



(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.

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

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



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 Crafar 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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