

# More than a mindful Learning to Drag Race



**Some say more than a handful is a waste, but in drag racing, more than a mindful is a necessity.**

*For a first time drag racer, it feels like your head will explode before the bike explodes off the starting line. The number of things you need to think about during a 10 second run would give Einstein a headache, and most of them need to be covered in the first second or so. I think I only remembered about a third of what I was supposed to on my first launch, and it was reflected in my time slip. I have a lot to learn.*

Of course, before I discovered just how much it takes to go straight for a quarter mile, I had to get to a

track, in this case Maryland International Raceway, better known as MIR. This was the venue for Jason Miller's Streetbike Seminars drag racing school, and the 2007 Grudge Race. Getting to the track required a bit of a trip in my case. Some 7 hours aboard a rather sparsely equipped plane took me to Reagan National Airport in Washington DC, which ought to be the most secure airport in the world given its proximity to the most

powerful city in the world and the current political state of the world, but much to my surprise I breezed through without so much as a single body cavity search. I soon discovered that the whole city of DC should probably be locked down harder than any airport when I took a wrong turn on my way to the hotel and found myself driving down a small street in a commercial area that looked like a rather large riot had been through there earlier in





creature like that. One of the best equipped trailers there is hauling the bike I am supposed to ride - a beautiful ZX-12R with a very custom paint job - the ZX-12R that MadMike rode to the 2003 International Drag Bike Association Championship.

the day. Hard to believe real estate is so expensive in a town so dodgy. I paid closer attention to the GPS unit's directions after that, staying on the freeways the rest of the way to the hotel in Maryland.

The next morning saw a half-hour drive to the track. The hot, humid, sunny weather, which while uncomfortable and bad for quarter mile times, is a mite better than last year's rain-out. At the track I found a number of attendees had already unpacked their trailers and set up their canopies in the staging lanes. It became obvious pretty fast that most of the people here take drag

racing very seriously, even the ones that do it purely as a hobby. These are people that pull 30+ft enclosed trailers containing fully prepared drag bikes (sometimes two per rider), more spare parts and tools than I have at home, tents, pit bikes and golf carts, Easy-Up tents, race fuel, generators, fans to help keep the bikes cool, and the list goes on.

It is clear there is truth behind the saying "Drag racing is an addiction". I begin making the rounds and putting faces to names that I have known for up to 7 years, yet never met before. The internet is an odd

I get rather nervous as visions of the pavement meeting the beautiful paint job dance in my head, not to mention thoughts of notoriously easy to burn 12R clutches. Thankfully, Vincent Hill comes to my rescue with a kind offer to run his tamer ZRX-1100., but first we have Jason Miller's the first seminar to attend.

Jason knows what he's talking about. Besides being a member of the family that owns and runs MIR, he is a pro drag racer who has seen 7's on board a 550hp turbo bike, and appeared on Speed's racing reality show Pinks. During the course of the day he gave four seminars covering different aspects of drag racing. In the first he gave a thorough explanation of how the timing system works, including tips



on using the shortcomings of the system to your advantage.

The second seminar covered launching, focusing on clutch control, body positioning, and just how hard to leave the line, with the key being to have the front end just coming off the ground. Easier said than done, though the three riders he had demonstrating it sure made it look easy enough. Seminar number three was all about reaction time, though unfortunately I missed this one.

The final seminar talked about setting up a multi-stage clutch, and provided crucial visuals by actually disassembling and reassembling one right in front of the attendees. I had moments when I felt like I was right back in university. The amount of info and expertise that Jason put into each seminar was staggering. For an experienced drag racer, which is the target demographic of the school, it is probably easy enough to absorb, but to a noob like myself it was rather daunting. Fortunately Jason proved to be an excellent professor, getting his points across very well, and in such a manner that even my novice butt could understand it. Better yet, he offers a beginner version of his drag race school specifically tailored to first timers like myself.

Just before the second seminar, Vincent reminded me that it was time to face the tree, so I suited up, swung a leg over the ZRX-1100, and



made my way to the track. The track was open most of the day, and this particular time it was empty except for my instructor for the day, Vincent, and myself, which was a very welcome situation as I was about to make a bit of a fool of myself. Now let me say that this is a very nice facility. Everything is new or kept in great shape, from the ticket booths to the timing building and especially to the track itself. The timing system is top notch and well run. The track is regularly treated with traction compound to the point that your shoes will be ripped off your feet if you were to walk on the track without your laces tightly tied. Perhaps most importantly, the shutdown area is very long, and the pavement is in excellent shape all the way to the end. Although, at the time I was more concerned with the reassuring lack of eyes watching me.

So before I can make a run, I have to learn to do a burnout, which is easy enough to do but does take a try or two to learn (more like two or three in my case). Now that the tire is all warmed up, it's time to get last second instructions and stage. Lean forward with feet trailing behind, set RPM at about 3500, go on last yellow light, let the clutch out quickly but not so much as to wheelie, open the throttle as the clutch engages, shift decisively at 10,500, don't let off before the finish lights. Well, 2.5 out of 7 ain't good, and shows in my some what sad yet better than expected ET of 12.6s, but with a

miserable .7s reaction time. It to say that my brain could not concentrate on so many foreign tasks at once. If you could stop your run every 100th of a second and take your time to make adjustments, this would be a pretty easy sport. But you can't. You really can't think about what you're doing at all if you want to be good, cause there simply ain't time.

Thankfully, after the first couple seconds or so, you have the rest of your run to relax, as it is pretty much a case of tuck in, open the throttle, and watch the speedo climb. After a lengthy break, it was time for run #2. I must have learned something from the first run because this time I saw an 11.6s ET, thanks in no small part to a 125MPH speed, my best MPH of the day. Reaction time was even worse at 0.9s though. No break this time, as I hot lapped right back to the start, finally did a passable burnout, and for the first time lined up against another racer in the form of DWB. Perhaps the (sadly

lopsided) sense of competition helped me, because I got down to a 2.001s 60' time, which is as good as I had hoped to achieve, and an 11.46s ET.

I don't know if DWB was having mechanical issues or just felt sorry for me, but he shut down after the 1/8, giving me an ET win by 0.1s. A technical win at best, but given how rarely I win anything, I'll take it! The drag racing bug had been planted. Unfortunately that was all the time I would have this day as photography duties beckoned, and it was soon time for the Grudge Race to begin.

The Grudge Race is a private annual event with entries made up exclusively of Bikeland members. This year it took place just before MIR's Friday night Speed Unlimited Midnight Madness races, and we were in a bit of a hurry to get done in time, so a quick 8 format was chosen. A qualification run whittled the field down to eight entrants to the Heads Up event. After the



smoke had settled on the third round, we had a winner in the form of Buddy with a 9.36s run on his near stock ZX-14. With no time wasted the ET class began, again with eight entrants and three rounds. This time it was our resident pro MadMike winning it on his previously described ZX-12R with a 9.66 to his 9.65 dial-in. For details on the race see our [Grudge Race coverage](#).

The winners having been decided, it was time for a wind-down in the form of supper, so we all headed to Captain Billy's, better known among Bikeland members as Big Crab Whores. Good eats (if a little sparse in my case) and good conversations ensued, as Bikeland members got a rare chance to talk in person to other members they normally only

converse with online. Of course, the Smack Talk flows freely too, especially with the day's events as fresh Smack fodder. Parting well wishes are made, and everyone heads home or to the hotel,

Saturday morning arrives and I get packed for the trip home, I can't leave just yet as Vincent isn't done being generous. This time, he's offering up his time, local knowledge, and crazy fast Mini Cooper S to give me the \$0.50 tour of DC. This is a good thing, as I would barely have had time to navigate DC's confusing streets to a single tourist destination before I had to hit the airport. As it was, I pretty much saw every attraction in DC in the course of a mere two hours, not to mention what can only be compared to an amusement park

ride through Rock Creek Park. That Mini is one nimble little machine under the hands of a capable driver, and Vince sure qualifies. As if my head didn't need a rest from the stuffing it endured at the track the day before, Vince did his level best to cram all of DC in there too!

So now I'm back home to the usual non-routine, but I've been infected by the drag racing bug, and I can't wait for my next chance to hit a track. Thanks go out to everyone involved: all the sponsors for supplying the prizes, Jason Miller for being a class act in everything he did, MadMike and Entropy for helping organize the event, VincentHill for his bike and time, and everyone who attended for showing up and having a good time!

