



1. On the podium in the 125 BSB championship with Camier and Knockhill in 2001
2. Racing an Aprilia 125GP bike at Valencia in 2003
3. HRC's Shuhei Nakamoto is confident Stoner can win the title for Honda



"HONDA ISN'T A ROBOT COMPANY"

Casey Stoner is the final piece in Shuhei Nakamoto's plan to bring the MotoGP world title back to Honda for the first time in six years.

"You hear all these stories that Honda is such a robot company, that they care about the bike more than the rider," he says. "A few months back I went to the Honda factory for a visit and it was just unbelievable. To go there and see it's just like a normal workshop, it's not computers everywhere, they still do a lot with their hands. It's still a human factory and it was amazing to meet the geniuses behind so many bikes and cars."

Stoner understands the difference between Ducati and its Japanese rivals, echoing Rossi's comments that the Ducati is more like a prototype, while Japanese machines are more like production bikes.

"Everything on the Hondas and Yamahas is better finished," he says. "Look at the fairings – they put them on: click, click, click. With a Ducati they're frickin' squeezing it, slamming it, because the fairing doesn't match up perfect."

"Honda seem to have everything correct, so you go out there and you know it's going to work."



Don't all MotoGP riders drive TDV8 LandCruisers with bullbars and snorkels?

kind of fishing – you can't lie around, you've got to be on the top of your game."

Stoner has been a country boy most of his life. Born on Australia's Gold Coast, his parents moved south to the wine-growing Hunter Valley region when he was nine, to further his racing career.

"The competition in Queensland wasn't high enough. I was winning everything, so we came down to New South Wales. I didn't get my butt whopped but I had to work a lot harder."

He rode his first motorcycle when he was 16-months old.

"I'd roll this PW50 down the hill, push it up, roll it down, push it up, roll it down... then someone sat on the back for ages with

Look at the fairings... with a Ducati they're frickin' squeezing it, slamming it...

me doing the throttle before they put me on the bike for a run around when I was three. From then on, whenever we had enough fuel, I was pretty much always on the bike."

Stoner rode his first race when he was four and had won 41 national dirt track titles by the time he was 13. It is the quick-fire rough and tumble of dirt track that formed him, just like it formed legends like Mick Doohan and Wayne Rainey. When he was a kid, Stoner would do a few dozen races a day, some lasting seconds rather than minutes. This style of racing demands an aggression, commitment and willingness to go instantly on the attack that no other racing discipline can match. Hence Stoner's talent for screwing the maximum out of any motorcycle – even a Ducati Desmosedici – after just a few laps, an ability that has his rivals dropping their jaws in awe.

Convinced that their son was something special, his parents sold everything and headed to Britain to go road racing, because Stoner would have had to wait another two years to road race in Australia. In 2000, his first year on tarmac, he won the British Aprilia 125 crown. Two years later he was in GPs. He won his first GP the following year,

graduated to MotoGP in 2006 and won the title in 2007. He's now won more GPs than Wayne Rainey, Kevin Schwantz and Freddie Spencer.

The parents who scrimped and saved to put their son on the road to greatness now own a 970ha farm near Lake Glenbawn with 1000 cattle, where Stoner stays when he's in Australia. There's no internet and it's a 40-minute drive to the shops – perfect for a man who rejects so much of modern life.

"I'm a bit contradicting, because I like my gadgets, but I don't want anything to do with the rest of it. I don't need TV. I'd rather be outside doing something or working on the farm."

His retirement plan is straightforward: "I'll come back here, run the farm and hopefully have kids."

Stoner and his wife Adriana currently live most of the year near Lake Geneva in Switzerland.

"We love it there, it's green all around and we live right on this little creek which twists and turns through the mountains. I can walk out of the front door and catch some trout."

The Stoners moved there a few years ago when living in Monaco threatened to drive him nuts. In fact, he had managed to get some hunting done in the billionaire's city, by pinning targets to the wall of his apartment and shooting them with an air rifle.

Stoner doesn't like the bright lights and he hates life in the spotlight, hence his sometimes awkward relationship with fans and the media. Although he's growing more confident with age, he's still much happier out of the public eye.

"Fame isn't my cup of tea. It's not something I'm comfortable with. A lot of riders, especially the Europeans, are comfortable with it, they don't mind the attention. I try to get as far away from it as possible. Obviously, I'm in an industry, which isn't as far away from it as possible, so I just have to deal with it."

Stoner is a MotoGP star because he loves racing motorcycles, nothing more. "The rest is just murder to me," he says, so he spends race weekends looking forward to the moment he snaps down his visor and slips out of pitlane – just him and his motorcycle against the world.

That's one reason why he changed teams. Ducati – or rather its sponsor, Marlboro – works its riders hard on the PR circuit.



Well, you'd hardly expect a Yamaha outboard on the back, would you?