

MAXWELL'S SUZUKA 8HR DREAM DEBUT UNRAVELS

Racing with the Honda DREAM RT Sakurai Honda team, Australian rider, Wayne Maxwell made his debut in Japan's famed Suzuka 8 Hour race and was on target for a podium finish before the dream run unravelled, this weekend.

While it was a Honda CBR1000RR that clinched the prestigious Suzuka victory in the hands of the MuSASHi RT HARC-PRO squad, it was heartbreak for Maxwell and his Japanese team when a crash in the third hour ended their podium aspirations and resulted in a mammoth challenge just to reach the chequered flag.

As the event got underway last Thursday, the weekend began full of promise as Maxwell wrapped up free practice just one tenth of a second behind his highly experienced team mate, Chojun Kameya.

"We were doing long runs checking tyres and fuel mileage. There were about 60 riders, so the track was very busy. The weather was extremely hot and humid. I felt ok on the bike, but struggled with grip in the heat," Maxwell said.

In Friday morning's practice session, the Honda DREAM RT Sakurai Honda team turned its attention to checking tyres ahead of the afternoon's all-important qualifying session.

Allowed only three tyres to share, both riders were given two half-hour sessions to record their fastest qualifying time. As track temperatures soared to 62 degrees, Maxwell quickly found the limits of the very slippery Suzuka circuit, but recovered undamaged to complete the session.

"In my first qualifying session, I crashed on the second flyer at turn one... it was only very small. We finished up ninth, which got us comfortably into the Superpole," Maxwell said.

Maxwell sat on the sidelines on Saturday as last year's podium finisher, Kameya contested the Superpole session, elevating the team to sixth on the grid for the race start.

Kameya took his place on the grid for the race start and by the time he handed over to Maxwell, they were running in fourth place.

Acquitting himself well in his first attempt at the gruelling eight-hour race, 27-year-old Maxwell kept the pace and maintained a strong fourth position when he handed back to his team mate.

However, in the third hour, their hopes for a podium position suddenly vanished as Kameya suffered a massive crash that damaged everything apart from the frame and engine.

The Sakurai team launched into action in an impressively speedy rebuild of the heavily damaged Honda CBR1000RR to get themselves back into the race.

Rejoining the field in 39th place, some 21 laps behind the leaders, the pair bravely set out to salvage the best possible result throughout the remaining five hours.

As the chequered flag dropped at the eight-hour mark, they had clawed back four places and crossed the line in 35th place.

While it was not the result that he had hoped for, Maxwell remained positive about the overall experience.

“It was an incredible experience; something that I will never forget. The crowd and the atmosphere were amazing. It is an awesome event,” Maxwell said.

“What an amazing result for Honda, 1-2-3. When Kameya-san crashed we were a comfortable fourth. Yoshimura crashed out so, if we had of stayed on the bike, we would have been third.

“It is a very taxing race. I lost 3.5kgs. Mentally, you have to keep talking yourself through it each lap. The traffic is frustrating, but it’s good; it keeps you focused on someone to chase.

“This has been a great opportunity for me and I’d just like to thank Sakurai Honda. The Sakurai team was awesome. They are very well drilled.

“If I get the chance, I would like to race the Suzuka 8 Hour again. Now it is time to focus on the next round of ASBK and try to regain the championship lead.”

Maxwell will now head back to race with Demolition Plus Gas Honda on home soil when the ASBK series heads to Queensland Raceway for round four on 9-12 August 2010.