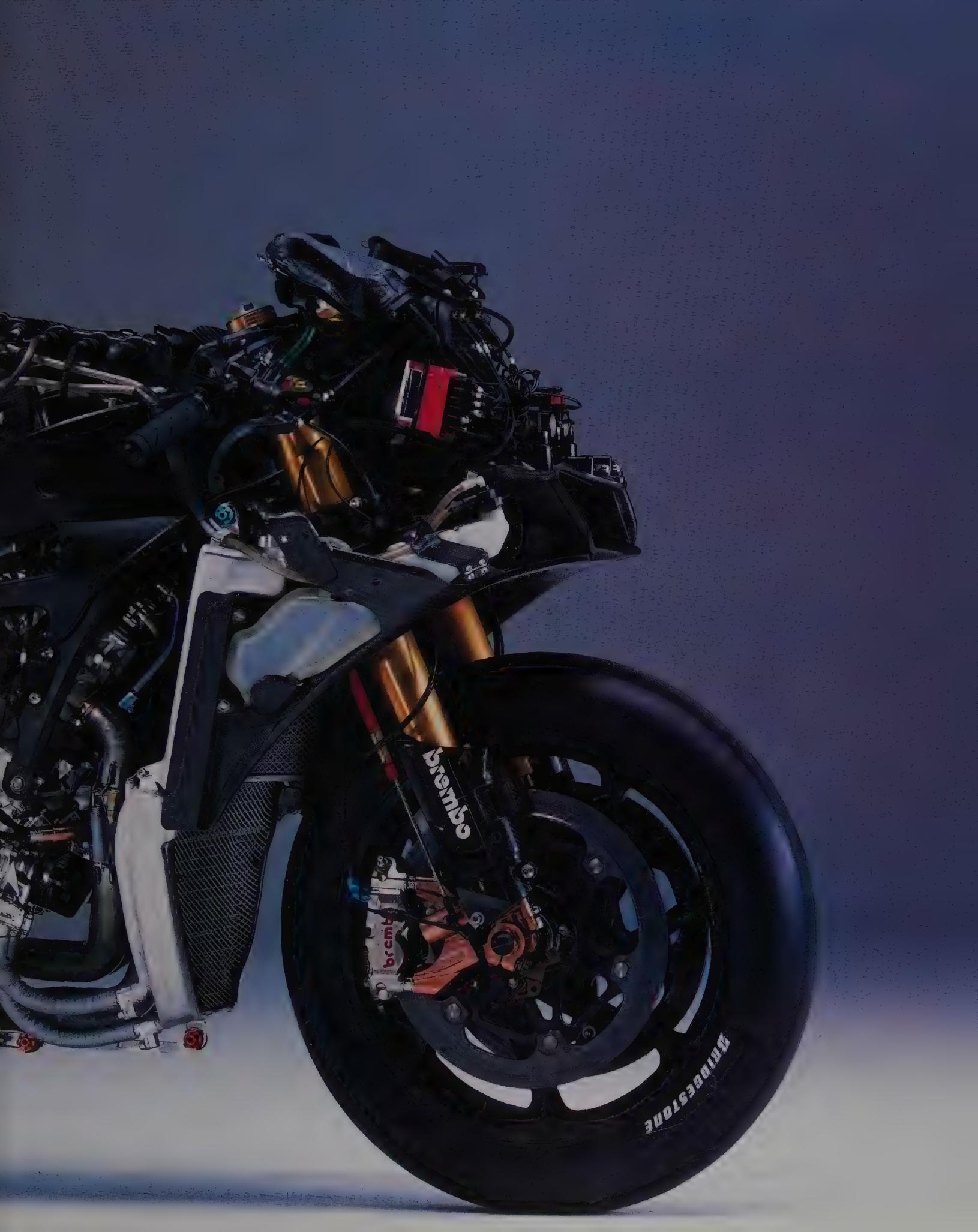
Top speed: over 210mph



YAMAHA YZR-M1

2008





Electronics are the prime growth area in MotoGP technology, which is why the M1's front end is a mass of cables and little black boxes. Left handlebar includes buttons for launch control and engine mapping, adjusted mid-race to suit tyre and track conditions.

YAMAHA YZR-M1 2008

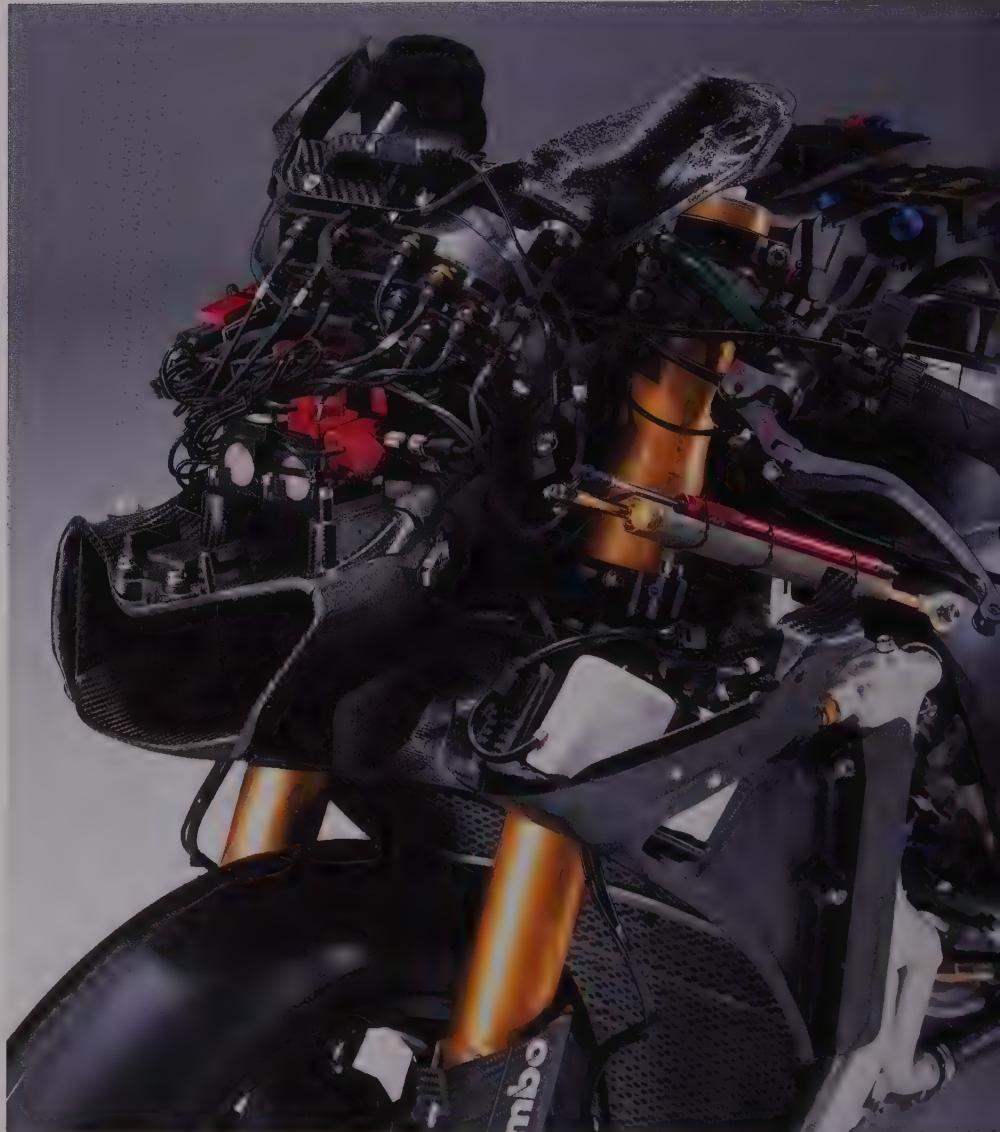
MotoGP changed again in 2007, the new 800cc machines replacing the 990s, now deemed too fast to be safe. The 190cc capacity reduction was supposed to reduce speeds but such is the engineering genius in MotoGP that the 800s smashed the lap record at their very first race!

Reason for the 800s' remarkable pace was their huge corner speed. The engines are smaller and lighter (compare the 2004 and 2008 photos), allowing engineers to design nimbler, better-handling machines. The engines also have less torque, requiring riders to use more corner speed for faster corner exits.

The new regulations also blew MotoGP's status quo to smithereens. In 2007 Ducati's GP7 was by far the fastest 800 while Yamaha's M1 handled superbly but was well down on horsepower, so much so that Valentino threatened to walk if the factory didn't turn things around. Yamaha worked so hard that in 2008 the M1 was the best bike, a superbly rider-friendly package that defeated the fast but fiery Ducati.

Main improvements were the all-new 19,000rpm pneumatic-valve engine, which increased power by 12 per cent, and revamped electronics. The M1's engine management system used two gyroscopes, a Magneti Marelli Marvel 4 ECU and radical vehicle dynamics software to calculate tyre contact patch and deliver exactly the right amount of torque at any lean angle, regardless of how much throttle the rider uses.

Also crucial, Valentino switched from Michelin to Bridgestone tyres in 2008. The Japanese tyres use a stiffer construction which allows higher corner-entry and mid-corner speeds.





SPECIFICATIONS

Yamaha YZR-M1 2008

ENGINE

Type: liquid-cooled 16-valve inline four-cylinder four-stroke

Displacement: 800cc

Fuel system: fuel injection

Claimed output: 210 horsepower

Gearbox: six-speed, cassette type

CHASSIS

Frame type: dual beam aluminium

Tyres: Bridgestone

Wheels: 16.5in front, 16.5in rear

Front brake: 4-pot Brembo, twin carbon discs (dry), twin cast iron discs (wet)

Rear-brake: 2-pot Brembo, single disc

Front suspension: Upside down Öhlins, multi-adjustable

Rear suspension: Öhlins with rising rate linkage, multi-adjustable

Race weight: over 148kg

Top speed: over 210mph





DUCATI DESMOSEDICI GP11 2011



DUCATI DESMOSEDICI GP11 2011

Ducati's MotoGP bike has never been an easy machine to master, but the 800cc variant has a bad reputation. It has defeated many talented riders including several world champions. No doubt, it is the biggest challenge of Valentino's career so far.

The Desmosedici is unique in several ways, most notably through its desmodromic valve system and its carbon-fibre chassis. But these aren't the factors that make the bike so tricky to ride. Casey Stoner, who took the Duke to world title glory in 2007, used a genius combination of rear brake, throttle control and body positioning to tame the bike. But he also fell off quite frequently, because he had to ride on the very edge of control.

Various experts have various opinions on the causes of the Ducati's ills, but no one is really certain. Engine character is certainly a factor. The V4 has always been wilder than its rivals, so most riders find it too risky to get on the throttle early in the corners, which is where the winning difference can be made. Thus early in 2011 Ducati equipped Valentino with a revised engine featuring a heavier crankshaft, which makes the power friendlier at the first touch of the throttle.

The GP11's chassis was also revised soon after Vale's arrival and then replaced by a new chassis, taken from the GP12 being readied for MotoGP's 2012 1000cc regulations. The new chassis was designed to reduce corner-exit problems and increase front-end feel, but it too may be replaced by yet another redesign, a conventional alloy beam frame. ■

The Desmosedici requires a lot of hard work, from the rider on the track and from the mechanics in the pits. Ducati introduced the GP12-framed GP11.1 (main photo) midway through 2011 but it didn't prove to be an instant fix. Desmodromic valve actuation allows revs peak not much shy of 20,000rpm.

GOLD AND GOOSE





Ducati Desmosedici GP11 2011

Type: liquid-cooled 16-valve 90 degree V4 four-stroke

Displacement: 800cc

ECU: Magneti Marelli

Claimed output: around 220 horsepower

Gearbox: six-speed, cassette type

Frame type: carbon-fibre monocoque

Tyres: Bridgestone

Wheels: 16.5in front and rear

Front brake: 4-pot Brembo, twin carbon discs (dry), twin cast iron discs (wet)

Rear-brake: 2-pot Brembo, single disc

Front suspension: Upside down Öhlins, multi-adjustable

Rear suspension: Öhlins shock, multi-adjustable

Race weight: over 148kg

Top speed: over 210mph



SETE GIBERNAU

'I've always said you can only ever aspire to being the best rider of your time. No-one can reasonably say who's the best ever because you can't compare riders from different eras. Right now Valentino's the best. He's always had great chances and he's always been able to profit from them, that's what makes him a champion. He's strongest because he wins in every area. To win races you've got to be like that – you've got to be talented, you've got to be mentally strong and you need everything working around you, like the team, plus you need some luck, too. Valentino's got all those things, he's winning and he deserves it.'

'But don't ask me about him as a person, I'll only speak about him from a professional point of view, that's about it. I don't know why he's got a problem with me because I've never had a problem with him. I've always had a lot of respect for everyone on the grid, I just wish everyone shared that respect, because once you lose respect you lose everything.'

Gibernau is the grandson of Francesco Bulto, founder of the Bultaco marque (and one of Franco's artillery officers during Spain's civil war), so he comes from a biking family. He got into 250 GPs in the early '90s and graduated to 500s in '97, under the tutelage of former 500 champ Wayne Rainey. He retired at the end of 2006 and made a brief comeback in 2009.



▲ If looks could kill, Gibernau ponders what Valentino's all about in a pre-race press conference at the 2005 Chinese GP.

GOLDBLATT/ICON

▼ Best mates or sworn rivals, Vale and Gibernau have always raced each other hard. This is Brno 2003, with Troy Bayliss in the mix.

DAVID WOOD/ICON

'I don't know why he's got a problem with me'



ROSSI V GIBERNAU

2009 MotoGP World Championship	
Rossi 1st	Gibernau 18th
2006 MotoGP World Championship	
Rossi 2nd	Gibernau 13th
2005 MotoGP World Championship	
Rossi 1st	Gibernau 7th
2004 MotoGP World Championship	
Rossi 1st	Gibernau 2nd
2003 MotoGP World Championship	
Rossi 1st	Gibernau 2nd
2002 MotoGP World Championship	
Rossi 1st	Gibernau 16th
2001 500 World Championship	
Rossi 1st	Gibernau 9th
2000 500 World Championship	
Rossi 2nd	Gibernau 15th

LORIS CAPIROSSI

'I've always been friendly with Valentino because he's a good guy, though maybe it's easy to be friends with me because I'm a quiet man. I've known him since 1990, because I knew his father. I'd just started doing GPs and he had started minimoto. Every time he came to a bike show or some other event he used to really break my balls – he would come to me and say "please give me a helmet", or "please give me a boot", or "give me a set of leathers"... always. Fucking hell! I remember so well Brno '93, when he came to watch the GP and he slept in my motorhome, he was just a kid then.'

'He's really strong and he loves to fight. In 1999 we had a lot of races together, lots of overtaking but always fair, we would look at each other during the race and smile, we had a lot of fun. Sometimes when I beat him he wasn't happy, but after ten minutes he'd be okay. I don't think it's his riding style that makes the difference. At this level everyone is a very good rider, it's his brain that makes the difference, he's very clever.'

Capirossi was GP racing's first teenage superstar. He won the 1990 125 world title aged 17, and he's still the sport's youngest world champ. He raced Rossi in the 1998 and '99 250 championships, then in the 500 and MotoGP series.

ROSSI V CAPIROSSI

2010 MotoGP World Championship	
Rossi 3rd	Capirossi 16th
2008 MotoGP World Championship	
Rossi 1st	Capirossi 9th
2008 MotoGP World Champion	
Rossi 1st	Capirossi 10th
2007 MotoGP World Championship	
Rossi 3rd	Capirossi 7th
2006 MotoGP World Champion	
Rossi 2nd	Capirossi 3rd
2005 MotoGP World Champion	
Rossi 1st	Capirossi 6th
2004 MotoGP World Champion	
Rossi 1st	Capirossi 9th
2003 MotoGP World Champion	
Rossi 1st	Capirossi 4th
2002 MotoGP World Champion	
Rossi 1st	Capirossi 8th
2001 500 World Champion	
Rossi 1st	Capirossi 3rd
2000 500 World Champion	
Rossi 2nd	Capirossi 7th
1999 250 World Champion	
Rossi 1st	Capirossi 3rd
1998 250 World Champion	
Rossi 2nd	Capirossi 1st



▲ When he was a kid Vale was a fan of teenage 125 champ Capirossi. They've remained good mates ever since.

ROSSI RIVALS

The men who've given him the hardest time in 125s, 250s, 500s and MotoGP

▼ Valentino and Capirossi had some of their best battles in the 1999 250 World Championship, when they rode for Aprilia and Honda. Vale beat Capirossi here in Germany and for the title.





◀ Two people with not much to say to each other – the Roman Emperor and the Doctor suffer the agony of yet another press conference.

ROSSI V BIAGGI

2005 MotoGP World Championship	
Rossi 1st	Biaggi 5th
2004 MotoGP World Championship	
Rossi 1st	Biaggi 3rd
2003 MotoGP World Championship	
Rossi 1st	Biaggi 3rd
2002 MotoGP World Championship	
Rossi 1st	Biaggi 2nd
2001 500 World Championship	
Rossi 1st	Biaggi 2nd
2000 500 World Championship	
Rossi 2nd	Biaggi 3rd

MAX BIAGGI

'I've never been friends with him. I just go my own way, at least I don't pretend to be his friend like some guys, which is just theatre, like fake friends. I always say it's impossible to have a friendship with a rival. I'm true, whatever I say, I just give my opinion and that's me. If you like me, okay, if you don't like me, okay, but at least I'm true.'

'What do I think about his riding technique? I don't see anything very particular, but he's the man to beat. When I see him it just seems he works very well with the package. In 2001 I was the only one who could fight with him. He was very good on the brakes but I think that was because the Honda was always so strong on braking, while we had some front-end problems with the Yamaha. Even so, we gave 100 per cent to be fastest and sometimes we were.'

The self-styled Roman Emperor was Rossi's first big, bad rival, as opposed to the mates he'd played with in 125s and 250s. The two hated each other's guts even before they raced each other. After their infamous punch-up in 2001 the imperious Biaggi explained away a graze on his face with the immortal words: 'A mosquito bit me.'

▼ Through most of their rivalry, Rossi has generally had the best bike. This is Brno 2002, which Biaggi won on the Yamaha M1. That's the late Daijiro Kato in the background.



**ROSSI V HAYDEN**

2010 MotoGP World Championship	
Rossi 3rd	Hayden 7th
2009 MotoGP World Championship	
Rossi 1st	Hayden 13th
2008 MotoGP World Championship	
Rossi 1st	Hayden 6th
2007 MotoGP World Championship	
Rossi 3rd	Hayden 8th
2006 MotoGP World Championship	
Rossi 2nd	Hayden 1st
2005 MotoGP World Championship	
Rossi 1st	Hayden 3rd
2004 MotoGP World Championship	
Rossi 1st	Hayden 8th
2003 MotoGP World Championship	
Rossi 1st	Hayden 5th

◀ Valentino chases former team-mate Hayden during practice for the 2005 German GP, the year of Hayden's first GP win.

▼ Hayden is always an entertaining speaker, so it's no wonder he's got Valentino enthralled here.

NICKY HAYDEN

'One thing I noticed when we were team-mates is that he looks like it's fun, fun, fun, but once you're in the garage that dude is so serious, so focused. Everything seems perfect, right down to the windscreens sticker and the colour of his boots. He doesn't overlook anything and that's a big part of it.'

'More than anything it's the racer in him that makes him so strong, it's obvious he wants to win. He's got a lot of natural talent but I know a lot of guys with natural talent and it gets some guys in trouble. It's the whole package that makes him strong: the desire, the focus, the talent.'

'I think sometimes maybe he's not as laidback as he comes across. He knows what to say and when to say it to make it look like things aren't really getting to him. He knows how to play it, on the bike and off the bike.'

'On track he's aggressive but totally clean and he definitely has a lot of tactics. He knows when he wants to race just one guy, how to separate groups, how to slow guys down. I'd say his biggest strength is that he can adapt. If the tyres go off he can slide, when the bike needs to be ridden in line he can ride in line.'

Former US Superbike champ Hayden was the first man to steal the MotoGP title from Valentino in 2006. The pair were Honda team-mates in 2003, Hayden's debut GP year.

'Once you're in the garage that dude is so serious, so focused'



CASEY STONER

'I think the mistake is to put somebody on a pedestal. That's not the way to go racing. Setting your target on one rider is the biggest mistake you can make. For me, every weekend, it's about who's going to be quickest. Sometimes it's Valentino, other times it's Dani [Pedrosa] or me or Jorge [Lorenzo]. When you're in practice you set your target on the track, and in the race you set your target either on the track, if you're in first place, or if you're not then on whoever's giving you the most grief. It's as simple as that.'

'When I said stuff about Valentino after the race at Laguna 2008 some people didn't see eye to eye with me, but they weren't on the bike. Some of those moves that he pulled were a bit out of order – I love a good race and a good battle, but that was a little bit too much. It didn't rattle me though, I've never been rattled in my life.'

One of the toughest rivals Valentino has faced during his GP career, Stoner was an Aussie dirt track sensation when he was a kid. He made an instant impression when he started GPs in 2002, aged 16. After winning 125 and 250 GPs he graduated to MotoGP in 2006 and took pole position in only his second race. Stoner and Valentino have immense mutual respect for each other; Vale was once moved to say that 'Casey rides like a god'.



▲ Stoner has just won a masterful victory at a rain-lashed Sachsenring in 2008. Vale offers his congratulations.

'I think the mistake is to put somebody on a pedestal'



ROSSI V STONER

2010 MotoGP World Championship	
Rossi 3rd	Stoner 4th
2009 MotoGP World Championship	
Rossi 1st	Stoner 4th
2008 MotoGP World Championship	
Rossi 1st	Stoner 2nd
2007 MotoGP World Championship	
Rossi 3rd	Stoner 1st
2006 MotoGP World Championship	
Rossi 2nd	Stoner 8th

◀ Valentino's just won the 2009 Jerez GP, so Stoner gets his podium revenge with a bottle of fizz.

JORGE LORENZO

'Everything depends on your attitude. When you are Valentino's team-mate it can be a negative, if you say 'Valentino is the quickest rider in the world, but I am new, so I can't beat him'. Or you can say, 'It's a good opportunity to be with a rider from whom you can learn some things'. For me it's a positive, I always look to be positive with everything I do in my life. For me, I respect Valentino very much. Every time I see him I'm very proud to be in the same team'

'The most important thing is to be very proud of yourself and very confident and very positive, then things will come true. That's the way it is. I think a rider has to be very proud of himself, like Muhammad Ali, you know. I don't compare myself with Muhammad Ali, because Cassius Clay was the greatest sportsman ever, but I always look to him as a good example of how to be a sportsman.'

'I'm a very competitive person, that's for sure. I want to win every time I come to a race. I want to learn so I can get rid of the handicaps I have and take more profit of the advantages I have. I know the only way in life is hard work and I will do the maximum to reach my goal.'

Jorge Lorenzo won back-to-back 250 world titles with Aprilia before joining Valentino at Fiat Yamaha in 2008. He was instantly mega-fast but had a bad habit of bone-crunching crashes. He was Vale's toughest-ever team-mate and won the 2010 MotoGP crown.



'When you are Valentino's team-mate it can be a negative'



ROSSI V LORENZO

2010 MotoGP World Championship
Rossi 3rd, Lorenzo 1st
2009 MotoGP World Championship
Rossi 1st, Lorenzo 2nd
2008 MotoGP World Championship
Rossi 1st, Lorenzo 4th

▲ Valentino celebrates after outfoxing Lorenzo at the final turn of the 2009 Catalan GP. Lorenzo just about manages a smile.

◀ Showing the master how it's done. Lorenzo has eight years less elite-class experience, and yet Vale has called his riding 'fortissimo'.





Because even a genius gets it wrong now and again

DOWN ROSSI

This is the moment Vale thought he'd thrown away the 2004 World Championship. Struggling to stay with the faster Hondas at Rio, he finally pushed his M1 beyond the brink. But he learned plenty from this crash: when the bike ain't right, it's better to score a few points than none.

'In my mind I try to ride fast, then make mistake. I need this for go faster, is a system'



▲ Sitting on his arse again – Valentino crashed way too many times during his debut GP season in '96. As his team boss Giampiero Sacchi recalls: 'Many came from Vale just not thinking; the tyres: cold! Give gas: crash!'

► Racers always have to learn the hard way – Vale gets ejected from his Honda NSR while battling with Gary McCoy and Kenny Roberts Junior (2) at Sepang, April 2000. This was his second 500 GP and his second tumble.





▼ Honda's RCV is such a rider-friendly tool that Vale only crashed it a few times. This minor tumble, during practice for the 2003 German GP, was his first in more than a year and over 9000 miles of riding.

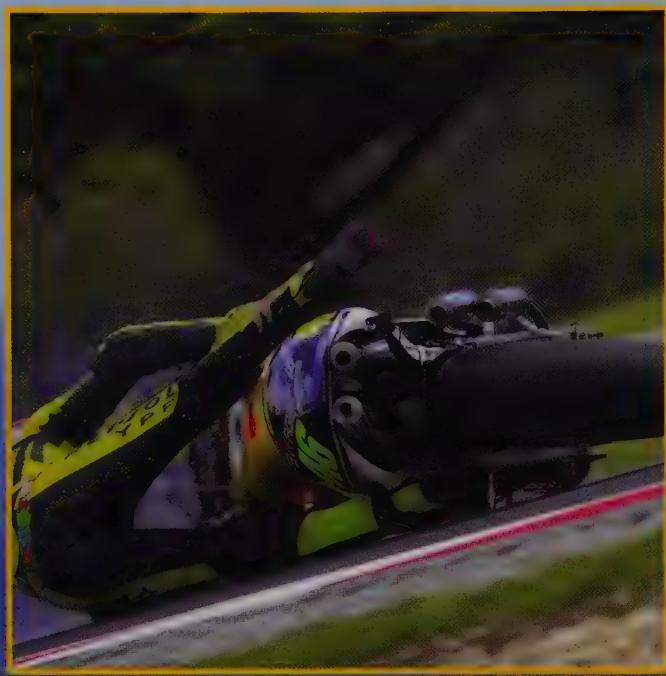
GOLI AND GOOSE



▲ The end of Valentino's Hawaiian dream. Leaving his own wake on the soaking Mugello track, Vale crashes out of the 2001 Italian GP. He'd been trying too hard to catch the leaders.

GOLI

◀ Even after Vale had mastered 500s, the NSR could still creep up and bite him when he was least expecting it. He survived this get-off at Phillip Island in 2001 to secure the 500 title the following day.





▲ Vale makes an ignominious exit, eating the Le Mans dirt during morning warm-up for the 2004 French GP. Struggling with handling problems, he recovered to finish fourth.

MILAGRO



▲ Valentino reckons this tumble marks his career's lowest ebb. Despite a crash-ridden start to his debut 250 season in '98, he still had a chance of the title, until this crash, just four corners into the Czech GP.

GOLD AND GOOSE

▼ What a difference a year makes. Valentino won Jerez 2005 with a do-or-die move on Gibemau at the very last corner. A year later he was knocked out of the season-opening Jerez GP at the very first corner after getting tagged by Toni Elias. Vale got going again to finish 14th. It could have been so much worse – check how close Elias came to running him over...







10.39am Saturday morning, 5 June 2010... the worst crash and worst injury of Valentino's career so far. The rear end of his Yamaha comes round on him as he enters the 110mph Bionetti esses, the rear grips and the bike flicks him over the highside. It's a horrible, looping, bone-cruncher of a crash.

COLD AND CHOCOLATE





Round two of the 2011 season and it's raining hard. Off the pace in practice, Valentino sniffs a hope of victory in the wet, so he's going for it. He passes Lorenzo and is making a run on second-placed Stoner when he loses the front at turn one, with disastrous consequences.

After the race Stoner told Vale: 'your ambition outweighed your talent'.

PHOTOGRAPH BY GUY LAWRENCE

'60s LEGEND
GIACOMO AGOSTINI

'Mother nature gives you this kind of talent. His dad rode for my team once – he wasn't so bad but not like his son. He started racing as a young boy, just doing what he liked doing, playing around, and now he's doing the same but in a different way. He has everything you need to win – courage, sensitivity with the bike, and so on.'

'He's fantastic and he's the best rider out there. He proved that to everybody by changing factories. But it's stupid to ask if he's the best ever. How can you say he's better than Mike Hailwood? To compare them is impossible.'

Ago is the most successful rider of all, with 15 world titles and more than 120 GP wins. He ruled the '60s and kept winning into the '70s. The Italian heartthrob also starred in some movies, then went into team management.

'Mother nature gives you this kind of talent'

Giacomo Agostini

'70s LEGEND
KING KENNY ROBERTS

'The biggest problem with beating Valentino is that he doesn't mind getting beat. To be a good winner you've got to be a good loser. Some days he'll take third, if there's any chance of overcooking it. What keeps him winning is the fact that he loves it all: racing, practice, testing. But is he the greatest? I don't know, I don't think you can classify anyone like that.'

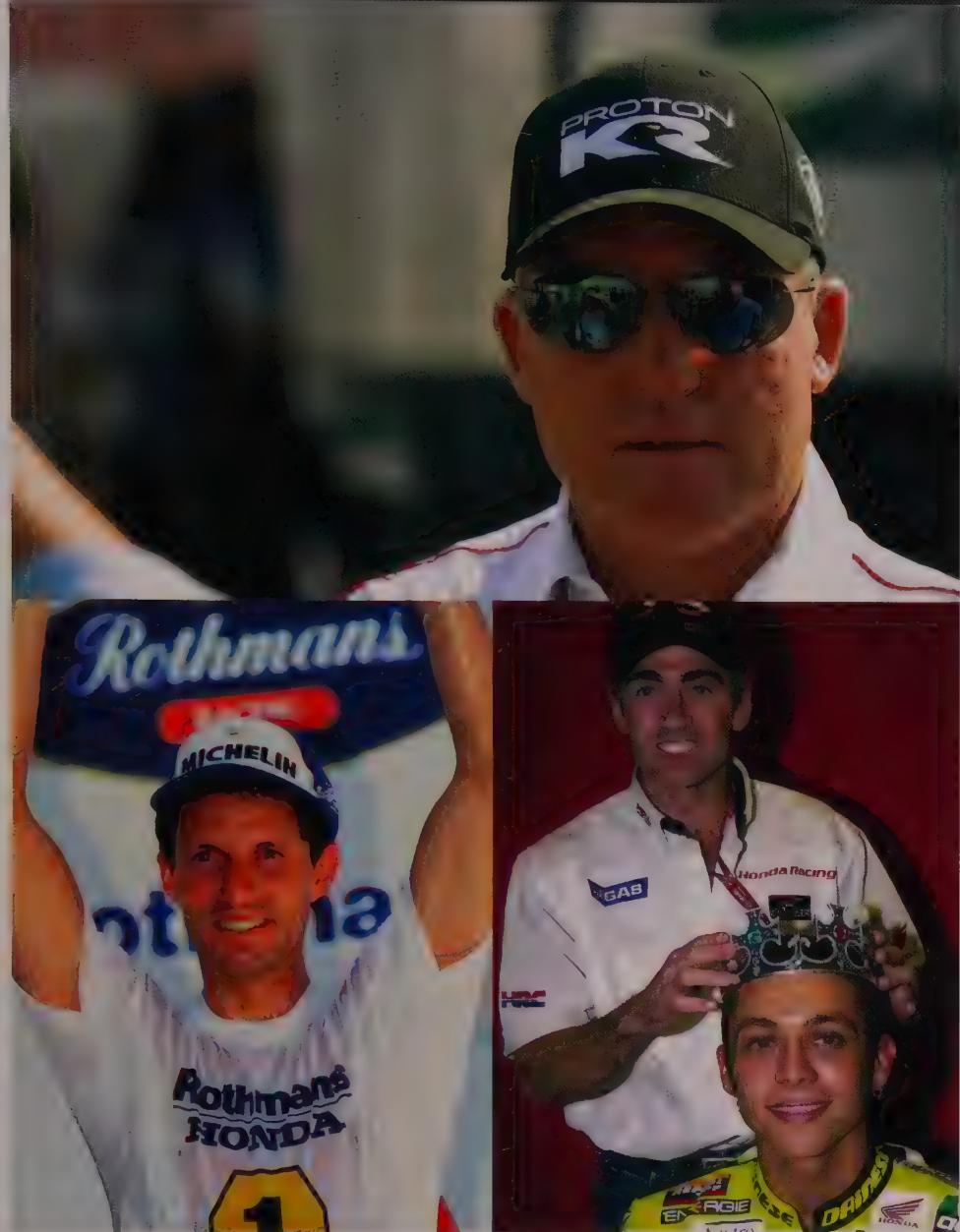
'He rides a bit too close to the limit sometimes, but if he can get away with it, more power to him. It's just his natural ability coming through more than thinking about it: "Okay, I'm going to win this".'

King Kenny Roberts was the first American to win the 500 World Championship, in 1978, using tail-sliding dirt track techniques. He won a hat trick of titles, became a team manager and went on to build his own MotoGP bikes.

▼ Charm offensive: 60s Italian heartthrob Giacomo Agostini chats to 21st century heartthrob Vale on the grid at Mugello, 2003.

► Eddie Lawson was a smooth, deep-thinking rider, just like Valentino.





'ROSE' SCHNID EDDIE LAWSON

'He could be the best ever but it's hard to compare different times. I'm impressed by the guy because he goes fast all the time. He just seems to have the combination of everything where he can ride fast when it's hot, when it's cold, when he doesn't like the track, when it's raining... He's always fast, whereas the other guys seem like they're "I'm from Spain, so I'll go fast when I'm in Spain". Plus he thinks about stuff and he's dedicated.'

'I like the way he rides. He's in control, he doesn't want the bike sliding or wobbling because you go fast with momentum, not by being on the ragged edge.'

Four-time 500 champ Lawson was the first man to win consecutive 500 titles on different bikes, in 1988/1989, quitting Yamaha for Honda. 'Steady Eddie' was a thinking man's racer, known for smooth riding.

◀ No-one understands bike racing and bike riding like King Kenny does.

▼ The king is dead, long live the king! Mick Doohan hadn't been long gone from GPs before a worthy successor to his crown was found.

ROSSI VERSUS HISTORY

Is he the greatest racer ever? The legends of the '60s, '70s, '80s and '90s decide...

'SO LÉGENDE MICK DOOHAN

'Valentino is immensely talented as far as riding a motorcycle goes, but he also has the capacity to think his way through a race. He doesn't get too flustered, he gets going when he needs to, then pulls off the fastest lap on the last lap to win. But if it's the last lap and he's going to finish second, that's where he finishes, he doesn't pitch it down the road. He's well ahead of the bike while the other guys are struggling to keep up with them. So, yes, he's an extremely talented rider, but is he more talented than Eddie Lawson or Kenny Roberts? I don't know, I don't think I can really answer that one.'

Doohan ruled the '90s, winning five back-to-back 500 crowns. After he retired Rossi inherited his pit crew. As HRC general manager, Doohan offered advice to Rossi during his first years on big bikes.



▲ The start of a new life? Valentino amazed the F1 paddock with his speed when he tested alongside F1's big boys at Valencia in January 2006. But he was less impressed with F1. He hated the uptight paddock atmosphere and the pressure from the media, but most of all he hated the racing. 'This is a sport for engineers, not for racers,' he said later.

► Dear oh dear. Vai clammers out of his beached Ferrari on the damp first day of the Valencia tests. But he got faster and faster over the next two days. In the end, though, he decided to stick with bike racing because it's more fun.





◀ Keeping his date with destiny, Vale starts his first WRC event, the Rally of Great Britain, November 2002. He crashed out on the first stage but don't be surprised if he goes rallying after bikes – he prefers it to F1.

AUTO ROSSI

Valentino started racing on four wheels and almost switched to F1 with Ferrari

◀ Possibly his greatest achievement during the Valencia F1 tests – making Ferrari legend Michael Schumacher laugh while wearing his work clothes. Having a laugh isn't actually banned in F1 but...



▲ Enjoying a little R&R a few weeks after losing the 2006 MotoGP title, Vale battles his Subaru Impreza during a stage of the Rally New Zealand at Mystery Creek.

► It's not difficult to see how much he enjoys rallying! In the background is faithful co-driver Carlo Cassina.

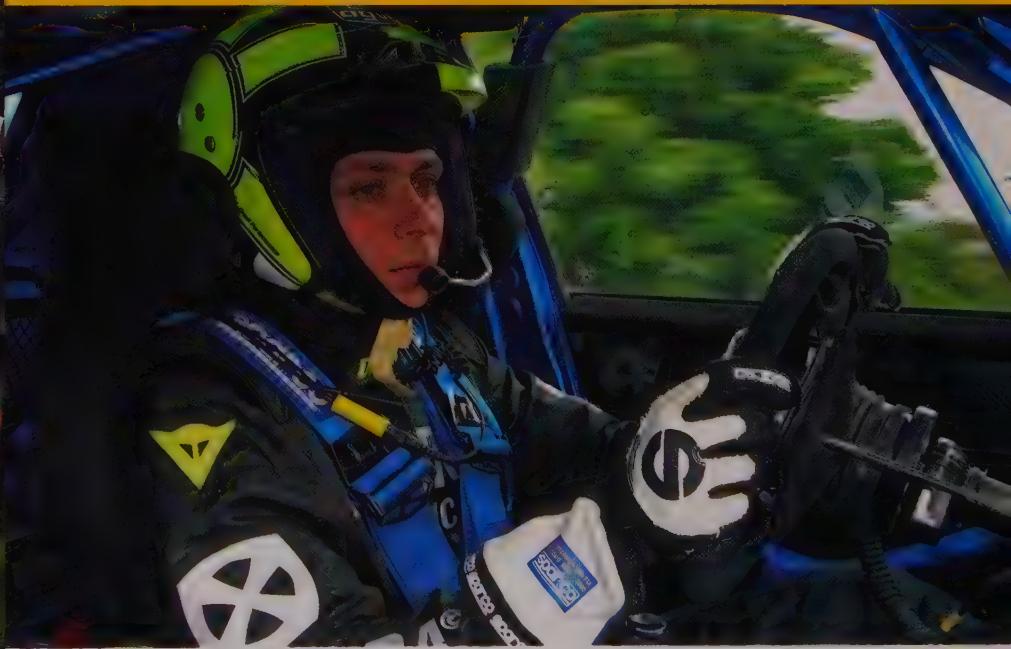
Rally is a lot of fun — more wild than motorcycle racing



Valentino loves rallying because it's looser than F1, both literally and figuratively, and because when he was a kid he spent many a weekend hurtling round the local gravel pit in beaten-up rally cars with his dad, playing the game of throttle versus traction. He's good at it too – in 2006 he took a creditable 11th place in Rally New Zealand.

'Driving rally cars is a lot of fun, a lot of sliding. In circuit racing the most important thing is precision and perfection. In rally it is control

which is most important, so it's fun. I think it is more wild than motorcycle racing. It's so different, you're driving out in the country, with the mechanics working on the cars in the dirt. But I do not know if rally is what I will do when I stop bikes. I like also circuit racing and I think I have a better potential there because I know the circuits. I don't know what kind of car racing, I haven't decided yet, maybe touring cars. Anyway, I hope to have ten years of extra career in cars when I stop with bikes.'



▲ Vale looks relaxed, almost too relaxed as he tackles the New Zealand landscape.



ROSSI'S 'STRIKE RATE'

PREMIER-CLASS WINS [MODERN ERA: 1975-2011]

RIDER	STARTS	WINS	WINNING %
1 Valentino Rossi	190	79	41.6%
2 Mick Doohan	137	54	39.4%
3 Kenny Roberts (Snr)	58	22	37.9%
4 Freddie Spencer	62	20	32.3%
5 Casey Stoner	62	18	29.0%
6 Wayne Rainey	83	24	28.9%
7 Jorge Lorenzo	61	16	26.2%
8 Eddie Lawson	127	31	24.4%
9 Kevin Schwantz	104	25	24.0%
10 Barry Sheene	98	19	19.4%

PREMIER-CLASS PODIUMS [MODERN ERA: 1975-2011]

RIDER	STARTS	PODIUMS	PODIUM %
1 Wayne Rainey	83	64	77.1%
2 Valentino Rossi	190	139	73.2%
3 Mick Doohan	137	95	69.3%
4 Kenny Roberts (Snr)	58	39	67.2%
5 Jorge Lorenzo	61	40	65.6%
6 Eddie Lawson	127	78	61.4%
7 Dani Pedrosa	90	51	56.7%
8 Casey Stoner	92	51	55.4%
9 Wayne Gardner	102	52	51.0%
10 Freddie Spencer	62	31	50.0%
Pat Hennen	24	12	50.0%

ANORAKS' CORNER

- Valentino competed in a record 230 successive Grand Prix races up to crashing and breaking his right leg in practice for the Italian Grand Prix in 2010 at Mugello.
- When he won the 500cc world title in 2001 he became only the third rider to win crowns in three different classes, after Phil Read (125, 250 and 500) and Mike Hailwood (250, 350 and 500).
- Rossi is the only rider to have won World Championships in four classes: 125, 250, 500 and MotoGP.
- Vale and Giacomo Agostini are the only two riders to have won premier-class titles on both two-stroke and four-stroke machinery.
- His win at the 2004 season-opening Grand Prix made him the first rider to take back-to-back premier-class victories on different makes of bike.
- In 2004 he became only the second rider to win back-to-back premier-class titles on different makes of machinery. Eddie Lawson was the first, winning on a Yamaha in 1988 and a Honda in 1989.
- Valentino is the only rider to have scored five successive premier-class victories on a Yamaha.
- His total of 11 wins in 2005 is the highest number of premier-class victories in a single season by a Yamaha rider.
- He is the only rider in history to have won five or more successive races on two different makes of bike.
- He holds the record for successive premier-class podiums, scoring 23 successive top-three results from Portugal 2002 to South Africa 2004. Agostini was the previous record holder with 22 top-three finishes during the 1967, 1968 and 1969 seasons.
- Valentino had the honour of scoring the 500th Grand Prix victory for Honda when he won the Japanese 500cc Grand Prix in April 2001.
- He became the youngest-ever rider to win the 250cc World Championship when he took the title in 1999.
- Valentino finished on the podium at all 16 races in 2003, a record for the number of podiums in a single season at that time.
- He is the only rider to win the premier-class title on four different types of motorcycle: 500cc two-stroke Honda, 990cc four-stroke Honda, 990cc four-stroke Yamaha and 800cc four-stroke Yamaha.
- He is Yamaha's most successful rider of all time with 46 race victories on their bikes.
- His total of 79 race victories in the premier class is more than any other rider in the 63-year history of Grand Prix racing.
- He is the only rider to have stood on the podium in the premier class on more than 100 occasions.
- He has been on the podium 175 times across all classes – more than any other rider in the history of Grand Prix racing.
- Valentino is the only rider to have won at least one Grand Prix in 15 successive seasons.
- Rossi has won at 27 different circuits during his Grand Prix career.

PREMIER-CLASS POLES [MODERN ERA: 1975-2011]

RIDER	STARTS	POLES	POLE %
1 Mick Doohan	137	58	42.34%
2 Freddie Spencer	62	26	41.94%
3 Johnny Cecotto	34	11	32.35%
4 Kenny Roberts (Snr)	58	18	31.03%
5 Casey Stoner	92	28	30.43%
6 Kevin Schwantz	104	29	27.88%
7 Jorge Lorenzo	61	17	27.87%
8 Valentino Rossi	190	49	25.79%
9 Dani Pedrosa	90	17	18.89%
10 Wayne Gardner	102	19	18.6%

PREMIER-CLASS WINS [ALL GPs: 1949-2011]

RIDER	STARTS	WINS	WINNING %
1 John Surtees	34	22	64.7%
2 Giacomo Agostini	119	68	57.1%
3 Mike Hailwood	65	37	56.9%
4 Valentino Rossi	190	79	41.6%
5 Geoff Duke	55	22	40.0%
6 Mick Doohan	137	54	39.4%
7 Gary Hocking	21	8	38.1%
8 Kenny Roberts (Snr)	58	22	37.9%
9 Freddie Spencer	62	20	32.3%
10 Casey Stoner	92	27	29.3%

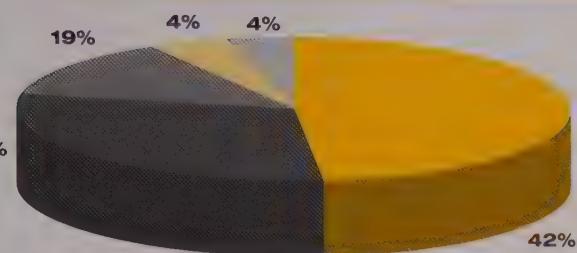
PREMIER-CLASS PODIUMS [ALL GPs: 1949-2011]

RIDER	STARTS	PODIUMS	PODIUM %
1 Wayne Rainey	83	64	77.1%
2 Giacomo Agostini	119	88	73.9%
3 Mike Hailwood	65	48	73.8%
4 Valentino Rossi	190	139	73.2%
5 John Surtees	34	24	70.6%
6 Mick Doohan	137	95	69.3%
7 Kenny Roberts (Snr)	58	39	67.2%
8 Jorge Lorenzo	61	40	65.6%
9 Phil Read	53	34	64.2%
10 Eddie Lawson	127	78	61.4%

Only riders with a minimum of 20 starts are included in the tables on this page

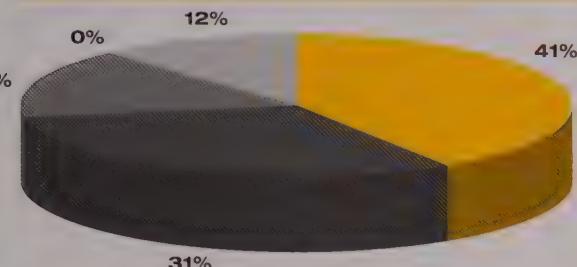
ROSSI'S CAREER STATISTICS

MotoGP RESULTS



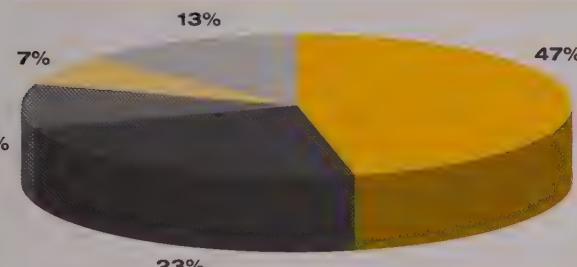
Starts	158
Wins	66
2nd & 3rd	50
4th to 15th	30
Mechanical DNF	6
Crashes	6

500 RESULTS



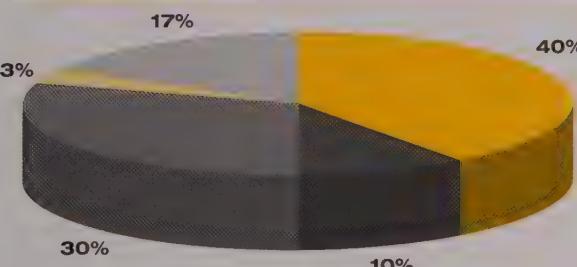
Starts	32
Wins	13
2nd & 3rd	10
4th to 15th	5
Mechanical DNF	0
Crashes	4

250 RESULTS



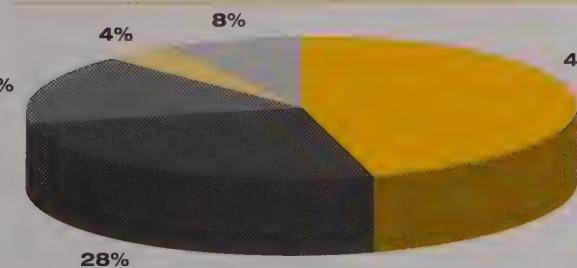
Starts	30
Wins	14
2nd & 3rd	7
4th to 15th	3
Mechanical DNF	2
Crashes	4

125 RESULTS



Starts	30
Wins	12
2nd & 3rd	3
4th to 15th	9
Mechanical DNF	1
Crashes	5

COMBINED RESULTS



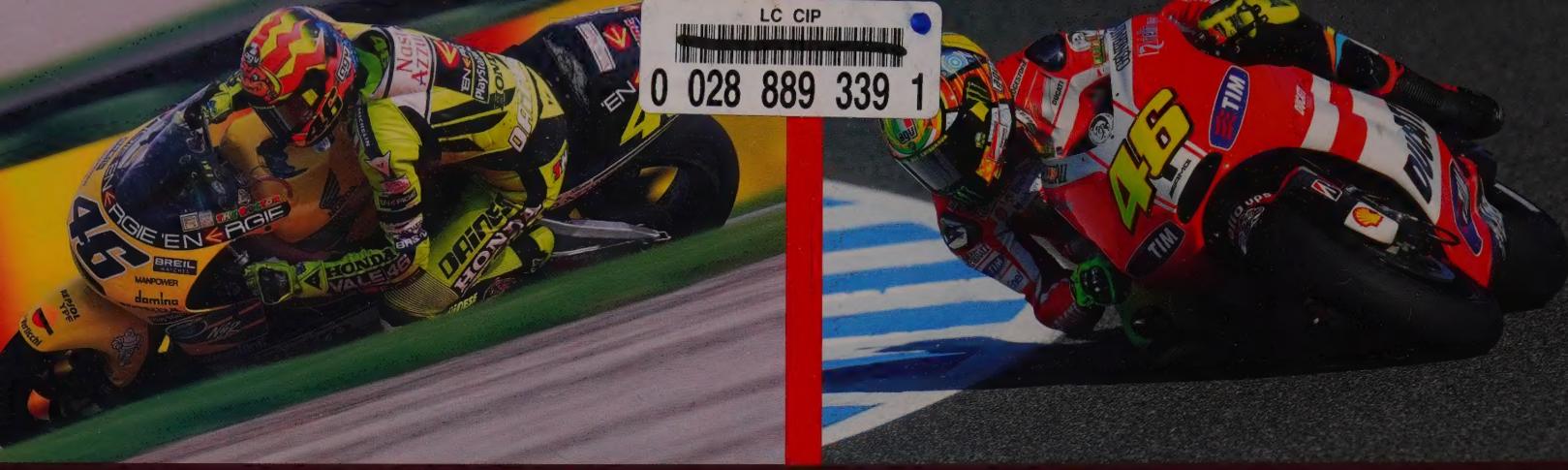
Starts	250
Wins	105
2nd & 3rd	70
4th to 15th	47
Mechanical DNF	9
Crashes	19

ROSSI BY NUMBERS

Awesome statistics
that prove the
man's genius

ROSSI RESULTS

1996 125 World Championship: 9th. Bike: AGV Aprilia RS125R - March 31, Malaysian GP, Shah Alam: 13th/6th. April 7, Indonesian GP, Sentul: 18th/11th. April 21, Japanese GP, Suzuka: 10th/11th. May 12, Spanish GP, Jerez: 7th/4th. May 26, Italian GP, Mugello: 8th/4th. June 9, French GP, Paul Ricard: 13th/DNF, crash, FL. June 29, Dutch GP, Assen: 8th/DNF, crash. July 7, German GP, Nürburgring: 4th/5th July 21, British GP, Donington Park: 9th/DNF, mech. August 4, Austrian GP, A1-Ring: 3rd/3rd. August 18, Czech GP, Brno: pole/1st. September 9, City of Imola GP, Imola: 2nd/5th, FL. September 15, Catalan GP, Catalunya: 5th/DNF, crash. October 6, Rio GP, Jacarepagua: 11th/DNF, crash. October 20, Australian GP, Eastern Creek: 12th/14th. 1997 125 World Championship: 1st Bike: Nastro Azzurro Aprilia RS125R - April 13, Malaysian GP, Shah Alam: pole/1st, FL April 20, Japanese GP, Suzuka: 7th/DNF, crash. May 4, Spanish GP, Jerez: 6th/1st, FL. May 18, Italian GP, Mugello: 3rd/1st. June 1, Austrian GP, A1-Ring: 2nd/2nd, FL. June 8, French GP, Paul Ricard: 3rd/1st. June 28, Dutch GP, Assen: pole/1st. July 6 City of Imola GP, Imola: pole/1st, FL. July 20, German GP, Nürburgring: pole/1st. August 3, Rio GP, Jacarepagua: 2nd/1st, FL. August 17, British GP, Donington Park: 4th/1st, FL. August 31, Czech GP, Brno: 3rd/3rd. September 14, Catalan GP, Catalunya: 4th/1st. September 29, Indonesian GP, Sentul: 4th/1st, FL. October 5, Australian GP, Phillip Island: 3rd/6th. **1998 250 World Championship:** 2nd. Bike: Nastro Azzurro Aprilia RSW250 - April 5, Japanese GP, Suzuka: 7th/DNF, mech. April 19, Malaysian GP, Johor: 2nd/DNF, crash, FL. May 3, Spanish GP, Jerez: 3rd/2nd. May 17, Italian GP, Mugello: 4th/2nd. May 31, French GP, Paul Ricard: 3rd/2nd. June 14, Madrid GP, Jarama: 4th/DNF, crash. June 27, Dutch GP, Assen: 3rd/1st. July 5, British GP, Donington Park: 2nd/DNF, crash. July 19, German GP, Sachsenring: 4th/3rd. August 23, Czech GP, Brno: 2nd/DNF, crash. September 6, City of Imola GP, Imola: 5th/1st. September 20, Catalan GP, Catalunya: 2nd/1st, FL. October 4, Australian GP, Phillip Island: 2nd/1st. October 25, Argentine GP, Buenos Aires: 3rd/1st, FL. 1999 250 World Championship: 1st Bike: Nastro Azzurro Aprilia RSW250 - April 18, Malaysian GP, Sepang: pole/5th. April 25, Japanese GP, Motegi: 11th/7th. May 9, Spanish GP, Jerez: 3rd/1st. May 23, French GP, Paul Ricard: pole/DNF, mech. FL. June 6, Italian GP, Mugello: 6th/1st, FL. June 20, Catalan GP, Catalunya: 2nd/1st, FL. June 26, Dutch GP, Assen: pole/2nd, FL. July 4, British GP, Donington Park: 3rd/1st. July 18, German GP, Sachsenring: pole/1st. August 28, Czech GP, Brno: 3rd/1st, FL. September 5, City of Imola GP, Imola: 3rd/2nd. September 19, Valencia GP, Valencia: 4th/8th. October 3, Australian GP, Phillip Island: 7th/1st, FL. October 10, South African GP, Welkom: 6th/1st, FL. October 24, Rio GP, Jacarepagua: 2nd/1st, FL. October 31, Argentine GP, Buenos Aires: pole/3rd. **2000 500 World Championship:** 2nd. Bike: Nastro Azzurro Honda NSR500 - March 19, South African GP, Welkom: 5th/DNF, crash, FL. April 2, Malaysian GP, Sepang: 7th/DNF, crash. April 9, Japanese GP, Suzuka: 13th/11th. April 30, Spanish GP, Jerez: 2nd/3rd. April 14, French GP, Le Mans: 10th/3rd, FL. May 28, Italian GP, Mugello: 3rd/DNF, crash. June 11, Catalan GP, Catalunya: 9th/3rd. June 24, Dutch GP, Assen: 6th/6th. July 9, British GP, Donington Park: 4th/1st. July 23, German GP, Sachsenring: 6th/2nd. August 20, Czech GP, Brno: 5th/2nd. September 3, Portuguese GP, Estoril: 12th/3rd, FL. September 17, Valencia GP, Valencia: 5th/DNF, crash. October 7, Rio GP, Jacarepagua: 4th/1st, FL. October 15, Pacific GP, Motegi: 5th/2nd, FL. October 29, Australian GP, Phillip Island: 8th/3rd. 2001 500 World Championship: 1st Bike: Nastro Azzurro Honda NSR500 - April 8, Japanese GP, Suzuka: 7th/1st. April 22, South African GP, Welkom: pole/1st, FL. May 6, Spanish GP, Jerez: pole/1st, FL. May 20, French GP, Le Mans: 3rd/3rd. June 3, Italian GP, Mugello: pole/DNF, crash, FL. June 17, Catalan GP, Catalunya: pole/1st, FL. June 30, Dutch GP, Assen: 3rd/2nd, FL. July 8, British GP, Donington Park: 11th/1st, FL. July 22, German GP, Sachsenring: 11th/7th. August 26, Czech GP, Brno: 2nd/1st, FL. September 9, Portuguese GP, Estoril: 3rd/1st. September 23, Valencia GP, Valencia: 2nd/11th. October 7, Pacific GP, Motegi: 4th/1st, FL. October 14, Australian GP, Phillip Island: 2nd/1st. October 21, Malaysian GP, Sepang: 2nd/1st, FL. November 3, Rio GP, Jacarepagua: 5th/1st, FL. **2002 MotoGP World Championship:** 1st. Bike: Repsol Honda RC211V - April 7, Japanese GP, Suzuka: pole/1st, FL. April 21, South African GP, Welkom: pole/2nd. May 5, Spanish GP, Jerez: pole/1st, FL. May 19, French GP, Le Mans: pole/1st, FL. June 2, Italian GP, Mugello: pole/1st. June 16, Catalan GP, Catalunya: 4th/1st, FL. June 25, Dutch TT, Assen: pole/1st, FL. July 14, British GP, Donington Park: pole/1st, FL. July 21, German GP, Sachsenring: 6th/1st, FL. August 25, Czech GP, Brno: 3rd/DNF, mech. September 8, Portuguese GP, Estoril: 3rd/1st, FL. September 21, Rio GP, Jacarepagua: 2nd/1st. October 6, Pacific GP, Motegi: 6th/2nd. October 31, Malaysian GP, Sepang: 8th/2nd. October 20, Australian GP, Phillip Island: 7th/1st, FL. November 3, Valencia GP, Valencia: 6th/2nd. 2003 MotoGP World Championship: 1st Bike: Repsol Honda RC211V - April 6, Japanese GP, Suzuka: pole/1st, FL. April 27, South African GP, Welkom: 2nd/2nd, FL. May 11, Spanish GP, Jerez: 5th/1st, FL. May 25, French GP, Le Mans: pole/2nd. June 8, Italian GP, Mugello: pole/1st. June 15, Catalan GP, Catalunya: pole/2nd, FL. June 28, Dutch TT, Assen: 3rd/3rd. July 13, British GP, Donington Park: 4th/3rd, FL. July 27, German GP, Sachsenring: 4th/2nd. August 17, Czech GP, Brno: pole/1st, FL. September 7, Portuguese GP, Estoril: 3rd/1st. FL. September 20, Rio GP, Jacarepagua: pole/1st. October 5, Pacific GP, Motegi: 3rd/2nd, FL. October 12, Malaysian GP, Sepang: pole/1st, FL. October 19, Australian GP, Phillip Island: pole/1st, FL. November 2, Valencia GP, Valencia: pole/1st, FL. **2004 MotoGP World Championship:** 1st. Bike: Gauloises Yamaha YZR-M1 - April 18, South African GP, Welkom: pole/1st. May 2, Spanish GP, Jerez: pole/4th. May 16, French GP, Le Mans: 4th/4th. June 6, Italian GP, Mugello: 3rd/1st. June 13, Catalan GP, Catalunya: 2nd/1st. June 26, Dutch TT, Assen: pole/1st, FL. July 4, Rio GP, Jacarepagua: 8th/DNF, crash. July 18, German GP, Sachsenring: 2nd/4th. July 25, British GP, Donington Park: pole/1st. August 22, Czech GP, Brno: 3rd/2nd. September 5, Portuguese GP, Estoril: 2nd/1st, FL. September 9, Japanese GP, Motegi: 3rd/2nd. October 2, Qatar GP, Losail: 8th/DNF, crash. October 10, Malaysian GP, Sepang: pole/1st, FL. October 17, Australian GP, Phillip Island: 2nd/1st. October 31, Valencia GP, Valencia: 3rd/1st. 2005 MotoGP World Championship: Bike: Gauloises Yamaha YZR-M1 - April 10, Spanish GP, Jerez: 1st/1st. FL. April 17, Portuguese GP, Estoril: 4th/2nd. May 1, Chinese GP, Shanghai: 6th/1st. May 15, French GP, Le Mans: 1st/1st, FL. June 5, Italian GP, Mugello: 1st/1st. June 12, Catalan GP, Catalunya: 3rd/1st, FL. June 25, Dutch TT, Assen: pole/1st. FL. July 10, US GP, Laguna Seca: 2nd/3rd. July 24, British GP, Donington Park: pole/1st, FL. July 31, German GP, Sachsenring: 4th/1st. August 28, Czech GP, Brno: 4th/1st, FL. September 18, Japanese GP, Motegi: 11th/VDNF. September 25, Malaysian GP, Sepang: 7th/2nd. October 1, Qatar GP, Losail: 3rd/1st. October 16, Australian GP, Phillip Island: 2nd/1st. October 23, Turkish GP, Istanbul Park: 4th/2nd. November 6, Valencia GP, Valencia: 15th/3rd. **2006 MotoGP World Championship:** 2nd. Bike: Camel Yamaha YZR-M1 - March 26, Spanish GP, Jerez: 9th/14th. April 8, Qatar GP, Losail: 6th/1st, FL. April 30, Turkish GP, Istanbul Park: 11th/4th. May 14, Chinese GP, Shanghai: 13th/DNF, mech. May 21, French GP, Le Mans: 7th/DNF. June 4, Italian GP, Mugello: 3rd/1st. June 18, Catalan GP, Catalunya: pole/1st. June 24, Dutch TT, Assen: 18th/8th. July 2, British GP, Donington Park: 12th/2nd. July 16, German GP, Sachsenring: 11th/1st. July 23, US GP, Laguna Seca: 10th/DNF. August 20, Czech GP, Brno: 1st/2nd. September 10, Malaysian GP, Sepang: 1st/1st. September 17, Australian GP, Phillip Island: 3rd/3rd. September 24, Japanese GP, Motegi: 2nd/2nd. October 15, Portuguese GP, Estoril: 1st/2nd. October 29, Valencia GP, Valencia: 1st/13th. 2007 MotoGP World Championship: 3rd. Bike: Fiat Yamaha YZR-M1 - March 10, Qatar GP, Losail: 1st/2nd. March 25, Spanish GP, Jerez: 2nd/1st. April 22, Turkish GP, Istanbul: 1st/10th. May 6, Chinese GP, Shanghai: 1st/2nd. May 20, French GP, Le Mans: 4th/6th. June 3, Italian GP, Mugello: 3rd/1st. June 10, Catalan GP, Catalunya: 1st/2nd. June 24, British GP, Donington Park: 2nd/4th. June 30, Dutch TT, Assen: 11th/1st. July 15, German GP, Sachsenring: 6th/18th. July 22, US GP, Laguna Seca: 5th/4th. August 19, Czech GP, Brno: 6th/7th. September 2, San Marino GP, Misano: 2nd/DNF. September 16, Portuguese GP, Estoril: 3rd/1st. September 19, Japanese GP, Motegi: 2nd/13th. October 14, Australian GP, Phillip Island: 2nd/3rd. October 21, Malaysian GP, Sepang: 9th/5th. November 4, Valencian GP, Valencia: 17th/DNF. **2008 MotoGP World Championship:** 1st. Bike: Fiat Yamaha YZR-M1 - March 9, Qatar GP, Losail: 7th/5th. March 30, Spanish GP, Jerez: 5th/2nd. April 13, Portuguese GP, Estoril: 3rd/3rd. May 4, Chinese GP, Shanghai: 2nd/1st. May 18, French GP, Le Mans: 4th/1st. June 1, Italian GP, Mugello: 1st/1st. June 8, Catalan GP, Catalunya: 9th/2nd. June 24, British GP, Donington Park: 2nd/2nd. June 28, Dutch TT, Assen: 3rd/11th. July 13, German GP, Sachsenring: 7th/2nd. July 20, US GP, Laguna Seca: 2nd/1st. August 17, Czech GP, Brno: 2nd/1st. August 31, San Marino GP, Misano: 2nd/1st. September 14, Indianapolis GP, Indianapolis: 1st/1st. September 28, Japanese GP, Motegi: 4th/1st. October 5, Australian GP, Phillip Island: 12th/2nd. October 19, Malaysian GP, Sepang: 2nd/1st. October 26, Valencian GP, Valencia: 10th/3rd. 2009 MotoGP World Championship: 1st. Bike: Fiat Yamaha YZR-M1 - April 13, Qatar GP, Losail: 2nd/2nd. April 26, Japanese GP, Motegi: 1st/2nd. May 3, Spanish GP, Jerez: 4th/1st. May 17, French GP, Le Mans: 4th/16th. May 31, Italian GP, Mugello: 4th/3rd. June 14, Catalan GP, Catalunya: 2nd/1st. June 27, Dutch TT, Assen: 1st/1st. July 5, US GP, Laguna Seca: 2nd/2nd. July 19, German GP, Sachsenring: 1st/1st. July 26, British GP, Donington Park: 1st/5th. August 16, Czech GP, Brno: 1st/1st. August 30, Indianapolis GP, Indianapolis: 3rd/DNF, mech. September 6, San Marino GP, Misano: 1st/1st, FL. October 4, Portuguese GP, Estoril: 2nd/4th. October 18, Australian GP, Phillip Island, 2nd/2nd, FL. October 25, Malaysian GP, Sepang: 1st/3rd, FL. November 8, Valencian GP, Valencia: 4th/2nd. **2010 MotoGP World Championship:** 3rd. Bike: Fiat Yamaha YZR-M1 - April 11, Qatar GP, Losail, 2nd/1st. May 2, Spanish GP, Jerez, 4th/3rd. May 23, French GP, Le Mans, 1st/2nd. June 6, Italian GP, Mugello, DNS. June 20, British GP, Silverstone, DNS. June 26, Dutch TT, Assen, DNS. July 4, Catalan GP, Catalunya, DNS. July 18, German GP, Sachsenring, 5th/4th. July 28, United States GP, Laguna Seca, 6th/3rd. August 15, Czech GP, Brno, 5th/5th. August 29, Indianapolis GP, Indianapolis, 7th/4th. September 5, San Marino GP, Misano, 4th/3rd. September 19, Aragon GP, Aragon, 7th/6th. October 3, Japanese GP, Motegi, 2nd/3rd, FL. October 10, Malaysian GP, Sepang, 6th/1st, FL. October 17, Australian GP, Phillip Island, 8th/3rd. October 31, Portuguese GP, Estoril, 3rd/2nd. November 7, Valencian GP, Valencia, 4th/3rd. 2011 MotoGP World Championship: Bike: Ducati Desmosedici GP11 - March 20, Qatar GP, Losail, 9th/7th. April 3, Spanish GP, Jerez, 12th/5th. FL. May 1, Portuguese GP, Estoril, 9th/5th. May 15, French GP, Le Mans, 9th/3rd. June 5, Catalan GP, Catalunya, 7th/5th. June 12, British GP, Silverstone, 13th/6th. June 25, Dutch TT, Assen, 11th/4th. July 3, Italian GP, Mugello, 12th/6th. July 17, German GP, Sachsenring, 16th/9th. And so on and so forth... ■



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