

MAXWELL READY TO TAKE ON SUZUKA 8HR

Ready to take on one of the world's toughest road races, Australia's Wayne Maxwell has re-joined the Honda DREAM RT Sakurai Honda team in Japan, as free practice gets underway today ahead of this weekend's 33rd running of the Suzuka 8 Hour.

As Honda chases its 23rd win at the famed Suzuka event, Maxwell is preparing for his first attempt at the gruelling eight-hour challenge; relishing the opportunity to put himself to the ultimate racing test.

"Being selected to race the Suzuka 8 Hour is a great honour as a lot of Australian riders have had great success at this event over the years. This is a great opportunity for me to not only show others what I can do, but also to try and prove to myself whether I am as good as I think I am," Maxwell said.

With a chance to join the likes of Mick Doohan, Wayne Gardner and Daryl Beattie on the Suzuka victory honour roll, Maxwell will re-partner with team mate Chojun Kameya to pilot the Sakurai Honda CBR1000RR.

"Kameya-san has been great; he finished third in the race last year and he has a lot of experience, as does the whole Sakurai team," Maxwell said.

After scoring a strong fifth place with the team in the Suzuka 300 earlier this year, Maxwell recently returned to Japan for the Suzuka 8 Hour official test session on 7-8 July and was given plenty of track time in readiness for the big event.

"Testing went well, so I am feeling confident for the race. Each day, we had three one-hour sessions and one 45-minute night session. I did a 2:09.58-minute lap which was only two tenths off my team mate, and I was second fastest in the night session," Maxwell said. "It's a really technical circuit and it all links together which suits my style. It's a lot different to the Australian circuits with the chicanes, so it's taking a bit to sort out, but overall I'm doing ok."

Weather is always a major factor in the Suzuka 8 Hour, and with Sunday's forecast for 32oC and afternoon showers, the extreme heat and humidity promises another punishing test of endurance for man and machine.

"The long runs are tough, but doing it in the heat is even tougher. I am getting more used to it as I spend more time here. It's very humid; similar to Darwin earlier this year, except the stints on the bike are one hour long.

"I have been training hard with my trainer Anthony Klarica in preparation for the event and am feeling in good shape. Last week we simulated half of the race in training by cycling in a heated room for one hour then a one-hour break then another hour on.

"The race is for eight hours and so many things can happen. Running in the Suzuka 300 earlier in the year was invaluable as I got to practise a pit stop and experience damp conditions on slicks."

While many teams will contest the event with three riders, Maxwell is comfortable that he and Kameya will not be disadvantaged having just two riders to share the load.

“I think it is easier if you only have two riders. It’s hard enough to keep two riders happy with settings, let alone three.

“I think the greatest challenges of the race will be the heat and trying to be consistent through traffic. Then we just have to be ready for any other unknown stuff we will stumble across as the race unfolds.

“No doubt everyone wants to win, but I would be happy to race in the top five for the first half of the race, then assess where we are at and go from there. Hopefully things will go our way.

“Above all, it’s a great opportunity just to be able to compete in an event like the Suzuka 8 Hour.”