

The 2023-24 New Zealand Superbike Championships

BIKE RACERS HANDLE TOUGH CONDITIONS BRILLIANTLY

CAPTION: It's a high-speed traffic jam at the start of this Formula Two/Supersport 600 race at Taupo at the weekend. Photo by Andy McGechan, BikesportNZ.com



DECEMBER 4, 2023: It was a thrill-a-minute at the opening round of the 2023 New Zealand Superbike Championships (NZSBK) in the Bay of Plenty at the weekend.

Taupo's International Motorsport Park hosted this first round of the combined Suzuki International Series and New Zealand Superbike Championships and, despite the vastly different weather conditions over the two days, all riders adapted brilliantly and produced an entertainment package that had the good-sized crowd standing on their feet.

The NZSBK series is again this season being run in conjunction with the Suzuki International Series, with the first two rounds recognised as rounds one and two of both parallel-but-separate competitions.

The racing was intense from the start with several riders enjoying stellar weekends, most prominent among them being defending Suzuki International Series and national superbike champion Mitch Rees, who qualified fastest in the premier F1/superbikes class and then finished 1-1-2 in the three points races that followed.

He was beaten to the chequered flag only once all weekend and that 'defeat' was handed to the Whakatane man by his own team-mate, his multi-time former champion father, Tony Rees.

Invercargill's Cormac Buchanan got his F2/Supersport 600 class title defence off to a perfect start as he qualified fastest and then scored a hat-trick of wins, finishing the weekend ahead of fellow Kiwi international Shane Richardson, from Wainuiomata.

Also unbeaten at the weekend was a first-time visitor to New Zealand, British rider Davey Todd, who dominated the supermoto class. The 28-year-old from North Yorkshire qualified fastest and then scored a hat-trick of wins to keep Whanganui's defending national supermoto champion Richie Dibben in chase mode for most of the weekend.

Taupo's Karl Hooper dominated the F3/Pro Twins in identical fashion, while Papakura's Craig Coulam proved untouchable in the Formula Sport Senior class, out-scoring Paraparaumu's Richard Markham-Barrett, who had been the fastest qualifier in the class.

An unfortunate crash in race two, not of his doing, proved costly for Markham-Barrett.

Dual-class rider Hooper is just one point behind Hastings man Gian Louie at the top of the Post Classic Pre-89 Senior class.

Hamilton's Jesse Stroud, the young son of now-retired nine-time former national superbike champion Andrew Stroud, was outstanding with an unbeaten run in the Supersport 300 class, while Christchurch's Jordan Leslie, Invercargill's Jon Rawcliffe and Auckland's Scott Findlay were also perfect in their respective battles for separate Post Classic class honours.

Panmure's Adam Unsworth, riding with Whanganui's Bryce Rose as his 'passenger', got their F1 sidecars title defence off to a great start, finishing the weekend 10 points clear of the Spike Taylor and Kendal Dunlop pairing from Masterton.

But perhaps the closest battle all weekend was between the F2 sidecars teams of Whanganui family crew Peter and Lucy Dowman and the Ian Burke and George Vennell pairing from Edgecumbe – these two crews finished the weekend equal on points.

NZSBK series co-ordinator SJ Cavell, who was national Pro Twins 650cc class champion in 2021, said: "We were treated to some outstanding racing at the weekend, especially in the wet conditions on Sunday. Some of the skills on display in those very tricky conditions was world class.

"We cannot wait to get to the second round next weekend," he said.

Motorcycling New Zealand road-race commissioner Andy Skelton was similarly upbeat.

"What a great weekend of racing! The whole mix really leaves so much on the table for the next two rounds in terms of the Suzuki International Series and also the NZSBK," said Skelton.

“All classes delivered both great racing and huge anticipation.

“The Suzuki International Series delivers such a balance of professionalism, as regards the delivery, and has the ability to engage a wide group of racers who turn out to provide a super spectacle. It all bodes well for a great championship for both series.”

The riders all now head to Manfeild, on the outskirts of Feilding, for round two in both series next weekend. The Suzuki International Series will wrap up, as always, on Whanganui's famous Cemetery Circuit public street environment on Boxing Day.

The Boxing Day 'street fight' is not part of the NZSBK series and that six-round NZSBK competition resumes in the New Year, with rounds three, four and five in the South Island – at Christchurch, Timaru and Invercargill respectively – with the series then travelling north again to wrap up with round six at Hampton Downs, near Huntly, in March.

Class leaders in both series after the weekend in Taupo are: Whakatane's Mitch Rees (F1/Superbike class); Invercargill's Cormac Buchanan (F2/Supersport 600 class); Taupo's Karl Hooper (F3/Pro Twins); Papakura's Craig Coulam (Formula Sport, Senior); Whanganui's Jeff Croot (Formula Sport, Junior); Hamilton's Jesse Stroud (Supersport 300); Hamilton's Nathan Finlay (GIXXER 150); Christchurch's Diego Petrucci (Supersport 150); Hastings' Gian Louie (Post Classics, Pre-89, Senior); Auckland's Scott Findlay (Post Classics, Pre-89, Junior); Christchurch's Jordan Leslie (Post Classics, Pre-95, Junior); Invercargill's Jon Rawcliffe (Post Classics, Pre-95, Senior); Christchurch's Jordan Leslie (Post Classics, Pre-95, Junior); Britain's Davey Todd (Supermoto); Auckland's Adam Unsworth and Bryce Rose (F1 Sidecars); Whanganui's Peter and Lucy Dowman (F2 Sidecars).

DATES FOR 2023-24 NZ MOTORCYCLE ROAD-RACE SEASON:

Suzuki International Series (and first two rounds of the nationals):

- Round 1, Taupo, Dec 2nd and 3rd;
- Round 2, Manfeild, Feilding, Dec 9th and 10th;
- Whanganui's Cemetery Circuit, Dec 26th (third and final round of Suzuki International Series, but not part of the nationals).

South Island:

- Round 3, Ruapuna, Christchurch (includes GP title races), Jan 6th and 7th;
- Round 4, Levels, Timaru, Jan 13th and 14th;
- Round 5, Burt Munro, Teretonga, Feb 9th, 10th and 11th.

North Island:

- Round 6, Hampton Downs, part of MotoFest (includes TT title races), Mar 2nd and 3rd.

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