

BMW Race Report

October 7, 2017

by Steve Weir

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AHRMA – BARBER MOTORSPORTS PARK

What better weekend to display BMW's newest offering the 2018 HP4 Race than the 13th Annual Barber Vintage Festival complete with American Historic Racing Motorcycle Association races, BMW Demo rides, stunt shows and non-stop entertainment and racing with upwards of 80,000 people in attendance. For some it was a weekend of fun and entertainment but for BMW North America's very own Nate Kern it was a completely different venue, filled with the highs, lows and stressor's of professional road racing. In the end, Kern would take home 2 National Championships on his trusty BMW R nine T truly proving that it is more than a cool looking canyon chasing coffee shop show piece. In the hands of a professional racer it's a cool looking National Championship winning dream chaser. Who would have thought?

The last time I worked with Kern we took a perfectly innocent looking stock BMW S 1000 RR and turned it into a perfectly innocent looking stock BMW S 1000 RR National podium finishing beast. So, when I heard I would be working with him once again I wondered what shenanigans would be produced. It only took one conversation with Kern to learn he was once again up to his old tricks. Kern said, "I'm gonna race my R nine T in Formula Thunder Pro." He had that look. I about choked on my coffee. Here we go again.

As always, I over think things and this one was full of it. I have to spell it out because it was just plain ridiculous. First off, horsepower to weight ratio compared to some of the one-off World Superbike spec toys he would be racing against or let me reiterate, attempting to qualify for the grid against, would fall in the 2 to 1 range. Meaning Kern's bike was making about 112 HP and some of the bikes being raced were over 200 HP. Kern's traction control fell on that of his wrist not the Magneti Marelli blessed, fly by wire, potentiometer slung, ignition controlled systems he would be competing against. The goal, get him qualified for the race and not look foolish.

Thursday Practice

I arrived at Barber Motorsports Park with overflowing parking lots and people everywhere. I literally walked up to Kern's pit as he was suited and headed out for practice. He saw me and put on that big old country boy grin, "See ya on the wall!" as he rolled out. I met up with Tom Wulfgang, Kern's hardworking friend, mechanic, a do-everything guy with a heart of gold. He asked what I needed and put together everything necessary for suspension changes on the wall. From the wall at Barber you catch the guys coming down the hill onto the curbing of the final turn and down the front straight. This was the first time I had witnessed Kern enter this turn on the R nine T and it looked just plain scary. He entered the final turn carrying what appeared to be too much speed to complete the turn using the curb like a dirtbike berm, bleeding over to no mans land onto the final paved patch before the grass and back onto the front straight, "Holy Sh@\$!" I said. Kern completed the lap with a 1:36.553 good enough for 6th overall. I just laughed to myself thinking of how many hearts he would break of those who had 30K plus in their Superbikes.



Photo by Brad Schwabb E Tech Photo

(On track with Kern. Head down knees up and throwin down)

Friday Practice/ Qualifying

We came into Friday's practice with huge changes to the bike's geometry. Although strategic and based on Kern's feedback, these were big changes. The kind of changes a racer, any racer would cringe at. I told Kern what I was thinking and he agreed. The Team also made a big gearing change enlisting the help of BMW of Atlanta Bill Kurtz Master Certified Technician. Like changing the rear differential on a truck, he went to work as this is not like any bike I have ever worked on. Impressively Bill got us on track in time for practice.

The first practice session of the day would immediately prove we went the right direction with Kern turning a 1:36.268 – just 3/10ths faster than the previous days. Kern said the bike was planted, felt good under braking, but still needed some minor tweaking. We made some more adjustments before the next practice – again in the right direction, Kern turning a 1:36.004. He came to the wall and said if it weren't for excessive traffic, he would have been a second faster, "Don't touch anything!" Kern said with a smile. The next session was qualifying for Formula Pro Thunder – a no-holds barred, Superbike-breathing who's who of racers in attendance. Under gunned, but not out-classed, Kern was truly against all odds. So, when he went out and turned a 1:35.1 on the second lap, qualifying him not only for the race but a grid starting position of 14th. I was elated. At this rate, we could see a top 10 qualifying by the end of practice, but when a mechanical issue took Kern out with only 3 laps in, the team was devastated.

Back in the pits the Team found the failure was in a bolt that secured the paraleaver arm, a devastating blow but as luck would have it we had a pit full of R nine T's to take from and that's exactly what the team did, working late to repair the damage. Special thanks goes out to BMW of Atlanta's Service Manager Bill Walls, Bill Kurtz and all those who lent a hand to get the team back on track.



Photo by Brad Schwabb E Tech Photo

(Kern leads the pack on his trusted BMW R nineT)

Saturday Races

Formula Pro Thunder

Kern's first race of the day was quickly red flagged after a pile-up in turn 1. The race was postponed, leaving Kern to race Formula Pro Thunder for his first race outing. Lining up in 14th position on the grid with 20 total racers to battle it out, Kern had his work cut out for him. When the flag flew Kern got off to an incredible start launching his R nineT up into the middle of the pack. As the race sorted itself out, Kern found himself in an impressive 11th place riding a lonely battle in no mans land. He would complete the race in the middle of the field of Superbikes with an astounding personal best lap time on the R nineT of 1:34.385 and an 11th place finish.

Sound of Thunder II

Kern lined up in pole position with a massive field of 58 gridded racers behind him. The start was picture perfect: Kern launching himself into turn 1 already putting a gap on the field. By lap 2, Kern and Ducati mounted racer Robert Fisher had walked away from the group. The two would put on what would be considered by most the best race of the weekend. Trading first place over and over, corner for corner. I could hear the screams from the crowd as the two would come onto the front straight battling back and forth. At the finish of the race, the two were separated by a mere second with Kern taking the #2 position. Kern would take home the Sound of Thunder II National Championship First place trophy for the year.



Photo by Brad Schwabb E Tech Photo

(Coffee shop show piece...Yup that too)

Battle of the Twins

Once again, starting from pole position Kern launched his BMW R nine T as though he had a custom built launch control map onboard. At the end of the first lap, it was clear that a mistake-free race would have him winning by a comfortable margin and that's exactly the way it went down. Crossing the finish line in hurricane fashion by a 7.9 second lead, Kern went on to not only take the win, but take home another National Championship First place trophy – this time for the Battle of the Twins.

Such an incredible race season for Kern and his team onboard his trusty BMW R nine T. Two National Championships, a box full of wins, and some serious bragging rights on a bike that was truly designed for fun in the sun, canyon runs with friends and Sunday lunches. Or is it? I think it's a successful merging of heritage and lifestyle with motorsports.