



Jack Findlay

No rider is more closely associated with the racing Suzuki 500 than Jack Findlay.

Jack Findlay, a European-based Australian won 3 world championship races, two as a privateer and was a keen devotee to the Isle of Man and the Ulster GP. He twice captured the unofficial title of best privateer in the 500 GPs - 1968 and 1968, in an era of Agostini and Hailwood on works machinery. Jack successfully rode a 250 Bultaco, campaigned a 500 Matchless and had a disastrous season on a Linto. He rode works TR500s in 1973 and 74 and helped develop the RG500. He beat Barry Sheene to win the 1975 FIM Formula 750 championship. His most cherished prize is winning the 1973 Isle of Man Senior TT after 15 years and 31 race starts.



Jack at the Ulster GP 1971

In 1970 Jack chose to use the TR500 as his engine of choice, saying it was lighter, more compact, less complicated and produced peak power at lower rpm than the opposition Kawasaki triples. Jack installed a modified road engine in a Seeley frame. In 1971 Jack and Danielle Fontana built their own 500 Suzuki. He won the 1971 Ulster 500 on this machine. It was his first world championship win and arguably the nearest to a road bike engine ever to win a world 500 championship round. Jack said that Suzuki was already selling TR500s, but the only part they would sell him were pistons. Suzuki GB loaned him 2 for Ulster (he had to give them back). He used converted road cylinders.



Isle of Man 1973

Suzuki Italia sponsored Jack on a water-cooled TR500 in 1973. He rode this machine to victory in the 1973 Senior TT. In 1974 he realised his ambition of a works contract riding for Suzuki on the new 500 Four and a TR750. Despite herculean efforts on the prototype Suzuki thought he was too old at 39 and did not renew his contract for 1974. Jack turned to a TZ750 Yamaha winning the 750 title. He pushed on, racing a production RG 500 in 1976. He won the 1977 500 GP at Salzburg which was boycotted by the works teams. After a serious accident in May 77 he finished his last GP in 1978 in Belgium. He entered the Nurburgring GP but DNF. His career had spanned 28 years.



1973

1973 - Raalte in Holland



Jack (no.4) and Barry Sheene (no.11) on prototype RG500s at Salzburg in 1974

Note: The above 3 pics and more can be seen in detail in Australian Motorcycle Heroes 1949-89 By Don Cox and Wil Hagon. A&R 1989 ISBN 20716207 7. This book has a detailed write-up of Jack Findlay's career plus coverage of many other Australian Motorcycle racers. Don Cox has written (7 November 06) to advise that Jack Findlay is unfortunately quite ill. Sadly Jack Findlay passed away in May 2007.



An artist has been formally engaged to create a life-size bronze statue of Moorooopna Australia's 1975 world motorcycle champion Jack Findlay. It's expected the work should be completed in June this year ready for installation soon after in the median strip in Moorooopna's McLennan St. Elphinstone artist, Phil Mune, was given the go ahead only a week ago after talks with representatives of the Jack Findlay Recognition Committee, Noel Heenan, Mick Pettifer and Robert McLean. The work of Mune is well known in the area as he was responsible for the creation of the statue of Shepparton author, Joseph Furphy, and champion Rochester cyclist, Sir Hubert Opperman. Support from motorcycle enthusiasts have made the statue possible - the FIM, the international controlling body of motorcycle racing and Jack's employers after he retired from racing, contributed more than \$6000. Motorcycling Australia have matched that; the GV Motorcycle Club raised \$1000 from a ride organized especially for the Jack Findlay appeal; several local businesses have contributed generously; a fellow who raced in Britain and Europe with Jack and shared a house with him for a time in London added \$500 to the appeal and a Moorooopna woman eager to see one of her fellows recognized paid in \$20. Phil Mune is planning to use a computer generated image for the major part of the statue - it will produce a polystyrene copy that can then be used for the creation of a mold. The special computer based device will scan a racing bike similar to that used by Jack when he won the Senior TT at the Isle of Man in 1973. Marong mechanic and motorcycle tuner, Karel Zegers, raced in Europe before immigrating to Australia about 20 years ago and has a restored version of the Suzuki Jack raced to success at the Isle of Man. He is enthusiastic about his bike being the model upon which the statue will be based. Bob West, now retired in Melbourne, threw fresh light on the Jack Findlay story and has added \$500 to the fund created to build a life-sized statue of Jack on his Isle of Man winning Suzuki. After a busy year and a half of racing throughout Europe and Britain, Bob, along with Jack, who had seen many of his fellows die on the race track, decided to return home. He loved his racing, but he also loved his life and figured he did not want to join those who had made a disagreeable departure.

Now where else in the world is there a statue of a racing Suzuki?? Sadly on May 19, 2007 we lost Suzuki's greatest privateer champion of the classic era.



Jack Findlay was one of the last motorcycle racing privateers to compete at the highest levels in the sport. In a 20-year career on bikes that he mostly financed and maintained himself, the expatriate Australian took on Europe's finest, and through sheer determination, mechanical expertise and skill as a high-speed corner specialist, he rode alongside such legends as Giacomo Agostini, Mike Hailwood and Barry Sheene. His most successful year was 1968 when he was runner-up to Agostini in the 500cc World Championship, while also competing in the 350cc and 250cc series. He came third in the 1966 championship, behind Agostini and Hailwood, and was later placed fifth three times. He won the unofficial 750cc series in 1975, having finished third the previous year. He gained most of his points with high places behind the biggest stars but well ahead of his fellow privateers. However, he did win three races - the Ulster Grand Prix in 1971, the Austrian Grand Prix in 1977 and the Senior Isle of Man TT in 1975.

Throughout the 1960s he competed on a Norton or Matchless, or on hybrids that he created using Yamaha, Aermacchi and Linto parts. He later moved mostly to Suzukis, many of which he put together himself, although he did receive some sponsorship and a brief factory ride towards the end of his racing days. Findlay remained an enthusiast at heart and stayed closely involved with the sport until a few years ago. Cyril John Findlay was born in 1935 in Moorooopna, Victoria, about 120 miles north of Melbourne. He began racing at 15, two years below the legal limit, and used his father Jack's ID to get a licence. He nearly stopped racing when he was offered a trial with the Melbourne Demons Australian football team, but had to refuse because his employers at a bank would not give him Saturdays off. He continued racing on a shoestring budget and without much success.

In 1958 he came to Britain to join the "continental circus" of private riders in Europe, later the subject of a French documentary focusing on Findlay's momentous 1968 season, which included his successes but also one of his many near-fatal accidents. In 1959 he competed in his first Isle of Man TT and became a familiar figure at the annual event in various categories over the next 18 years. Free from having to follow team orders, he would be back on a bike very soon after a high-speed crash, often against the advice of doctors and friends. His courage was combined with a keen intelligence and he was always seeking an extra edge and had the practical skill to turn his ideas into reality. At that time no racing parts were available from Suzuki, but their efforts were so successful that, in 1971, Findlay won the 500cc class at the Ulster Grand Prix. It was both his and Suzuki's first 500cc world championship race win. This success won his support from the Italian Suzuki importer, who sponsored Findlay in some 750cc races in 1972. He and his business partner, Danielle Fontana, built their own 500cc bike, which they called the JaDa, using pistons lent by Suzuki, on which Findlay achieved eighth place in the 1972 world championship, having come second in the Czechoslovakian Grand Prix and third in Spain.

The following year he was given a water-cooled TR500 by the importers of Suzuki in Italy, where he was living, on which he scored his TT victory as well as finishing on the podium in the Belgian Grand Prix. In 1974 the Japanese manufacturer gave him a contract with the new 500 Four and a TR750, but despite being competitive on both machines, the company did not renew the contract when it expired. He then bought a pair of Yamahas and achieved moderate success on the 500cc while scoring a satisfying one-point victory over Sheene, his former Suzuki team-mate, in the unofficial 750 championship.

Findlay then went back to riding Suzukis and began building success, finishing eighth in the 1976 championship with a second place at the Swedish Grand Prix, followed by victory in the second grand prix of the following season in Austria. However, two races later in 1977 Findlay suffered a second fractured skull in a high-speed crash at Imola caused by a collapsed rear wheel. Although he was racing again within weeks, age and the expense of maintaining the new and temperamental two-stroke racers were against him. He finally quit, at the age of 43, after the 1978 German Grand Prix - almost exactly 20 years after making his European debut and 28 years after his first race in Australia. Having split from Nanou, Findlay married Dominique Monneret, widow of the French racer George Monneret. They lived at Vaucresson, near Paris, while he helped Michelin to develop tyres for road machines. He gave this up after a high-speed road crash in 1987 and became technical officer for DORNA, the Spanish-based company which promoted the world championship series that mutated into the present Moto GP set-up. In 1992 the racing authority, the FIM (Fédération Internationale de Motocyclisme), appointed him grand prix technical director, in which his long experience as a rider and bike builder, as well as his fluent French and Italian, earned him the respect of competitors and crew. He was unobnoxious and friendly in his approach and would give mechanics a chance to change components that broke the regulations before imposing penalties. The job also allowed him to make regular visits back to Australia. He retired from the FIM in 2001.

Last July, a bronze statue of Findlay on his Isle of Man TT-winning Suzuki was unveiled at a park, renamed Jack Findlay Reserve, in his hometown of Moorooopna. The \$30,000 statue, the work of Philip Mune, was financed by donations from the FIM, Motorcycling Australia, Michelin and numerous private individuals. He is survived by his wife, Dominique, the widow of his friend and fellow rider George Monneret, and stepson Philippe. Jack Findlay, motorcycle racer, was born on February 5, 1935. He died of advanced emphysema on May 19, 2007, aged 72.

