



Team Owner Bob MacLean...



By Michael Gougis

Looking at professional-level racing today, it's easy to understand why a non-factory podium is an event celebrated by fans and racing journalists. Aside from freak weather-impacted races, it is rare that any of the factory teams are beaten by their lesser-funded colleagues to a top-three finish, and even rarer when a satellite team rider beats all of the factory team men and machines.

In the past decade, there has been exactly one dry-weather victory by a satellite team rider in MotoGP, in 2016 by Cal Crutchlow at Phillip Island, and that one came only after Marc Marquez, having already clinched the title, crashed while leading. (And given that Crutchlow is contracted directly to HRC as a development rider, calling his LCR Honda RC213V a satellite bike might be stretching the definition of "satellite...")

In that light, the accomplishments of American racer and team owner Bob MacLean are simply otherworldly. MacLean and Peter Clifford, who formed World Championship Motorsports, established the team as a solid satellite effort in the 500cc World Championship series in the 1990s and got the call when one of the factory Yamaha teams collapsed. Taking over that team's machines and riders, WCM podiumed in its first season, won in its second season, won again the following season, and then in 2000 took six podiums, three wins, and at one

Garry McCoy (24) won the 500cc Grand Prix at Valencia in 2000, riding a YZR500 for Bob MacLean's WCM Red Bull Yamaha team. Here, McCoy leads Kenny Lee Roberts (a.k.a. Junior) (2) and Valentino Rossi (46) with Max Biaggi (in red) trailing. McCoy also won in Portugal and South Africa that year. Photo by Yves Jamotte/DPPI Media. (Below, Right) McCoy (8) on the team's Yamaha YZR500 in 2001.

point led the 500cc World Championship points. To date, the five victories for WCM are the greatest number of wins for any non-factory team in the modern 500cc/MotoGP era. It is astounding.

"Here's a guy who had a pretty good team in the AMA," says MacLean, 81, now retired and living in Jackson Hole, Wyoming. "All of a sudden, in my wildest dreams, I would never have thought that I would be standing on a podium celebrating a 500cc Grand Prix victory! When I think back on that, all of those days, that was among the top thrills of my life. We had more frigg'n' podiums and victories. We had a terrific run. I look back at that with a lot of satisfaction. It was a great experience."

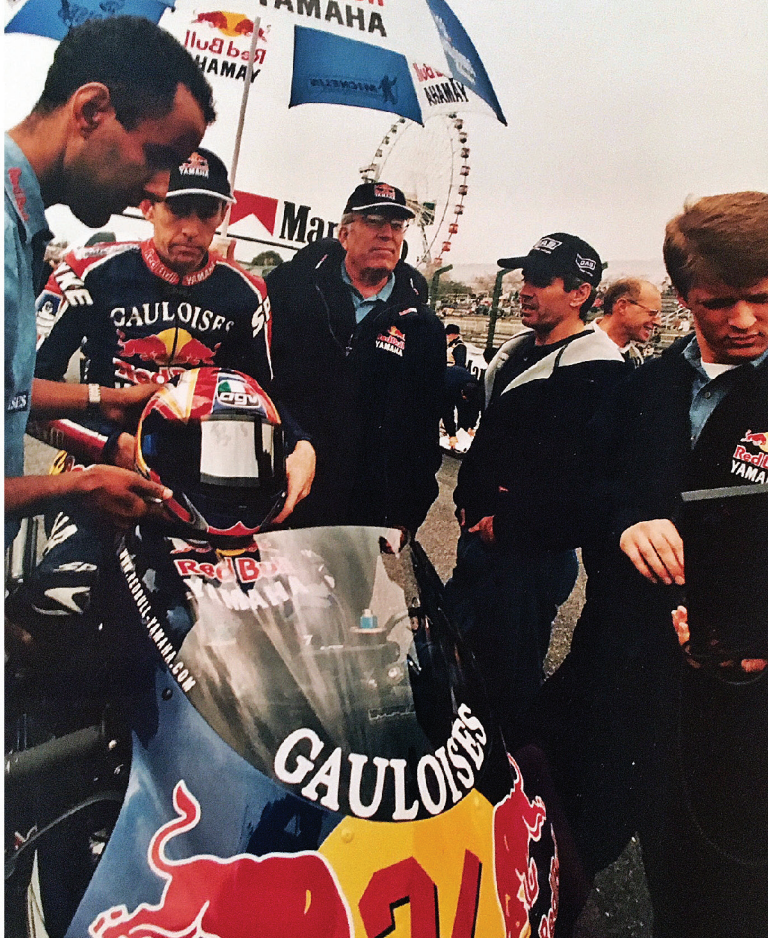
MacLean's name might not sound familiar to fans new to the sport, but another MacLean might. Son Ian MacLean has produced some of the best-reviewed films about motorcycle road racing, including *Faster*, *The Doctor*, *The Tornado* and *The Kentucky Kid*, *Fastest* and *Hitting The Apex*. MacLean's son lives close to him, and the two visit on a regular basis.

Bob MacLean's racing story began with him behind the handlebars. Back in the day, a Grand Prix race start was something far more accessible than it is today, and MacLean took



a Norton to 11th in the 1967 Canadian Grand Prix at Mosport Park.

But team management interested MacLean after he was done riding, for a very simple reason. "Some years later, I decided, I'd like to try to make a business of this. I got involved with Richard Schlachter. I wanted to get Mike Baldwin, but Mike got hurt that year and Richard was around and we talked. I sponsored Richard and he won a couple of the AMA Formula One Championships back in 1979 and 1980." MacLean ran a Yamaha TZ750 for Schlachter in the



AMA Formula One series, and kept one of Schlachter's TZ750 race-bikes for years.

That led to MacLean's introduction to GP racing on the Continent, with Schlachter in 1981 on a Yamaha TZ250. "We decided, 'OK, let's go to Europe.' We did the 250s, and the one year we did it he finished 10th in the World Championship, which is fantastic," MacLean says. "We just came over with a TZ250, and Kevin Cameron did some tuning, and that sort of got my toe in the water with GPs."

MacLean ran more high-profile riders in the U.S. in the mid-1980s, including Wayne Rainey and Grand Prix Champion Kork Ballington. "He (Ballington) came to the States when he was a four-time Champion in GPs. It was amazing. He rode a Honda RS500 and an RS250 for us. But that came to an end—the money was going out faster than it was coming in, which is typical of motorcycle racing, I guess."

Only temporarily deterred, MacLean jumped back in, and into the deep end of the pool, in 1992. Yamaha had made 500cc V-4 two-stroke GP engines available, and Serge Rosset's ROC firm started building GP-spec chassis. MacLean partnered with Clifford to form WCM, which ran as Team Valvoline/WCM in 1992 with riders Peter Goddard and Andrew Stroud. The next year, Niall Mackenzie snatched third in the British 500cc Grand Prix at Donington Park, the

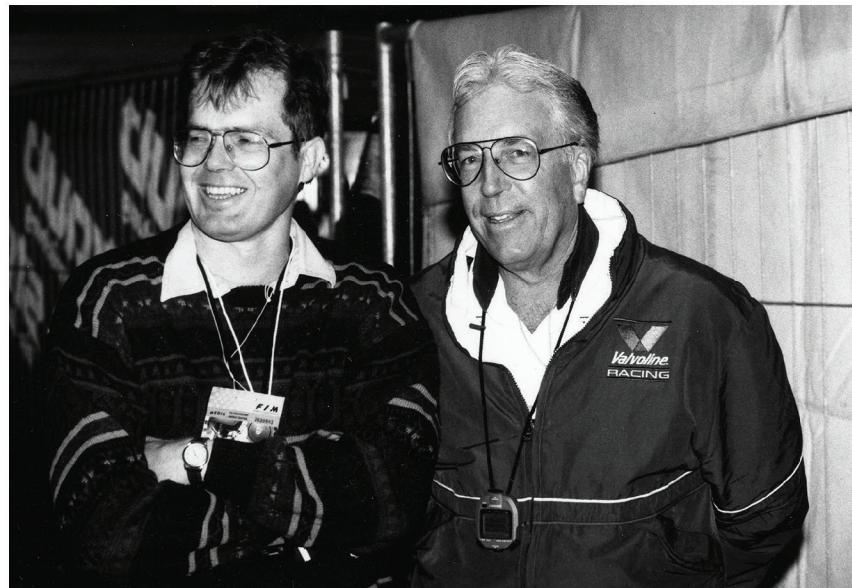
team's first podium.

The team plugged away until opportunity came knocking in 1997. "This energy drink company called Power Horse had signed Troy Corser and Luca Cadalora to run the Grand Prix races. As the season approached it became known that Power Horse didn't have the money to do it," MacLean says. "So between Peter Clifford and I, we thought, this might be an opportunity for us to step in and save Yamaha's bacon. They'd already built the bikes. So we did a deal with Yamaha, which was great. We had a great deal where they provided all the equipment for us.

"We went from there to the Red Bull sponsorship—we brought the idea to Red Bull and Dietrich Mateschitz (owner of Red Bull) because the Power Horse equipment was going to go back to Power Horse. So he said, 'I'll be the best sponsor you ever had.' And he was. Fantastic man, and a fantastic businessman."

Clifford recalls the opportunity in vivid detail. "Mr. Iio (Toshimitsu Iio), then Director of Racing for Yamaha) spoke to me at the first Grand Prix of the season in Malaysia," Clifford remembers. "He said, 'Peter-san, you and Bob-san have always been asking us for factory bikes. There are four sitting in the (Power Horse) garage there. Would you like them?'"

"I called Bob. We met up the following week in Japan at Yamaha headquarters in Hamamatsu and



(Above) Bob MacLean (right) and Peter Clifford (left) in 1997; they started World Championship Motorsports (WCM) before the 1992 season. (Left) McCoy, MacLean, and Mick Doohan on the grid with crew men in 2000.

made the agreement. The bikes ran the following weekend at the Japanese GP in Suzuka and were shipped direct to Jerez for the GP running in Power Horse colors.

"Bob and I went from Jerez to Salzburg and met Mateschitz and agreed for the rest of the 1997 season. I went from there to Italy where the team was based and started sorting things out. We raced as Red Bull Yamaha from the next GP in Mugello where Luca Cadalora took second behind Mick Doohan. At the end of the year we completely restructured the team and moved our base to Strasswalchen in Austria, close to Red Bull."

Contract talks with the riders had gotten tricky at first, and Corser was the first to leave. "We had to negotiate with Luca and Troy, and Troy was making rather aggressive demands on us in terms of what he wanted, including money," MacLean says. "He wanted Yamaha to provide all this stuff. And Yamaha said, 'Even Kenny (Roberts) doesn't ask for all that stuff!' So we let Troy go, over much grimacing, and kept Luca. And Kirk McCarthy was our number two guy, he later passed in a bike accident in Australia, great young guy—that was our first Red Bull team. We had a few podiums with them."

The next season saw the winning start. Simon Crafar won the British Grand Prix with the team in 1998, and Regis Laconi won at Valencia in 1999. Then came Garry McCoy, who won the opening round of the 2000 season in South Africa and backed it up with wins in Portugal and Valencia, Spain.

"Those were the golden years for us, in terms of performance. After two rounds, we were leading

the World Championship! And that was much to the (dismay) of Marlboro and Yamaha. Everyone says, when you're leading, you get all the good stuff. Yeah, sure we do. We didn't get the good stuff. We got some things. We didn't get what the main players were getting. But that's OK. That was the reality.

"For the manufacturer to give you the good stuff, you need several things. First of all, you need the rider. What makes an attractive rider to a manufacturer? Obviously, it's performance. But another thing is, what country is he from? If it's a U.S. rider and the U.S. market is big for a Yamaha or whatever, the markets in those big countries can help support Yamaha's money. It's not just Yamaha money, it's Yamaha Europe or Yamaha Germany that weighs in on those decisions."

"The other thing is that you're going to go to somebody and say, 'We have this team. We're not the factory team, with a capital 'F.' We're a satellite team. But we want the \$8 million it's going to cost to get you into sixth or seventh place.' Forget it! It's a ridiculous thing. That's what you're up against."

McCoy earned those three wins plus three more podiums to wrap up the 2000 season, and Max Biaggi was the only Yamaha rider who finished the season with more points than McCoy. It was making the Yamaha factory just a bit nuts. WCM was modifying engine locations in the chassis, experimenting with 16.5-inch rims and Michelin tires, and was making it work.

"We suddenly were going fast and beating factory people; we had improved the results by changing the size of the wheel. We went to a 16.5-inch wheel. And if you



(Above) The WCM four-stroke in 2004. (Left) Bob MacLean with mechanic Donnie Dove and rider Rich Schlachter, fielding a Yamaha TZ250 at 1981 at the British GP. Photo by Ian MacLean.

remember Garry's style, it was very speed-way-ish. For the layman, they would think, 'Man, he's spinning the tire, it's got to be burning up,'" MacLean says. "It actually ran cooler when it was spinning! But the big thing was moving the engine in the chassis. And Yamaha said, 'Oh no, no, no, that's not gonna work. You can't do that.' Well, Hamish Jamieson (the team's Race Engineer) said, 'We're getting the results, we're going to keep doing it.'"

At one point, it oh-so-nearly paid off, Vegas-style. But it turned into one of the biggest disappointments of MacLean's career. "I have a friend who is in sports marketing, and he introduced me to the man who spent all of ExxonMobil's money in motorsports. They had Penske, they had Formula One, all of these affiliations. We had several meetings with them," MacLean said. "And they agreed what they would like to do is that they would like to include Yamaha as one of their headline associations, just as they were associated with Porsche, Mercedes-Benz, all of those. They were all excited about it. What they wanted in return is that (Yamaha) mention Mobil 1 in the owner's manuals, or you'd be the official lubricant of Grand Prix races, that sort of thing. They wanted the marketing message."

The first half of the meeting in Hamamatsu went well. "The Mobil guys give this fabulous presentation," MacLean says. "The last image is a list of Mercedes-Benz, Penske, Porsche, Detroit Diesel, all of these names of all the companies they were associated with. And the president of Yamaha stands up and he points to the screen and says, 'I would like to see us right here.' Peter and I, we're already spending the money! This is the most exciting thing that's ever happened to us."

Then, after a short break, the meeting reconvened. And the head of the Yamalube division gave the proposal a big thumbs-down. "The Yamalube guy torpedoed the whole thing! They wanted Yamalube in the owner's manuals," MacLean says. "You should have seen the group of us standing on the subway platform on the way home. It was embarrassing. When you think, the largest oil company in the world would have been our partner—and they would have paid the whole budget! They would have paid for Yamaha's racing. It was bizarre. Absolutely bizarre."

The shift from 500cc GP two-strokes to



(Above, Left) Bob MacLean is now retired. He's shown at his home in Jackson Hole, Wyoming, in 2018. Photo by Ian MacLean. (Above, Right) MacLean at Daytona in 1987. Photo by John Ulrich.

honoring it. And (the bikes) were reasonably good. We were competing against Kenny (Roberts), he'd built a three-cylinder bike, and we were doing well against him.

"They wouldn't let us on the grid. That just killed us. We had to go to trial, we had lawyers, and didn't get a lot of support from Ezpeleta and Dorna. And ultimately the idea that we owned these spots on the grid, this franchise, went up in smoke. We felt kind of abused by that."

Clifford had done a deal with Blata to develop a V-6 engine for the 2005 season, but that failed to materialize. And with other promises unfulfilled and other options closing, MacLean finally turned his back on the GP paddock.

"All of these acquaintances—it's all about



MotoGP four-strokes also nearly paid off for WCM. At one point, MacLean and Clifford had grid spots guaranteed and factory backing for an awesome machine. That, too, fell apart.

"We had done a deal—we were one of five teams to do a deal with Dorna to become independent teams. We had a franchise agreement—we had two spots on the grid. So some engineers got together and said if we start with the (Yamaha YZF-R1) engine, we can use that. All the suspension technology, we can get that. We can have the Öhlins shocks, it's all available. All we need is a prototype powerplant. So we had an engineering team go to work to make it more efficient, faster, more powerful," MacLean says.

Clifford says Harris built the chassis, and he did the original CAD drawings for the crankcases. Engineer Coen Baijens contributed an original cylinder head design, and the team started producing the parts. But there was no way to have the prototype engine ready for the start of the 2003 season, so the team went to the races with heavily re-engineered YZF-R1 engines—and were banned from starting.

"It was going to be a prototype if they had given us a few more months. We would have had all original stuff. But we had this commitment to Dorna and Mr. (Carmelo) Ezpeleta to put two racebikes on the grid, and we were

developing a sense of trust. And slowly you start crossing names off the list," MacLean said. "I trust people until they give me a reason not to trust them. And they give you a lot of reasons not to trust them..."

Nowadays, MacLean is enjoying his retirement, looking out his window at the Teton Range of the Rocky Mountains. He's selling off some of his racebikes. His collection is small but storied: The bike that Mackenzie took to the British GP podium, the bike that Crافر took to the British GP win.

And he is enjoying his time watching Grand Prix racing. Having raced himself, having worked with some of the best riders in history, and having put a bike atop the podium at the absolute highest level of the sport, MacLean has a unique perspective on GP racing, and from that perspective, he can appreciate what he is seeing as few can.

"The racing—Moto2 and Moto3—is just breathtaking. I enjoy watching (Valentino) Rossi—he's having fun. He's a throwback. But I enjoy watching all of them," MacLean says. "What they do is bravery at its highest level. You immerse yourself in this incredible world of sound and danger and you can function and make these micro moves and have this sensitive feel on the throttle—jeez, it's spectacular."

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