

The 2023-24 New Zealand Superbike Championships

SHAKE-UP AT THE TOP IN SIX OF 14 BIKE CATEGORIES

CAPTION: The high-powered motorcycle racing at Manfeild at the weekend was edge-of-the-seat exciting. This is the start of the first race the F1/Superbikes class on Sunday. Photo by Andy McGechan, BikesportNZ.com



DECEMBER 11, 2023: There were changes galore at the top of the rankings after another mixed weekend of weather, this time at round two of the combined Suzuki International Series/New Zealand Superbike Championships at the weekend.

It was a case of two totally opposite seasons in one weekend at the two-day event at Manfeild, just outside Feilding, at the weekend and it caused quite a stir for the 2023-24 season title hopefuls.

Just as had happened at the opening round of the parallel-but-separate two competitions at Taupo a week earlier, the race circuit at Manfeild was baked hot and dry on Saturday, but horrendously drenched with rain the following day.

With several riders making mistakes, luck being sorely tested, mechanical failures popping up or just sheer brilliance being exhibited by so many riders in the contrasting conditions, changes were forced at the top of six of the 14 separate bike categories at the weekend.

Whakatane's Tony Rees (F1/Superbike class); Feilding's John Oliver (Formula Sport, Senior); Hamilton's Joseph Stroud (GIXXER 150); Upper Hutt's Keiran Mair (Supersport 150); Taupo's Karl Hooper (Post Classics, Pre-89, Senior) and Whanganui's Richie Dibben (Supermoto) all rose to the head of their respective classes, supplanting the men who had led them after the series opener in Taupo the previous weekend.

The racing was intense from the start with fortunes changing almost every lap.

Suzuki International Series and national superbike champion Mitch Rees crashed out of the third and final Formula One/Superbike race of the weekend, his 56-year-old father Tony Rees the main beneficiary there in terms of the title chase, although visiting Australian Ant West won the weekend overall in this premier class.

Invercargill's Cormac Buchanan kept his winning momentum flowing in defence of his F2/Supersport 600 class title, qualifying fastest and winning all three races over the weekend, while both his title rivals – Wainuiomata's Shane Richardson and Upper Hutt's Rogan Chandler – have now each suffered non-finishes and their respective campaigns have been derailed.

British rider Davey Todd had dominated the supermoto class at Taupo, but he crashed out of Saturday's race.

It was his sponsor and defending national champion Richie Dibben who took over the class lead after he qualified fastest and scored a hat-trick of wins at the weekend.

NZSBK series co-ordinator SJ Cavell, who was national Pro Twins 650cc class champion in 2021, said: "The crowd was royally entertained at Manfeild".

"The talent on display and the bravery shown by many of the competitors has been top-notch and these racers have delivered what would be one of the best entertainment packages available in New Zealand motorsport.

"The racing certainly was intense and augurs well for the rest of the season."

The New Zealand Superbike Championships (NZSBK) series is again this season being run in conjunction with the Suzuki International Series, with the first two rounds recognised as rounds one and two of both parallel-but-separate competitions.

The Suzuki International Series phase of the 2023-24 season will wrap up, as always, on Whanganui's famous Cemetery Circuit public street environment on Boxing Day.

The Boxing Day 'street fight' is not part of the NZSBK series and that six-round NZSBK competition resumes in the New Year, with rounds three, four and five in the South Island – at Christchurch, Timaru and Invercargill respectively – with the series then travelling north again to wrap up with round six at Hampton Downs, near Huntly, in March.

Round five, at Invercargill's Teretonga race circuit, is included in the annual 2024 Burt Munro festival week.

Class leaders in both 2023-24 series after round two at Manfeild are: Whakatane's Tony Rees (F1/Superbike class); Invercargill's Cormac Buchanan (F2/Supersport 600 class); Taupo's Karl Hooper (F3/Pro Twins); Feilding's John Oliver (Formula Sport, Senior); Whanganui's Jeff Croot (Formula Sport, Junior); Hamilton's Jesse Stroud (Supersport 300); Hamilton's Joseph Stroud (GIXXER 150); Upper Hutt's Keiran Mair (Supersport 150); Taupo's Karl Hooper (Post Classics, Pre-89, Senior); Auckland's Scott Findlay (Post Classics, Pre-89, Junior); Invercargill's Jon Rawcliffe (Post Classics, Pre-95, Senior); Christchurch's Jordan Leslie (Post Classics, Pre-95, Junior); Whanganui's Richie Dibben (Supermoto); Panmure's Adam Unsworth and Whanganui's Bryce Rose (F1 Sidecars); Whanganui's Peter and Lucy Dowman (F2 Sidecars).

DATES FOR 2023-24 NZ MOTORCYCLE ROAD-RACE SEASON:

Suzuki International Series (and first two rounds of the nationals):

- Round 1, Taupo, Dec 2nd and 3rd;
- Round 2, Manfeild, Feilding, Dec 9th and 10th;
- Whanganui's Cemetery Circuit, Dec 26th (third and final round of Suzuki International Series, but not part of the nationals).

South Island:

- Round 3, Ruapuna, Christchurch (includes GP title races), Jan 6th and 7th;
- Round 4, Levels, Timaru, Jan 13th and 14th;
- Round 5, Burt Munro, Teretonga, Feb 9th, 10th and 11th.

North Island:

- Round 6, Hampton Downs, part of MotoFest (includes TT title races), Mar 2nd and 3rd.

Credit: Words and photo by Andy McGechan, www.BikesportNZ.com

A high-resolution copy of the attached image is available for publication, for editorial use only, simply by contacting phone 027-324-0892. As regards web site use, credit for words & photo must be given to Andy McGechan and BikesportNZ.com

Code No. MNZ-AM1039