



Kawasaki Racing Team Wins Back Title at Suzuka 8 Hours Endurance Race After 26 Years!

Team Manager Guim Roda Discusses Factors Behind Kawasaki's Victory

On July 28, 2019, for the first time in 18 years, Kawasaki Racing Team (KRT), a factory team of Kawasaki, returned to the Suzuka 8 Hours Endurance Race. Through the last moment of the event, all eyes were riveted on the fierce battle that resulted in Kawasaki's first victory in 26 years. We interviewed Guim Roda regarding the factors that made Kawasaki a victor.



Under a blue sky, the Suzuka 8 Hours Endurance Race began at 11:30 a.m., July 28, 2019.

A Team that Unlocked the Potential of Human-Machine Synergy

With only two minutes left in the event, KRT's last rider and race leader Jonathan Rea was expected to finish first and receive the checkered flag, but he slid and crashed because of light rain and an oil spill on the course. The race was red-flagged and ended without Rea crossing the finish line. Provisional results named KRT's closest competitor the winner. However, after deliberations, the results were amended, making KRT the victor.

Team Manager Guim Roda comments, "When a race is red-flagged, rule has it that the ranking in the lap previous to the incident counts, and as a result of this rule being applied, KRT won back the title 26 years after its first victory in 1993. International race rules differ slightly from race to race, and in this case there was some confusion

on the part of FIM's jury. In any case, we achieved a dramatic victory."

Roda adds laughingly, "When the final result was announced, not everybody knew what had happened and those in the paddock who didn't yet know about it were wondering why we were so happy when we'd lost the race."

Motorcycle magazines featured titles such as "A Battle for the Ages" and "Birth of a New Legend." For the first time in 18 years, Kawasaki's factory team, KRT, had joined a race in which Yamaha was vying to achieve its fifth consecutive win and Honda was determined to stop Yamaha. The race indeed turned out to be a very exciting one, exhilarating both fans and race officials.

Speaking of the race, Roda says, "KRT's participation in the race was officially decided in the spring of 2019. It was extremely tough to prepare for because it was my first Suzuka 8 Hours and we were traveling around the world for World Superbike (WSBK) races. However, I was getting more and more convinced that KRT would live up to expectations, because we had Leon Haslam and Toprak Razgatlioglu in addition to our ace rider Jonathan Rea, and the motorcycle was the Ninja ZX-10RR, the most powerful machine made by Kawasaki. On top of that, our factory team had the best crew there is."

"As expected, Rea was the fastest among all participating riders. In 70 (67%) of the 104 laps he rode around the approximately 6-km circuit, he finished in an amazing 2 minutes 9 seconds or less. Haslam actually wasn't 100%, physically, but as the starting rider, he performed with great fuel efficiency, covering many laps before his first pit stop. The pit crew also performed wonderfully. The total in-pit time was an impressive 24 seconds shorter than Yamaha's, and other precise strategies and tactics, such as fuel efficiency calculations and race development control, brought out the best in the riders."

Regarding the Ninja ZX-10RR, Roda said that it "exhibited flexibility and power that accommodated any changes in conditions." The riders alternate, using the same machine for the entire race, so strategy and decisions as to which rider the machine should be tailored to are important. The Ninja ZX-10RR used for this race was not tailored specifically to Jonathan Rea. However, two critical factors — Rea's ability to attain the fastest speed and the capability of

the machine to deliver whatever riders demand of it — contributed to the victory.

Roda explains, "Everything was coming together to achieve a synergistic effect. I thought, 'We really could seize this race.' As team manager, I fully implemented our strategies and tactics without any hesitation."

A Passion for Manufacturing Is the Source of Kawasaki's Exceptional Strength

Guim Roda has been involved in the management of Kawasaki's racing teams since 2009. After assuming the post of team manager for KRT in 2012, he had contributed to Kawasaki earning five riders' titles and four manufacturers' titles at WSBK by 2018. From a team manager's perspective, we asked, what exactly is a "Kawasaki motorcycle"?

"I am constantly impressed by the deep and robust passion that people at Kawasaki have for motorcycles. They don't simply like motorcycles, they love producing themselves the ultimate in machinery and being involved in motorcycle-related businesses. Because of such fervor, fans, too, become fervent and come to love Kawasaki. This means that Kawasaki and fans together are improving the brand's power. Such a high level of passion isn't found in any other manufacturer. That's why impressive control is possible even in a race as tough as the Suzuka 8 Hours, which requires intricate strategy and tactics."



A pit work time amounting to only 310 seconds was also vital to winning the victory.



Provisional results were listed as "incomplete," but KRT was named winner after re-deliberations. Jonathan Rea commented, "Hearing that we won after being dejected, the emotional roller coaster is unreal." Because the dejection had been shared by all KRT staff, the joy of the victory increased exponentially.

Motorcycle development at Kawasaki finds its roots in the company's aircraft engine manufacturing, or — going further back — in the passion for making aircraft of Kawasaki's first president, Kojiro Matsukata, who contributed greatly to the modernization of Japanese industry with his indomitable spirit. Still very much alive at Kawasaki is a corporate culture of tackling challenges and persisting in perfecting the manufacturing process — the "DNA" it inherited from its predecessors.

Roda concludes, "Kawasaki's strong passion for motorcycles boosts everyone's morale for tackling complex challenges. That spirit permeates KRT and we will be working hard and with unswerving dedication toward winning another WSBK championship."



Guim Roda

Born in 1977 in Spain. While studying industrial design at university, he himself raced motorcycles. In 2009, he got involved in Kawasaki's racing team management and became the KRT team manager in 2012. Under his leadership, by 2018, KRT had earned five riders' titles and four manufacturers' titles at WSBK.

In September 2019, Jonathan Rea became the first-ever five-time WSBK Champion. KRT aims to win the remaining races for this season to secure the manufacturers' title. (They're currently first in the standings.)



Please visit the subsite dedicated to KRT's victory at the Suzuka 8 Hours Endurance Race on our brand site, "STORIES."

<http://global.kawasaki.com/en/stories/articles/vol90/>