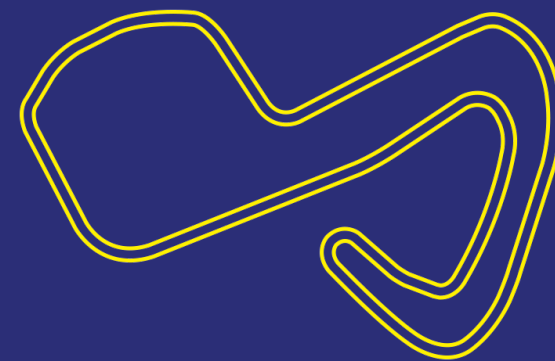


**Brad JONES**  
TWELVE



**12**

**BRANDS HATCH //**  
**ROUND 12**



What a hectic and busy couple of weeks to round out a successful season. First off at Brands Hatch for the final round of the British Supersport championship, followed by heading overseas to the Losail International Circuit based in Doha just a 7-hour flight away.

First off, Brands Hatch was challenging with the cold weather backed up with damp conditions in the free practice sessions.

The conditions were the worst type possible as it wasn't wet enough for wets but very risky for full dry tyres. This makes it very difficult and we had to weigh up if the risk outweighed the reward. In addition, the low air temperature resulted in alarmingly low track temperatures which is of course increased the risk. However, we had to look at the weather forecast to see if it was likely we were going to get similar conditions throughout the rest of the weekend.

In true British fashion, the weather forecast was predicting more unsettled weather which meant we had to run some laps in those conditions because it was most likely qualifying would be of similar condition.





With FP1 and FP2 both being unsettled conditions the times were 10 seconds off the lap record which clearly shows how tricky it was. Although it was good to get some laps and feel for the grip, it still meant we couldn't make any headway with set up etc. Qualifying was even harder than Free Practice. This was because one half the of the circuit was dry and the back half ,including in the final two sectors, was damp but drying. Therefore, the tactic for this session was to put a banker lap in early on, then sit and wait for the final 8 minutes when the track was at its best. However, although this was the best strategy; I just didn't feel comfortable in the damp sectors and just couldn't feel to the grip available meaning I was losing to much valuable time in the final two sectors which qualified me in a miserable P6.



Going into the race one I knew a good start from row 2 was vital. Lights out, I got a good jump but my path was blocked meaning I couldn't make the progress I wanted. The plan was to be up to 2nd by the end of lap 1 but it didn't work out like that meaning I had my work cut out. Pushing on I set about attacking Westy, putting in a strong move at turn 4. However, my gearing was not working that well on the exit of turn 4 which meant I was lacking some top speed down the back straight.

Westy was nipping at my heels so I had to manage the gap via my pit board signals. I aimed for a consistent pace lapping in the high 1.28s but I was struggling with the chassis and gearing in a few areas which made it difficult to lap in the 1.28s. Digging in for the final few laps I fended off the group of riders behind, bringing home a P2 for my 22nd podium the season. Although a great result I was not satisfied with my performance therefore I wanted to work on the bike setup for race 2.

Race 2, starting from P7 I had my work cut out again. Similarly, to race 1 a good start was crucial but this time I had to ensure I mastered it, lights out it was go time! A cracking jump and run up into turn 1 making up several places ending lap 1 in P3. This race I wasted no time in getting past Westy, then I set off chasing Jack but unfortunately, he had a little more pace than me. Early on in the race I was lapping consistently in the low 1.29s.



I knew the pace had to be improved therefore I change a few lines and began to lap consistently in the mid to high 1.28s, this was enough to increase the gap behind me but not enough to catch Jack. It turned into a lonely race but for me it was important to race my dash and be consistent as possible.

Rounding out the season with another P2 for my 23rd podium ending the season on a high and securing 2nd in the championship overall. It was great to look back at that point, as 12 months ago I had two podiums to my name, then to that point just a year later I had 23, this was satisfying as it showed our great progression!



# QATAR WORLD SUPERSPORT



Next stop was Qatar just a few days later for a World Supersport Wildcard with Team Toth on their Supersport R6.

Qatar circuit famously known for racing at night under the flood lights, followed by its fast, flowing corners and long start/finish straight. Arriving at the circuit Wednesday lunchtime I walked my first laps; the track was immaculate and much bigger than anything in the UK. Really impressive place and one that made me excited to get the weekend under way. The race weekend was a Thursday, Friday and Saturday format. This is because out there, their weekend is Friday and Saturday. Therefore, race night was Saturday rather than the typical Sunday.





FP1 around 4pm and the sun was setting, however it was still a very humid 34 degrees. I've ridden in those temperatures before, but the humidity was stifling. On average around 65% all week!

My first laps were brilliant although it reassured me I had a lot to take in and also some work to do with the bike to get me more comfortable on it and improve the chassis. After 15 laps in the session in the baking heat I was physically ruined after the 45 minute session. I couldn't get out my leathers quick enough and I was questioning how I was going to complete the weekend in the heat. However, that was the hottest part of the day so I had to reassure myself the heat strain would become a little easier.



Post session debriefs were a little harder than normal because of the language barrier. The team were Hungarian therefore the mechanics were also. They did speak English but it was still more difficult to explain my feelings on the bike etc. Immediately, I could feel the bike was flat. Meaning it had little amount of torque making the punch off the turns lazy.

In addition, the biggest limiting factor was that it had a misfire in the high RPM which killed the top speed, resulting being 13kph down in the speed traps. On a positive note, the chassis was ok.

Still plenty of room for improvement but I could see direction was is always a good place to start.

For FP2 it was night-time and the flood lights were on, creating that famous Qatar feel and giving me the full experience that I've always watched on TV. The misfire was still present which continued the lack of top end. However, I didn't have time to sit in the garage to find the issue. I accepted it and carried on with the main objective, to complete as many laps as possible and feel at home on the circuit. I did just that, completing another 15 laps and beginning to improve my lines on the track. There was need for improvement on the chassis, but it was harder to further improve the bike until the misfire was sorted. The team worked hard Thursday night to find the offending component, turning out to be a faulty coil pack.



The format was strange with turning up at the circuit around lunchtime and not leaving until around 11pm. It was a nice change though as it gave us time to get up and fuel up for the day and acclimatise to the heat.

FP3 gave me chance to confirm if the misfire was rectified, fortunately it was sorted which then filled me with some confidence and excitement going into the 25-minute qualifying. I planned to use the qualifying as more of a test session due to us being on the back foot a little bit. Now the engine was sorted we began to make some headway with the chassis, and I started to drop my lap time, but I then hit a point where it was hard to further improve. I was struggling in sector 4, this sector consisted off 6 fast corners and of course big chunks of time are won and lost in fast sections.



I was finding it hard to hold a line on the exit of each of corner, meaning I couldn't commit on the exit and was getting poor drive. This didn't improve throughout the session, however I dug in and qualified in 20th place for the 7th row of the grid. Normally a poor qualifying would frustrate me, but this time I wasn't too worried and focused in giving some really detailed feedback to further improve the bike for the 15 lap race.

After a positive post session de-brief, we could see something strange on the data with the front, when getting on the throttle after releasing the brake the front forks were extending very quickly, transferring a lot of weight to the rear and taking all the weight off the front which explained why I couldn't turn the bike in the fast corners. They later discovered the rebound damping in the forks had broken which made the forks like a po-go stick!





A 15 minute warm up session an hour and a half before the race give me chance to make sure we had the rebound issue solved, fortunately the bike was handling better. However, I still wanted to make some further improvement for the race.

Sat on the grid at 17:10 for the race was a strange time as the sun was setting and the flood lights were on. Starting from the 7th row I knew, like always, a good start was crucial so I could get away with the mid-pack group and use their slipstream to pull me along. I was a little unsure on how the bike was going to launch as the clutch was a different set up to what I was used to. The lights went out, the bike took off and I managed to almost jump the two rows in front of me. It was just what I needed, and I worked up to 13th by the end of lap 1. Unfortunately, I was getting zapped down the straights and then having to do all the work in sectors 1 & 2 to pass them back. All be it annoying, it was great for my race craft!



Mid race I settled in to 16th, chasing down 15th place who was creeping away from me. I managed to gap the guys behind and then I set to work on 15th place. Lap 10, I really dug in and made some in roads on closing the gap and applying the pressure! I took 3 laps to take 0.8 of a second out of him, I really had to dig deep to close the gap.

It was physically draining. On the penultimate lap he responded and I couldn't catch him any further ending the 15 lap race in 16th. Overall I was happy with the result considering the technical issues throughout the weekend. Post race I was very close to fainting with heat exhaustion, it wasn't very nice but it was satisfying in a strange way as I knew I gave it everything I had! It was a brilliant experience and one I am very grateful for being able to do, so thank you to everyone involved for making it happen.

This concluded my 2019 season, and what a season it has been. A big improvement from 2018 and as always, a lot has been learnt. Many people have asked, what has made the difference from this year to last? I put it down to another seasons experience, continuity with my team, knowing what to expect and the main thing being...confidence!

I must say a huge thank you to all my sponsors and everyone involved, it has been great year and having the people I do around me I've been able to concentrate on the job in hand and deliver some solid results!

