

HE'S been dipping his toe in the waters of the classic motorcycle racing paddock for a few years and as the mongrel kid from Wollongong revs his way to 50, he's even starting to look quite comfortable there.

In recent years, Wayne has led the pack on various machines at the Phillip Island Classic and this year, he won the Barry Sheene Memorial race at the Goodwood Revival Festival for the fifth time. It seems he has every intention of staying at the pointy end of the Classic field for a long time to come...

The 1987 World 500cc Champion left GP racing at the end of 1992 at the top of his game and spent the next 10 years on four wheels in an Australian V8 Supercar and Japanese GT car. These days, he still spends most of his weekends at the track as head mechanic for sons Remy and Luca. With the boys' passion for dirt track racing gathering momentum, it doesn't look like Wayne will be slowing down anytime soon.

As he notches up his first half century, I spoke to some of the people who have influenced or been influenced by the Wollongong Whiz over the years and asked them to share their favourite 'Wayne Gardner moment' or memory. It says a lot about Wayne's personality that many of their fondest (or funniest) memories are of his off-track antics – which are mostly in stark contrast to his well documented on-track successes.

Roger Marshall

Looking back, one of my favourite memories of Wayne was Easter at Brands Hatch in 1982. After the race, we were staying in our caravans and traveling to Mallory Park the next day for a Sunday meeting. During the night, I was passing blood and was taken to hospital in a lot of pain. It turned out to be a kidney stone. The next morning, Wayne came in and they had just put a full drip on me. Wayne asked if I could leave the hospital and the doctor said only if I signed myself out and not until my drip was finished. The Doctor turned his back on us and Wayne opened the valve on my drip to flat out. It drained straight into me. Then he said to the doc, "Can he go now?" You should have seen their faces. As for me, I felt worse than ever after that. That's one of one hundred stories but most of all, we were like brothers and I still miss him. What we had then was special.

Didier de Radigues

It's impossible for me to resume such a friendship in one story! Everything we did together between 1987 and early 2000 has been great. Was it our trip to California before the US GP and our travels through Disney, LA, Carmel and route 101 or our unforgettable parties in Monaco, Cannes and St Tropez? Our winter training in Wollongong or summer training in the Riviera Mountains? Great memories and pictures.

To cut it short – I miss Wayne a lot.

Randy Mamola

My favourite memory of Wayne was in Jarama, Spain in mid 1980. Wayne went to see Doctor Costa because he'd hurt himself, so Doctor Costa prescribed him suppositories. The next

Anyway, Wayne was inadvertently persuaded to join the task of boosting the Guinness Company. He clearly got confused and was being towered by accomplices onto the glass washing brushes that spin around like miniature toilet brushes – trousers and pants around his ankles! I am not sure to this day whether the shower in his room wasn't working or he had some kind of blockage but it certainly did stop people requesting clean glasses for the remainder of the evening.

It was confirmed that he had been tempted to partake in a little too much of the local brew. He arrived at breakfast wearing only a bed sheet, as he had somehow lost his clothes, which was made even more amusing when people were coming over asking for his autograph.

I know it would be far more appropriate to tell a story about his magnificent racing career and track exploits but I generally didn't see much of that as he was always too far in front of me and still is for that matter.

Craig Dack

Wayne and I have been mates for 20 years and it seems like we're family. In fact, when Wayne met his wife Toni, we found out that she and I are third cousins. Our first encounter is one of my strongest memories. It was 1989 and I was competing in the World Motocross Championship and Wayne was in the World 500cc Championship. At the end of our respective seasons, we were both in Monaco where we met for the first time, along with another former motocross rider, Aussie Jeff Leisk. We decided to head to St. Tropez and got to know each other over dinner. Then we drove back to Monaco to put the cars away and party. The road became an instant racetrack. To this day, I don't know how we survived the drive. I was in the car

WAYNE GARDNER



REVS IT TO

FRIENDS, RIDERS, RIVALS...

Mick Doohan

It's hard to believe that it's 20 years since Wayne and I teamed up with Rothmans Honda in 1989. Now he's 50 and I'm approaching that milestone fast...

I have many memories of Wayne, firstly of his sheer determination as a rider and secondly as a person. As a rider, his 'never say die' attitude will remain with me forever. I remember watching Wayne in the mid to late 1980s at Surfers Paradise raceway sliding his way around that circuit. That was the first time I'd seen WG ride – wow! Then in a few short years, I would become his teammate. I have too many impressive stories to tell about his riding and attitude towards racing that it wouldn't leave room for others.

Away from racing, I've always found Wayne to be very humorous – especially after a beer or two... We've shared a few memorable moments that still make me laugh. These days, it's great to see Wayne and his beautiful young family enjoying life when we do have the chance to catch up.

day, the Doctor asked him how he was doing and Wayne said he felt better but the pill he gave him was hard to swallow... I'd never heard of anybody swallowing a suppository before. Oh and the other thing... He was a great rider.

Kenny Roberts

In my carefully considered professional opinion, Wayne Gardner has big balls. When he was on the grid, he had no doubt he was going to win the race. Gardner was never racing for second place. He sometimes fell off trying for first but he never quit. In my own career, I rode bikes that didn't handle. Wayne was the same. But whatever the bike was like made no difference to Wayne's plan to win.

Steve Parish

It was 1984 at the NW200 in Ireland when I really got to know Wayne or WG. He came out to support his close friend Roger Marshall who loved the race and was very successful there. When I say support Roger, he was usually required to actually hold him up in the bar in the evenings as Roger would attempt to drink Ireland out of Guinness.

with Wayne driving and Leisk was driving his brand new Honda. All of a sudden, Wayne turned into an animal and the red mist came over his eyes. Almost the whole way back, Wayne kept nudging and banging the back of Leisk's car. When we got to Monaco, we jumped out of the cars, looked at the race damage and laughed. Wayne told Leisk, "Let me know what it costs and I'll sort it out" and off we went to party. That was when Wayne had more money than sense. That's one of thousands of stories but it shows what our friendship was destined to be like from that very first meeting. As time went on, I christened Wayne 'Mr Magoo' – the cartoon character who wanders through life leaving a trail of destruction and is none the wiser of what's going on around him – that's him.

Tony Hatton

I have many great memories of Wayne – most of course concerning motorcycle racing. My favourite memory would have to be when I was following a very young guy at Oran Park during a mid week practice day in the mid '70s. The young guy is riding a TZ Yamaha 250 (I think) and I'm running in a new engine in my BMW, preparing for an Interstate event. Then this

young guy passes me going like the wind. So I decided to follow him. Well this turned out to be the best entertainment I'd had in ages. The rider is using the entire track and more, never using the same piece of track twice and totally off the planet at every corner but despite all the antics, he never looked like he was going to crash. I was bloody impressed and made a point of telling him "Mate, if you ever get this thing pointed in the right direction, with a little less throttle, no one will ever catch you." This young guy turned out to be WG and the rest is history. Dave Horton, an old mate of mine and a friend of WG pointed out to me later that this young guy was the wild dirt track kid from Canberra we'd both witnessed some years before. So it all fell into place. I had witnessed a champion in the making.

Wayne Rainey

When I first came to GP's in 1988, I heard and read about Wayne's ego (mostly from Eddie). I never experienced it really until the GP in '89 at Phillip Island. The race was a great battle between myself, Kevin Magee, Christian Sarron and Wayne. The lead changed many times during the course of the race with Wayne getting the win, I finished second. The atmosphere on the podium was incredible, with thousands of people celebrating their hero! We sprayed champagne and went to the press conference. Wayne was still very excited, he looked at me and said, "maaannn, was I good today". I shook my head because I thought I heard him tell me how good he was! I said, what did you say...he said "I was good today". I finally experienced Wayne's ego directly! Fortunately for me, Wayne didn't beat me too often (my ego), but on that day Wayne you were not only good you were the best. Happy 50th birthday.

50!

IMPORTANT INFLUENCES

Mamoru Moriwaki

President. Moriwaki Engineering Co.Ltd.

On a raining day at a Melbourne circuit, back in the winter of 1980, I was watching young riders race to see if there was a talent to take back to Japan for professional racing. It was Wayne, the future World Champion's performance, which absolutely caught my heart. However, it didn't take long before I found out that this 20-year-old amazing boy was not even registered for the race. When I checked, I found out Wayne had borrowed someone's bike without permission and jumped into the race to impress me. I am not advising any of you to 'borrow' someone else's bike without permission to become a World Champion but I would definitely advise not to give up in anything to achieve your goals, just like the great champ.

Yoichi Oguma

Former Honda Racing Corporation Vice President

I've never forgotten working with Wayne. We made the strongest racing team in the world.



**Wayne Gardner's rivals and mates tell their favourite WG moments and wish the champ a happy 50th...
STORY BY TONI GARDNER**



Kazuhiko Tsunoda

Chief Engineer, Honda R&D

My favourite memories were during 1989 and 1990 in World 500cc GP and Suzuka 8 Hours. I was working with Wayne then. World GP bikes in those days were such monsters. I assumed it was really difficult to race. I cannot forget the race at Phillip Island in 1990, when he was almost shaken off the bike and broke a fairing stay with his knee – yet was still winning the race! He did get a lot of physical damages himself from racing such a monster of a bike but I am really happy to know that Wayne is still doing very well and now turning 50 years old!

Donna Kahlbetzer

Wayne's first wife

It was just minutes before the start of the 1990 Australian GP. Nursing a broken bone in his wrist, wrestling with a machine that was just not performing and having dealt with a media circus that had demanded nothing but the best from their reigning hero for the pride of the country. Wayne looked into my eyes and showed a fear I had never seen in him before. Exhausted and in pain, the odds were stacked against him. "I don't know if I can do it Don." I had never heard Wayne doubt himself before.

Wayne took the chequered flag despite the odds and once again showed that he really was a hero to a Nation, the hero he always was to me.

paddock to familiarise himself with my bike prior to practice but for some reason, this didn't happen. When he turned up in the warm up area, I wasn't keen on letting him out on my bike but all Wayne kept saying was, "she'll be right". So I quickly went through a few things with him as it was his first time on a classic bike and as he set off in practice and turned right onto the track, I remember thinking how comfortable and in control he looked on the bike.

The track was a bit damp and he'd never ridden at Goodwood before so I thought he'd just potter around. No one was more surprised than me when on lap three of practice, he broke the lap record. Which in my mind, only proves that form comes and goes but class will never leave you.

ON FOUR WHEELS

Neil Crompton

Former V8 Supercar team-mate

Most of Wayne's mates have got plenty of yarns to tell. I'm no exception. We spent four great years together in Wayne's V8 Supercar Coca Cola Racing Team. Reflecting on our time, apart from the giggles, Wayne was an extraordinary racer. We all knew this from his GP days but it was interesting to observe a World Champion at close quarters. I always called him 'The Chief' and for my money, 'The Chief' had seriously big boy bits. After the team disbanded, Glenn Seton and I asked WG to run

of as a real friend and an example to anyone who wants to try to emulate his great career. I'm talking about Wayne Gardner of course. Wayne and I go back a long way to when as an unknown newcomer, he created a sensation in Britain by blowing everyone away on a bike we'd never heard of – the Moriwaki and it wasn't long before he was a Honda works rider and a gigantically spectacular World Champion, defeating the likes of Eddie Lawson, Randy Mamola, Freddie Spencer and Kevin Schwantz. You don't do that without being supremely talented and the two-stroke, backbiting Honda that Wayne rode was no easy touch either. Now in the UK over 20 years on, we have the very real pleasure of Wayne, with his easy charm and Aussie good humour, regularly coming to compete at the fabulous Goodwood Revival, meeting and showing today's competitors how a single cylinder G50 Matchless should be ridden to victory. His races there against his friend and mine, Barry Sheene, were all out sporting contests that will live in my memory for a very long time. And now he's 50? Hard to believe.

Nick Harris

Moto GP Commentator, Journalist and former Rothman's PR Manager

There are far too many races to choose from but my favourite was the British Grand Prix at Donington Park in 1992. Just a day earlier, a tearful Wayne announced his

"WAYNE GARDNER HAS BIG BALLS. WHEN HE WAS ON THE GRID, HE HAD NO DOUBT HE WAS GOING TO WIN THE RACE," KENNY ROBERTS.



Peter Molloy

Respected motorcycle engineer

The moment I remember most about our hero was at Amaro Park. He was leading the race on my Honda CB900 against the Honda works bikes, with two laps to go. He came onto pit straight and the bike stepped out and high sided him out of the seat. We all jumped away from the pit counter as he headed straight for us. He never let go of the bars and his legs were five feet in the air as he wrestled with the bike for what seemed like forever. Finally, he got back in the seat and Dennis Neal, who was behind him at the time backed right off, thinking Wayne was going to hit the pit wall, (Dennis said later, "I thought he was going to bounce off into me but the bastard pissed off and won"). I have never seen anything like it – ever.

Fred Walmsley

Respected classic motorcycle engineer

The first time that I met Wayne was at the 2002 Goodwood Revival Festival in the UK. He was supposed to see me in the

with us in the sister car at Ford Tickford Racing at Bathurst in 2000. The Shootout was cold and wet. Soaking wet. The Chief's 6.2km lap was amazing. Not a millimeter left anywhere. Nothing left on the table at all. Nobody really got close. In those conditions, you needed to have feel, be fast and be brave. He was all of that and he scored a fine pole.

Mind you, it wasn't all about bravery either. We tested a lot at Oran Park in the old day and from a technique standpoint, he did something over the dogleg that fried my brain.

THE MEDIA

Murray Walker

Legendary Motorsport Commentator

There have been a lot of great Australians in Motorsport. Alan Jones, Jack Brabham, Harry Hinton, Mark Webber, Mick Doohan, Vern Schuppan, Tim Schenken and Frank Gardner to name but a few and it has been my enormous pleasure and privilege to know and talk about all of them. They've all been great characters and achievers but none more so than the man I like to think

retirement at the end of the season from Grand Prix racing but so typically, he could not go quietly. Instead, he fought off the challenge of Wayne Rainey around one of the great World Championship venues. It was such a fitting end to his fantastic career in England and not only reminded us all just what we would be missing but what a massive part Wayne had played in that golden age of 500cc Grand Prix racing.

As for me, I didn't know Wayne when he raced motorcycles and although we were together when he was racing cars, I wasn't physically present for a lot of his on-track performances because I was at home with the boys. So my favourite memories of Wayne are linked more to our family than his career and there's no better Wayne Gardner moment for me than watching him proudly cheering and supporting his boys when they're racing and seeing his enthusiasm as their mechanic, team manager, mentor and Dad. ■