

MOTOCROSS encounters the owner of TM RACING

GASTONE SERAFINI



Mantova, 6th of March. The MX1/MX2 motocross Grand Prix of Italy. It is the most important event of the season where a number of important executives which we never see, tend to show up. Like Gastone Serafini, the co-owner of TM Racing, who rarely leaves his factory in Pesaro where he is at the top of the command triangle, day and night. During the night, as a number of machining centers work the night shift and they might need someone to keep an eye on them after dinner and Gastone lives right next door... Nowadays he is probably less involved with operational decisions and more involved with the strategic ones ("I'm the one who takes the final decision") but it's always true that with regards to work he doesn't know time limits. He is a huge fan of motocross and had a successful career as a rider, where at a certain point, he took on the role of manufacturer going against the tide and has become successful. Against the tide because TM was born and has grown in the same era as the Japanese giants, with success as today with his brother Stefano and their partner Flenghi he guides the factory that manufactures 1300-1500 bikes a year (60-70% enduro) and 3000 kart engines.

He wants to get something off his chest. "I read in **MOTOCROSSDIGITAL.COM** the article covering the opening round of the world championship in Walkensvaard, where we finished in the points and I said to myself: 'it's probably on the next page!' But I didn't see a single photo or paragraph mentioning our achievement... and we're an Italian company! Other magazines in the past have ignored us, but they have at least printed a small photo..." What can I say. We publicly apologize. He is not the type of person to go looking for commercial gain, but rather is driven by his passion! Gastone has motocross in his heart, he can build bikes, go to races and succeed in other disciplines (motard for example) but his true passion is MX. He immediately begins smiling again and like in the good old days when the Italian factories made parties out of the Italian world motocross rounds with the introduction of new products, he begins speaking freely about next years TM's.

"The entire 2008 line up will have the perimeter style aluminium frame, made from a number of stamped and extruded sections. The first prototype will be used by Manuel Priem in the MX1 world championship. I hope to have it ready for the Faenza round of the world championship that was just announced; at the same time we will have the official photos."

It's the passage of an epic. What does this mean to a company like TM?

"It has created much difficulty in the company. We have a lot of experience with the steel frame, the aluminium one required a lot of investment in CNC machines, the selection of new suppliers, we augmented the research and development team to design the new frame and required stamps. Almost two million Euros... five-hundred thousand for the plastics alone".

Will you manufacture the frame or use an external supplier?

"The raw material is purchased by TM, the

Tooling was built in TM. The components will be manufactured outside.

"I believe ~~that~~ ~~for~~ A 124-144 is a bike that will help a lot of kids grow. It helps your learning because if you don't ride it

Is the aluminium frame useful to help the image of the company or does it represent an important technical innovation that is necessary for a motocross bike?

"I think that with the progression of the suspension, especially in the manufacturing methods, and even for end users, it is necessary to have an aluminium frame, its stiffer. In the past, having suspension that was a bit more economical, we needed the frame to be able to absorb a certain amount of flex. Now a frame that is more rigid and a bit lighter is an inevitable step ahead".

Will it come equipped with the standard suspension?

"Marzocchi-Ohlins. We will remain in contact with Ohlins for the forks and Paioli will remain as the alternative, as a number of clients request them. The majority of the bikes will come with the Marzocchi forks and Ohlins shock".

Redesigning the frame means rebuilding the bike. Has this also allowed you the opportunity to introduce a number of additional technical changes or have you reproduced the actual dimensions?

"We modified the position of the linkage of the swingarm, the geometry of the linkage and the geometry of the steering head. We tried to adjust every part of the bike to improve it, we did not make any compromises, everything that we needed to do has been done".

This important upgrade of the model line, how does it fit in with the role of the present TM?

"TM had a few difficult moments - maybe these are not the most exact words - in the past, with the passage from two to four strokes. Now TM has grown a lot, we have a couple of very capable people in the new team and we are still growing... the results speak for themselves. We are growing, I'm truly content with the work group within TM".

All of the bikes have been redesigned?

"All of them. 125-144, 125 enduro, 250-300 motocross/enduro, 250-450-530 motocross/enduro".

Motard?

"We'll see. The use of the aluminium frame has been decided, but we still need to do a lot of testing".

Today the launch of a new licensed motorcycle requires a lot of thought with regards to the emissions and the anti-pollution laws. Is this difficult?

"With the arrival of the new guys in TM - Eddy Rossi has been with us a long time, Claudio Fava ex Aprilia, and a couple of other engineers: Marco Poggiali ex Oral and Andrea Federici - we have a team that understands the problems. In my opinion the emissions and the noise are the main causes to the cost increases, without a doubt; it can be overcome and the bikes get better, but the final customer will be a bit penalized for these - correct - laws".

144 displacement. TM is the only company that has built a dedicated bike in the market. How is it going, what's the interest of the market?

"I have seen some interest, we have sold 70-80 bikes in a month and a half. The response of the market is positive because the public wants a bike that is a bit larger. Even with regards to the four strokes, many are riding around with a 300. It's the mania of having a bigger engine, to work on it... generally the public as well as the fans are curious when there is something new".

We have not had a chance to test your bike... from the point of view of power, are the 144 and 250 4T equivalent or is the 144 always a bit underpowered?

"They are very close. I was a bit skeptical. But the kids are very content and the market is responding. In a heads up contest the 4T will always win, but they are very close".

There is a discussion between the bosses of the federations (even in the USA) and the manufacturers with the idea of conserving the two stroke, maybe having a dedicated class. The 144 could be the

Best Displacement class or will we see something better

correctly it will not go by itself. Bigger displacements go by themselves, a 125-144 needs to be pushed or it doesn't go. It could be the right bike".

Your comments with regards to the statement '450 cross is too big a displacement'. Some people are talking about reducing the displacement: your thoughts?

"In my opinion, it would be an error to make a 350 for example. If you make a limited 450 all of the internal parts last longer, for the user this is an advantage, it costs less and you still have a 4 stroke which is what they want today. A 350 could have the same power output, but it would require more technology, and therefore would cost more and require more maintenance. In the end - my idea - the result is the same but the cost goes up".

Another topic, noise. At the tracks and even the riders, it seems that they are all starting to agree that there is too much noise. How much time will pass before we see a change? Injection, a technology that we will see in the near future, with the sound testing you can use a few tricks, maps that are dedicated, strategies to reduce the noise. How will this come to an end?

"It's complicated. I've seen a bit of everything. The paddock reacts to the limits of the restrictions with plugs in the exhaust and other tricks, maps... silencers that are later opened up. There is a lot of confusion. Surely, the rules are not very clear, there will always be smart people that push the limits of the rules. To be sure, we need to look at the rules as well as the decibel limits, without a doubt there are some problems with the rules. This will also have a cost impact, to silence these bikes the engine temperature will rise and the power will decrease. We will need to find another path to arrive at the same result, a path that is more complicated. It would be easy to say 'lets put a more efficient silencer on the bike', but as a manufacturer it's not that easy".

TM and research: are you still active with the 2 strokes?

"We were born with this engine, we develop it constantly, you don't need a lot of investment. By now 70-80% of our research potential is dedicated to the development of the 4 strokes. On the 2008 2T, in particular, we have a new double map ignition produced by Kokusan".

And the resources dedicated to the 4T are paying off?

"We are developing a new 250cc engine. It's a lot of work. We have seen that the market is moving towards the 250. Today in production we have an engine derived from the 450 and it is a bit overdimensioned, we are building a new engine that is dedicated, trying to use the best ideas from a number of passionate competitors".

Timing?

"The bike should already be on the track. There have been a number of slow downs and reflections, we are evaluating the collaboration with an external engineering company, even Americans, in order to build this engine with the best possible quality. We are preparing it for 2009: our program foresees our debut in the MX2 class next year with a few bikes going to some very close clients and production starting after summer holidays".

Single cam? Twin cam?... Balance shaft?

"Twin cam. Without a counterbalancer as the smaller displacement does not require one. With the possibility of a six speed transmission. Oil in the cylinder and head separate from the transmission. That weight as little as possible as today in motocross the agility is very important, fast directional changes... less weight is an advantage. We will mount it in a 125 two stroke frame".

Other sectors, supermotard...

"This has been very satisfying for us. The engine used by Gozzini in his debut is a mix between the 700 and the old

660. It has been working well from the beginning. Its winning. It doesn't seem to win with Flat Times, well see if we're able to keep it from going Flat

"The entire 2008 model range will have the aluminium perimeter frame. The first prototype will be used by Manuel Priem in the MX1 world championship, hopefully in Faenza... The aluminium frame demanded a lot of new investments in machining centers, the selection of new suppliers and new personnel in the technical department for the design of the frame as well as various stamps... TM had, maybe, a difficult time during the transition from two strokes to four strokes. Now we have grown a lot, in the organization there are a pair of new people that are very capable and we are growing... the results speak for themselves. I'm truly content with the new