

Hawaii Road Race Association

July 2006

NEWSLETTER

Volume 4: Issue 3

MotoGP at Laguna Seca

Introduction

The editor and his better half (Iris) attended the USGP at Laguna Seca for the second time. As before, this is not a race report; it's my view of the MotoGP experience and is more of a travelogue (getting there, where we stayed, dined, and points of interest). I will attempt to compare this trip with the one taken in 2005.



Thursday – July 20 (Travel Day)

I booked flights HA44/HA45 on Hawaiian Airlines to/from San Jose in first class for \$1,209.31 per person. (My wife is allergic to perfume among other things so we find it safer to fly in first class.) At the time I booked, coach tickets were running almost \$800! In 2005, we flew in/out of San Francisco on Delta (\$900 for First Class; thanks Scott!).

I was pleasantly surprised with the level of service and the food on Hawaiian – it was excellent, greatly improved over my last experience. Real glasses, plates, and silverware were used. Last year on Delta, they had us use plastic utensils. (I know, we're spoiled.) Dinner started with a chicken/shrimp/beef satay skewer over a green papaya salad; grilled fish over haricover for me, chicken breast over rice for Iris, followed by panna cotta and coffee for dessert.

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San Jose airport is more convenient than San Francisco as it is about 30 miles closer to Monterey. In addition, the airport is smaller so it's faster to get around. It's a semi-major hassle to get your rental car in San Francisco – you have to lug your bags to the train station (which involves stairs, elevators, ramps ...), take the train to the rental car building north of SFO, take an elevator to the proper floor, and finally get your car.

It's better in San Jose, but not perfect. You still have to tote your bags to the far end of the terminal and an airport shuttle takes you to one of two rental car buildings. However, everything is on one level; and, being smaller, it takes less time.

We left Honolulu at 1:00 p.m. and arrived in San Jose around 9:00 p.m. After getting our bags (which took awhile), we picked up a Hyundai Tucson at Hertz. It's the first time I've driven a Korean car. I was pleasantly surprised; it handled well and we cruised effortlessly down 101 at 85mph. We took 156 over to Monterey and were at our hotel just before 11:00 p.m.

Hotel

In 2005, we used Scott at Schewe Travel to arrange a room at the Monterey Travelodge for \$100/night, taxes included. This year I booked (via Travelcraft) a room for four nights at the Hyatt Monterey, which I was hoping was a nicer property than the Travelodge. The room rate at the Hyatt was \$195, plus \$30.50 in taxes. As with most places in Monterey, it didn't have air conditioning. While not normally needed, this year turned out to be a scorcher and it was sorely missed.



My friend's son used to manage this Hyatt property so I was warned that it was not up to usual Hyatt standards -- he called it a dump. I wouldn't go that far, finding it to be nice, but in need of some freshening, especially in the bathroom. However, it wasn't twice as good as the Travelodge, meaning it wasn't worth \$200+/night. My primary complaint with the Travelodge was that I could hear too much from the adjoining rooms and shutting the windows didn't help.

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Hyatt's pluses: a nice restaurant (with good food), bar, multiple pools, great access to the freeway and the Del Monte golf course next door. The minuses: freeway noise, Jacuzzi noise and no SPEED on TV (like at the Travelodge). Note that all of the hotel properties raise their rates for major events like the U.S.G.P.; so it's helpful to book early. Others paid \$275/night at the Hyatt. Someone said Rossi was staying there, though I didn't see him.

Actually, there are few high rise hotels in Monterey; most are what I would call motels. There is the Embassy Suites, the official MotoGP hotel (which made it impossible to get a room), Portola (which was going for \$250/night, minimum 4 nights), and the Marriott (an older property). Yes, there are really nice properties in Carmel, but these cost upwards of \$800/night. Other options include renting a house, which the Colin Edwards fans (Tornadiacs) did, and B&Bs, which are all over the place.

USGP Tickets

Unlike last year, we purchased the Flagroom passes at \$375 each. This was comprised of the 3-day general admission pass (\$90), turn 4 grandstand seats for Saturday (\$15) and Sunday (\$25), paddock pass (\$40), parking in the Blue 2 lot, and breakfast, lunch and drinks (including beer and wine) on Saturday and Sunday. Although expensive, the Flag Room tickets turned out to be worth the money.

The Flagroom was located between turns 4 and 5, just off Paddock Road. It was a large tented area, with round tables and chairs and TVs located everywhere. A large screen display was located across the track, like the one for the T4 grandstands.

In front of the tent were two rows of round tables with umbrellas providing shade (see picture to right). These were the best seats in the house and scooped up and jealously guarded by those arriving early. The only problem was having to look through the chain link fence. I had to shoot over the fence to get my camera to focus properly.



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There were more expensive tickets available, such as the Premier Suite passes going for \$750. I just read that some of these suites suffered from air conditioning failure on the weekend so it was too hot to remain inside. (Note that none of the premier passes were available to the general public. Ticket holders from 2005 got first dibs and all were gone before September 1, the start of general ticket sales.) Other options included third parties setting up private viewing areas, such as above the pit suites or above the T4 suites. These were going for about \$1,000 per person.

In comparison, in 2005 we spent \$140 per person on tickets (3-day pass, turn 4 grandstand seats SAT/SUN, and paddock pass). Parking was free in 2005, but it was on the back side of Wolf Hill – which was a long way to the track (up / down a big hill) and across the front straight via the wooden bridge, which was extremely crowded and claustrophobic.

To try to alleviate the traffic woes of 2005, the organizers eliminated most car parking at the track, except for preferred ticket holders and a limited number of \$50 passes for Wolf Hill (which, as I stated earlier is no bargain). They directed those with cars to park at Cal State University and use a shuttle service to/from the track. While this certainly reduced the number of cars entering the track, it didn't make the trip any easier for those having to endure long waits to get on/off the buses. I read that people had to wait hours under the hot sun for the buses with the total time exceeding 3.5 hours. Wolf Hill was also used for motorcycle parking, unless one had opted to get the premium tickets, ride around the track or if one rode a Ducati. The latter could park on Ducati Island. In 2005, cyclists were parking all over the place, even in areas marked “no parking”.

The best part of the Flagroom tickets was a parking pass to the DORNA area in parking lot Blue 2. This is one of the few parking lots inside the track and is very close to the T4 grandstands and the paddock. Flagroom / suite ticket holders had a special area in Blue 2 near Paddock Road so we didn't have to walk up/down the hill. You had to show your ticket to the traffic directors to gain access to the preferred parking area.

Friday – July 21

Not wanting to repeat the mistakes of 2005, we didn't fly on the red eye nor did we go to the track on Friday. (In 2005 it was very tiring to fly all night and then try to spend the day at the track.) Instead, my wife and I awoke late on Friday, had a leisurely breakfast at the hotel, then toured and shopped in Carmel. (I was supposed to take Iris to Carmel in 2005 but we ran out of time.) We had drinks on the veranda at the Pebble Beach shopping complex, overlooking the first tee of the Pebble Beach golf course. All it takes is money to play this mecca of golf. It must take six hours to play there, based upon the lack of talent of the three foursomes I watched. My brother-in-law said it cost him about \$500 to play at Pebble Beach; \$400 for green fees and the rest for the caddie. Okay, maybe it's once in a lifetime event. (It would be for me; \$500 would buy a set of irons or a couple of woods!) I did buy a Polo shirt at the golf shop. It was \$96!

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Thus, I didn't get to see Kim experience his difficulties in getting his bike set up for the Formula Xtreme race, which was limited to just 20 minutes of practice time, nor did I get to spend time in the paddock to take pictures of the MotoGP riders. However, it was nice to finally get to see a little bit of Carmel. We'll have to go back and spend more time there. Also, one of my favorite white wines comes from just down the road, at Talbott Vineyards on Carmel Valley Road.

We dined at [Max's Grill](#) in Pacific Grove on Forest Avenue, about 3.5 miles from the Hyatt. This is a small restaurant run by a nice Japanese couple, "Max" and Yuko Muramatsu. They offer [discounted meals](#) between 5 and 6. We had a nice dinner for \$64, including tip. I had the sushi roll (tuna, snapper and smoked salmon) appetizer and Duck & Duck (a Confit-style leg of duck and duck mousse ravioli with orange sauce for \$19) and a couple of nice glasses of Pinot Grigio. Iris had a salad and braised lamb shanks with white rice (\$15).



Saturday – July 22

We left the Hyatt at 7:45 a.m. and entered the track via Highway 68. In comparison to 2005 (which took 1.5 hours), the total time, from hotel to the Blue 2 parking lot was less than 30 minutes. After a short tour of the pits, where I took a few pictures of Kim, we went across the Dunlop Bridge to see what was available in the vendor display area where I bought some souvenirs for Tom Cesar and myself. This year I bought a Valentino cap for \$35, down from \$45 in 2005.



We then went to the Flagroom, where we enjoyed a nice breakfast. On the menu were scrambled eggs, bacon, ham, sausage, fried potatoes, biscuits w/gravy, fresh fruits and pastries. Beverages included coffee, tea, milk, bottled water, soft drinks, Corona, Coors Lite and (brand unknown) wine.

Fearing a shortage of toilet paper as in 2005, my wife packed some this time. No worries, there were a pair of air-conditioned trailers with toilet facilities located in a screened area adjacent to the large tent. These turned out to be the

coolest spots all weekend and provided a welcome respite from the torrid heat.

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Before we knew it, it was time for MotoGP free practice 3. I went to check out our grandstand seats while my wife decided to stay in the Flagroom. This turned out to be a life saver for her as the temperature exceeded 100 degrees and people were suffering from heat exhaustion. I stayed to watch the Formula Xtreme race (go Kim!) then went back to the Flagroom for lunch. I found that my wife had fallen asleep from the heat. We had lunch (menu consisting of roast beef, pork loin, several salads (greens, pasta, fruit), breads, and I forgot what else then called it a day.

Dinner was at [Rosine's Restaurant](#), a casual eatery in downtown Monterey on Alvarado St. They have huge desserts! (We visited Rosine's several times for breakfast in 2005.) It's just five minutes from the Hyatt (or the Travelodge), about 1.5 miles.

Sunday – July 23

I left the hotel at 7:30 a.m. without my wife, who decided to take it easy at the hotel; the heat of Saturday being too much for her. Again, it was an easy transit to the track and I was standing in line to the Flagroom by 8:00 a.m. After a hearty breakfast (menu the same as on Saturday), I went to the paddock to try and get some pictures of the riders. Alas, only got a couple of Casey Stoner. Everyone else was staying in their trailers until the last minute. Tiring of waiting around for someone to make an appearance, I went back across the Dunlop Bridge to see what was happening in the vendor display area and on Ducati Island.



I stopped into the BrakeTech booth and looked at the new ceramic brake rotors. Claimed to be 65% lighter (just over a pound), but selling for \$1,100 each. (Note that the BrakeTech web site lists the prices between \$900 and \$1,080 per rotor.) Luckily, they didn't have any for the RS125 – I know Tom would have to get one.

I went back to the Flagroom to cool off, watch the MotoGP warm-up (a 20min session) and wait for the races to begin. I sat down to have a few Coronas and conversed with a guy from Indiana and a couple from LA, by way of Belgium. The couple rode up from LA, he on a MV Agusta Brutale, his wife on her CBR600F4i.

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The organizers postponed the AMA Supersport race scheduled for 11:30 a.m. until after the MotoGP race as the newly paved track surface was breaking up. Thus, there was nothing to watch until 2:00 p.m. So, I sat in the Flagroom and imbibed a series of Coronas while talking to new friends.

Lunch consisted of roast beef, salmon, and the usual salads, and more Coronas. I found myself the only one asking for ice in their cup. (Hey, I'm from Hawaii!)



The Race: I went over to the T4 grandstand to take my seat. Gee, there were a number of empty seats, unlike in 2005 where we were packed in like sardines. Quite a few fans were sitting under the first row of the stands, in the shade. I think a number of my Flagroom compatriots decided to stay in the Flagroom, where they had shade and ready access to drinks.

I won't bore you with what happened during the race – I'm sure all of you know what happened. All I can say is – Team Camel had a bad day and the Repsol boys had a great day. It was sad to see Vermeulen fall back after leading for so long. I found it interesting that the two Ducatis were so uncompetitive, Capirossi and Gibernau lapping near the back of the field. It was no surprise to see Cardoso reprise his role as caboose – he was so far behind that people in the stands were cheering each time he passed us.

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I left the track after the MotoGP race and was able to get out and onto Highway 68 in less than 10 minutes; and was back at the hotel by 3:30 p.m. We dined at the [Sardine Factory](#) in Cannery Row, off Foam Street. This is a very nice restaurant, not much to look at from the outside, but there are a number of dining rooms, each decorated differently. We requested seating in the conservatory, a glass enclosed circular space like a giant bird cage.

Dinner for me started with a glass of Mumm's, followed by lobster bisque, then a glass of Talbot Chardonnay with my grilled swordfish. Iris had braised short ribs on a mound of mashed potatoes (no rice available), which were two huge ribs with at least a 3x4x4 cube of meat on each rib. I ate one. (Now you know why Iris is so small and I'm not.) Being too full for dessert, I just had coffee. The cost was \$137.28, including tip.



Monday – July 24

We went out to McDonald's on Del Monte to pick up our favorite fast food breakfast – Egg McMuffins, but ate them back in the hotel as Mickey D's had a strange smell. We left Monterey around 10:00 a.m. and headed up to [Stanford Shopping Center](#) in Palo Alto, 83 miles away. An hour and a half later, we were sitting down to lunch at [Max's Opera Café](#). This is one of our favorite chains in the Bay Area for breakfast, lunch and dinner. I had my usual order of chopped liver, egg and caramelized onions sandwich with a bowl of onion soup, while Iris had a healthy turkey sandwich w/o mayonnaise.

This shopping center has N-M, Bloomies, Ralph Lauren, Macys and some of my wife's favorite stores (like Talbot's and Ann Taylor). We spent the afternoon there as check-in time at the Embassy Suites in Santa Clara was 4:00 p.m. I like the Embassy Suites and try to stay at one wherever I travel. This one, just off 101, about five miles from San Jose airport, was a little unusual as it didn't have an atrium. However, the rooms are always nice and this one especially so as there was absolutely no noise from any of the other rooms up on the top floor.

I had picked out a number of restaurants to try, including Michael Mina's [Arcadia](#), but we were a little tired and so we went down to the bar for the free drinks and pupus before deciding where to eat. We ended up having dinner in the hotel even though it opened late. It must have been the day for late openings as there was a nice looking restaurant just across the parking lot, Arthur's. I went over to check it out but it was still closed at 5:15, even though the sign said dinner 5 – 10. (As you might have surmised by now, we like to dine early.)

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Well, it was very surprising to find that we had the best meal of our trip in the little hotel dining room. I had a nice piece of very moist sea bass over a bed of Thai noodles in a savory broth. Iris had the healthy (or so it was called) special of steamed vegetables (it was supposed to be asparagus but they served broccoli), mashed yams, with a 5oz. strip steak perched atop; alleged to total just 460 calories. I have my doubts as if that steak was 5oz. I want to buy meat from them; and, the steak was very tender! The meal was less than \$60, including tip.

Tuesday – July 25 (Travel Day)

We had an 8:50 a.m. flight home so we left the hotel after partaking of the free breakfast. I had delayed refilling the gas tank on the Hyundai as there was a gas station just down the street, or so I thought. When I pulled in, I was dismayed to find out that they were out of gas with no other gas station in sight. Iris suggested we just return the car as how much more could it be if Hertz filled it. Well, the fuel charge was \$103.42, as they charged me \$6.95/gallon, a little more than double what I saw at stations in other areas of California. Live and learn.

Anyway, we left San Jose on time and were headed home. Hurrah! I wasn't looking forward to breakfast on the plane as it is usually dismal, even in first class (which is why we ate at the Embassy Suites). Well, shame on me. It's nice to start the mid-morning with a glass of Champagne, actually sparkling wine as it wasn't from France, followed by a very nice piece of coffee cake; actually two, as I ate Iris's as well. Iris opted for the waffles and bacon (the bacon went to me as she usually forgoes anything with fat); I had the scrambled eggs with slices of steak, topped by a spicy mushroom sauce.

General Impressions

SCRAMP tried to correct the problems of 2005 (horrendous traffic, inadequate merchandise, too cramped food areas) and for the most part, succeeded. I can't comment on the switch to off-premises parking and the bus shuttle service even though I've read that it took hours to get in and out, mainly due to a bad decision to load one bus at a time. Vendors were charging \$4 for a bottle of water, which was up from \$3 last year. Interestingly, you could get a beer for \$5. I didn't check out food prices but I remember paying \$11 for a can of Diet Coke and a hot dog in 2005 so I can imagine that it was more this year.

The changes to the track were pretty extensive, and should have satisfied the more critical of the MotoGP contingent. However, it was unfortunate that the new pavement proved problematic; it had already been patched in a couple of places (between T4 and T5, and by the corkscrew), alleged bumpy and some areas of the surface were breaking up. Can they afford to repave before next year's race?

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I can say that purchasing Flagroom tickets were a great decision; I don't know if I would have done any better buying the more expensive VIP suite tickets, not that there were any available. The one thing that the VIP ticket holders get is a special walk through the MotoGP pits – but is that worth \$125 - \$375? Parking was convenient, getting in/out was a snap, and the food/drink was very good, especially the unlimited supply of Coronas.

I do think that if I return, and that is debatable at the moment, that I would try to get around and see the rest of the track. Photo opportunities from the T4 grandstands and the Flagroom are limited. If someone wants Flagroom tickets, let me know. As far as I know, previous ticket holders get first dibs on 2007 tickets. That's why I couldn't get any of the better packages.

Don't miss next year's race. The dates have been tentatively set for July 20 – 22, 2007, subject to release by the FIM. Book your hotel early and if you're looking for good race tickets, call the first day they're available! Tickets are supposed to go on sale on November 1. Be prepared to wait on the phone for a loooooooooooooong time. I dialed and dialed for what seemed like a couple of hours, and then was put on hold for about 45 minutes before I was able to speak to a ticket agent.

Congratulations to Nicky Hayden for his repeat win and what looks to be his first world title. It was great to see Kim racing at a big time event, even if he didn't perform to his usual standards. At least he's living the dream we all share.

Total cost for attending the race? Just over \$5,400, but that included first class plane tickets, four nights in Monterey and an extra day spent shopping. It's about what we spend on a 7-day cruise, our other form of vacation.

Get to Laguna Seca in 2007; it may be your last chance to see MotoGP there. Rumors abound that Barber, Miller and even Indy are trying to get the race!



Let's hope we get a track real soon!